

Clutter, hoards and stockpiles:
Families and responsabilized overconsumption in makeover TV

by

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Abstract

This work explores three makeover television programmes situated in a continuum of overconsumption: *Hoarders*, which deals with therapeutic intervention in the lives of the mentally-ill; *Consumed*, about organizing the homes of cluttered families; and *Extreme Couponing*, following participants who use coupons to acquire massive amounts of groceries for almost no financial cost. I argue that these three programmes reproduce and promote a particular morality of consumption which I call the domestic consumption ethic. This ethic is composed of three stages which are intended to maximize the interaction of families with capitalist markets: restrained acquisition, storage-as-display, and judicious disposal. In addition I suggest that these programmes encourage a mode of governance which involves the responsabilization of entire families, rather than individuals, into conformity with the domestic consumption ethic. This intensified governance is achieved through relations of accountability, which also knits families into strongly-responsibilized economic units.

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Makeover television showcases stories of transformation that are sometimes extreme and sometimes ordinary, and often both at once. Yet these presentations of the ‘extraordinary everyday’ also raise some interesting questions about how our culture classifies and judges behaviours as acceptable. Television programmes which feature consumption as a central aspect present a valuable opportunity to examine such judgements. What are the different ways that consumption is represented to viewers? Are there instances where overconsumption is acceptable? How and where are lines drawn between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of consumer behaviour? And what could this say about our cultural moment? In makeover television, the narrative of transformation must necessarily draw boundaries and make judgements as experts attempt to bring participants back in line with acceptable behaviours. Additionally, since these narratives rarely examine the rationales behind these judgements and assumptions, their taken-for-granted nature makes them all the more intriguing.

While there is a surfeit of makeover television available for our viewing pleasure, I suggest that three recent shows both employ and produce a particular, culturally-important narrative surrounding overconsumption, the home, and familial relationships. *Extreme Couponing* showcases the homes, and follows the shopping trips, of people who enjoy massive grocery savings by clipping coupons—an intensely domestic task here taken to excess. *Consumed* subjects families who live in overly cluttered homes to a thirty-day ‘tough-love’ regimen of discarding, presided over by an agreeable bully of a host. *Hoarders* follows a team of psychiatrists, professional organizers and volunteers as they attempt to help a mentally-ill person clean up their home and property over a weekend—often at the request of their family—in the face of immanent intervention or

seizure by public health authorities. Contrary to many examinations of makeover and lifestyle television programmes, I will show that these narratives do not represent consumption solely as a form of procurement, but instead require from their participants a particular domestic consumption ethic composed of restrained acquisition, care of goods through storage-as-display, and judicious disposal. Through its enactment in makeover television, this pedagogy of domestic consumption also encourages a particular kind of discipline: spend enough to maintain the economy, but not so much that the family risks becoming a burden on the larger social system through bankruptcy. Additionally, completely exhausting the usefulness of products is discouraged, since their planned obsolescence is thus subverted, placing a strain on the capitalist market. It is much better for the economy for consumers to discard objects in advance of the total depletion of their value and purchase anew. It is here, I will argue, that the value of objects and the ability of the consumer to read that value according to the dominant morality becomes an integral aspect of contemporary subjectivity.

This assignment of value is exemplified in the differences between the couponer's neat and organized 'stockpile' of goods yet-to-be-consumed and the unruly and often unsanitary 'hoard' of those classified as mentally ill. In adhering to this morally-driven 'proper' domestic consumption ethic, the storage of goods plays a prominent role as a signal of their potential usefulness. The focus of these shows on storage as a sign of control over consumer goods promotes particular domestic practices which seem to evoke the visual display of merchants: rows of similar products, neatly lined up on shelves in shiny, colourful packaging with labels all facing the same way. The leaning

stacks, mixed piles, decay and dust which characterize the hoarder's home drastically contravene this ethic and as such must be corrected.

This correction is partly achieved through the process of responsabilization. While many studies focus on the individualized call to responsabilize, I suggest that in these shows responsabilization is extended to the family. Family relationships, including their power relations, occupy a central place in these narratives. Indeed, it only aids the modern neoliberal state if citizens can be mobilized to look after and improve not only themselves, but their families and close friends. In this project, I will show that these programmes produce a kind of familial responsabilization in relation to consumption and the home, focussing on caretaking through a moral economy of consumption which involves conforming to the dominant rationality when making judgements on the potential usefulness of consumer goods. Further, since this responsabilization is extended beyond individuals to mobilize entire families, it acts to strengthen and normalize neoliberal processes of governance. While this may be subtle in any one episode or series, when several are considered together a larger pattern of cultural concerns emerges. As an ensemble, these seemingly different narratives combine to promote and affirm a single, dominant morality which I call the domestic consumption ethic.

1 Consumption as Domestic Ethic: Families and Values

1.1 Cycles and Transformations: Consumption and Makeover TV in the Literature

Since the object of this analysis is three television programmes, I will begin with an overview of the field of television studies, its foci and problems, and some of the challenges that television research faces. From there, I will move to a discussion of the consumption literature's contemporary concepts and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in relation to this project. Finally, I will present literature related to the particular reality television genre of makeover programmes, and their structures and themes, which leads into a statement of the research questions which guide my project. These literatures are presented as groups of themes and assumptions to best demonstrate the gaps which my project will help to address.

Television Studies. The study of television has long been dogged by television's perceived negative effects on audiences. Bernadette Casey, Neil Casey, Ben Calvert, Liam French and Justin Lewis (2008) write that television "has been blamed for encouraging violence and sexual promiscuity, for lowering educational standards, for influencing public opinions and for 'doping' passive viewers incapable of resisting television's narcotic power" (emphasis removed, p. vii). While academics working in television studies repeatedly deny the causal effects of watching, these anxieties retain public currency. Within television studies however, John Hartley (2003) maintains that the focus has moved from television as a *cause* of social ills to a critical examination of television as a "thing itself" (p. xiv). Casey *et al.* (2008) echo this when they state that

television studies “now turns its gaze on the *pleasure* of television every bit as much as the harm that television is alleged to cause” (original emphasis, p. ix).

Part of the pervasive fear of the effects of television viewing is a response to its ordinary ubiquity. Television is an overwhelmingly domestic medium, both as a technology—the television set—and in the content it showcases (Ellis, 2000, pp. 40-42). Television content is most often consumed within the home, and very often in the presence of other family members. The banality of television does not render it unimportant, however. John Fiske and John Hartley (2003) state that it is the everyday qualities of television which make it a valid object of study, since “it is television’s familiarity, its centrality to our culture that makes it so important, so fascinating, and so difficult to analyze” (p. 3). However, it is this very familiarity which means that network television programming tends to reproduce the cultural concerns of the majority; rarely does it showcase alternative or oppositional points of view. Ella Taylor (1989) suggests that this is due to market considerations, that “given the sheer breadth of its appeal, television tends to address—and help create—widely held beliefs that permeate the culture rather than the minority view at its margins” (p. 1). The domestic, everyday elements of television combined with its tendency toward mass appeal make it easy to dismiss as unimportant or trivial, and yet it is those very same characteristics which also make television an imminent ‘danger’. The position of a television in almost every home—not to mention in many public spaces such as restaurants, hospitals and convenience stores—means that television’s possible influence is incredibly pervasive.

Many scholars assume that television representations *stand in for* reality, and that they should be critiqued as flawed semiotic symbols. This principle relies on a distinction

between the actual and the symbolic or objective reality and its altered representation. However, television as a cultural product, produced by individuals operating within a particular culture, cannot be separated from our cultural reality. Perhaps, instead of drawing a line between television and our “real social world” as Fiske and Hartley (2003, p. 11) do, we should accept that television is *part of* our real social world.

The field of television studies is currently facing some challenges due to rapidly changing technologies, markets, and consumption practices. Researchers can no longer count on a mass audience; indeed many people no longer even turn to the *system* of broadcast television to enjoy its content, preferring to watch online or from DVDs. According to Christina Adamou and Simone Knox (2010), television studies has been experiencing a sort of legitimation crisis since “it seems that just as television studies has begun to gain acceptance, to fully establish itself within the larger scholarly community, the ‘death of television’ is proclaimed” (p. 273). Convincing the academy that mainstream, network television programmes still hold cultural or social relevance has become more of a challenge in the face of increasingly fragmented audiences. However, Charlotte Brundson (2008) also warns that the study of new programmes does not always mean that new conclusions can be drawn (p. 132). She puts it thus:

So, I propose that television studies in the twenty-first century is both bigger—more diffuse—and somehow smaller and more repetitive. There is much more of ‘it’ to study, and it is much less clear what the ‘it’ is when it stops being roughly the same thing in most living rooms in each country. (Brundson, 2008, p. 132)

It could be, however that the very repetition of which Brundson speaks is one key to overcoming the proliferation of programmes and audiences. While early television studies broke the phenomena of television into different “forms” with different purposes and audiences (Williams, 1974) it may be that now television studies needs to focus on

identifying and examining cultural *themes* which manifest across multiple programmes, channels, and audiences.

There also seems to be an anxiety within the field to continue to legitimate itself as a worthwhile endeavour in a post-broadcast era (Adamou & Knox, 2010, p. 273), however, I would say that television—that is the forms and conventions of the television programme—is not going anywhere anytime soon. Changes in how we view the programme, whether on the TV or the computer or the smartphone, with or without commercials, during the broadcast schedule or on a DVD, do not, in my opinion, significantly alter the content itself. Certainly it does not alter the fact that all television programmes are intensely cultural, produced by and reproducing the ideas and structures which are important to us in a particular socio-historical context. It is this, to my mind, which makes them worthwhile objects of study *as things themselves* rather than as representations of reality.

Surely if we discard the reality/realism dichotomy, and regard television as part of the world rather than a representation of it, then it becomes even more important as an object of study. Television can act as a powerful de-naturalizing agent, enabling scholars to literally pause, slow down, re-watch and examine in detail a cultural product of a particular socio-historical context. Rather than critiquing television programming as a distorted representation of society, researchers should embrace its possibilities as a demonstration of our own cultural moment, giving us a rare opportunity for analysis and critique of our everyday happenings. Since the shows examined in this project seem both to reflect, and contribute to, a cultural preoccupation with overconsumption, I will turn next to the literature of consumption studies.

Consumption. Consumption is most often defined as a process with definite stages; for example H el ene Cherrier and Jeff Murray (2007) describe consumption as a cycle of “acquiring, consuming and disposing” (p. 2). However, the manner in which a consumption cycle is completed—for example the length required to complete a cycle or the values given to goods—varies between individual consumers. The recognition of such variation is important to this project, since I will be examining the similarities and differences in the cultural presentations of a range of consumption styles. This will begin to address a shortcoming in consumption studies identified by Robert Stebbins (2009) as a focus on how people shop and the possible consequences of a consumer society, with very little analysis of the ways in which consumers interact with goods in the home (p. 82).

While consumption may be conceived of as a process, both Russell Belk (1988) and Gavin Lucas (2002) observe that there is a relative lack of scholarship on disposal in comparison to acquisition. Although the focus of consumption studies has been pointed away from divestment,¹ it remains an often-identified stage in conceptions of the production cycle. Frequently it seems that consumption scholars place discarding within the consumption cycle merely as a placeholder. In order to conceive of consumption as a cycle, discarding must appear to complete it, as in Cherrier and Murray’s description

¹ There has however been attention paid to non-capitalist divestment practices, in particular, potlatch ceremonies. Marcel Mauss (2002) used observations of potlatch ceremonies to develop his theory of the gift economy however the resulting binary of gift/commodity is still based in the capitalist system. Kevin Fisher (2005) considers the potlatch as an alternative economy, where prestige is built, not on accumulation, but on “how much loss one is capable of sustaining” (p. 16). Tina Loo (1992) discusses the outlawing of potlatch ceremonies in Canada, suggesting that it was one of many strategies designed to “assimilate” Aboriginal peoples into white culture and capitalist systems (p. 129). Further, she states that many in white society problematized potlatch as, among other things, an immoral interaction with goods, signifying the “savagery and depravity of Indians” (Loo, 1992, p. 129).

above. Yet the focus of consumption studies remains squarely on the front end of the cycle—acquisition—with little attention paid to other stages. Further, while acts of storage may be implied in this cycle, they seem to be mostly ignored as an unmarked phase of the consumption process. In Cherrier and Murray’s definition, the second phase of the cycle is an ill-defined “consumption”. To my mind, using the term consumption to define the consumption cycle seems tautological. Thus, in this project I begin with a definition of the consumption cycle which includes the acquisition, storage, and disposal of consumer goods. While storage is clearly not exhaustive as the stage between acquisition and disposal, it can be more precisely defined than consumption as well as enable me to shift the focus away from acquisition onto other neglected aspects of the consumption cycle.

Although disposal has not been a focus in the literature, it is often an integral part of critiques of consumption practices. Lucas (2002) states that modern society is often characterized as a “throwaway society” since the “heady cycle” of consumption encourages the replacement of the old with the new (pp. 5-6). Mark Paterson (2006) writes that “built-in obsolescence, the notion that the product has a particular expected lifecycle” plays a large role in the capitalist system of commodity production and consumption (p. 62). John Fiske (2000) also argues that “newness, of course, is central to the economic and ideological interests of capitalism: the desire for the new keeps the production processes turning and the money flowing” (p. 327). However, while the system of capitalism is perpetuated through strategies like planned obsolescence, rarely do scholars examine how consumers decide on the lifecycle of a product. Indeed, the

social afflictions of waste and overconsumption—the “throwaway society” mentioned above—are seldom examined from the perspective of individual consumers at all.

Separate from, but related to, planned obsolescence is the continued progression of the consumption cycle through the creation of need. Needs may be encouraged, modified, or even completely manufactured in order to sell products, often through the attempted influence of advertising (Paterson, 2006, p. 180; Stebbins 2009, p. 96). This manipulation of consumers as duped by advertising has given way in recent years to a recognition of the critical, creative, and individual ways in which people consume; indeed, the consumer-as-sucker versus the consumer-as-savvy debate has been a defining one for consumption studies (Paterson, 2006, p. 6).² However, while most scholars consider consumers to be active and aware in their practices, when it comes to issues surrounding overconsumption the figure of the irrational consumer is still present. Relating overconsumption to hedonistic pleasure, as Colin Campbell (2003) does, evokes connotations of over-the-top, whimsical or even savage desires; the very opposite of rational, responsible consumption. Kevin Robins (1994) presents a more nuanced view of overconsumption when he proposes the *opposite* of pleasure as a driver of consumption, suggesting that consumers use goods not for instant gratification but in an anticipatory manner, to deflect “discomfort and unpleasure” (p. 455).

² Writing from a communication studies perspective, Dallas Smythe (2006) offers a third model of consumers and advertisers. He suggests that audiences “work” for advertisers, in the sense that they encounter advertisements with their own histories of knowledge and experience gained from a variety of influences (Smythe, 2006, p. 244, 235). Since certain demographics will be attracted to particular television programmes, for example, advertisers seek out the commercial slots that will give them the best chance of reaching their target market—thus they are not paying for advertising time but are in fact buying access to audiences (Smythe, 2006, p. 234). In this model, advertising is not based on the manipulation of consumers through false needs or the manipulation of advertisers by creative consumers; rather its concern is getting a message to the audiences which will react most positively to it.

Ultimately, these arguments rely on a “distinction between luxury and necessity” (Paterson, 2006, p. 41) which is often culturally and morally based; indeed even the existence of such a distinction involves a moral decision. This division also leaves little room for considering consumption behaviours as what they are in themselves rather than how they fit into a pre-established moral economy. Furthermore, this undermines liberal ideas of consumer sovereignty which, according to Abba Lerner (1972) propose that individuals construct their own wants and, to a certain extent their own needs in a kind of democracy through consumption (p. 258). However even in discussions of consumer sovereignty there is a tension between the liberal-rational individual and the moral subject, since it is clear that certain kinds of consumption are still considered to be ‘deviant’. Yet academic exploration of atypical domestic consumption practices is difficult to find. While there is some scholarly work on sub- and counter-cultures and how they are constructed through consumption—for example punk culture or the voluntary simplicity movement (see Dick Hebdige (1998) and Jennifer Sandlin and Carol Walther (2009) in particular)—individuals operating within such cultures are not considered deviant; in fact it is their consumption practices which signal their membership in a particular group. In the literature, ‘deviance’ is more often linked to moral standards, frequently to the overconsumption of drugs, alcohol or pornography. Very little attention is given to less salacious, more mundane and domestic, acts of extraordinary or uncommon consumption by individuals.

Consumption is also a form of production, such that *how* a person consumes both produces, and is a product of, the meanings which they and others give to the consumptive act (Paterson, 2006, p. 154). Mike Featherstone (1991) points out a

compulsion in contemporary society to create a unified lifestyle through consumer choices (p. 67). In this “aestheticization of everyday life” lifestyle is imperative: “the modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste” (Featherstone, 1991, pp. 65, 86). This discursive notion of consumer sovereignty—one which gives the consumer control over the meaning and value which they attach to commodities—proposes a more contemporary view of the consumer as one who builds an identity and lifestyle through consumption choices. Still, there tends to be a focus on the choices sovereign consumers make between commodities; there is very little discussion about the choices we make in our *styles* of consumption, for example what we do with the drugstore magazine after reading it, or how we wash and fold clothes.

Consumer sovereignty is related to neoliberal values of flexibility and the ongoing project of the self. Neoliberalism is an economic term describing a free-market logic based on competition, which recently has been applied more widely to our social and governmental situations. Brenda Weber (2009) describes neoliberalism as promoting “goals of individualization, reduced state responsibility, free enterprise, market competition, and global currencies” (p. 39). Jayne Raisborough (2011) agrees, stating that two of the clearest ways that we can witness a neoliberal intensification are through the “spread of market rationality into social organization and by an uncompromising individualism” (p. 11). Thus, since neoliberalism rests on an economic foundation the marketization of society means that our sovereign, individual choices become consumer choices (Raisborough, 2011, p. 56). The showcasing of acceptable consumption practices

through a commodity form such as television further frames everyday life within a neoliberal market rationality, and television programming's wide range of topics suggests that we should be "managing all conceivable human problems and needs from the vantage point of cultural commerce" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008a, p. 40).

It is not only our lifestyle which is formed by consumer choices, but also our identity. Russell Belk (1988) writes that possessions not only aid in the *formation* of the self, but also act as an *extension* of the self; any change in the objects with which we surround ourselves, either by acquisition or divestment, may also result in a change in our sense of self (pp. 141, 143). Catherine Roster (2001) maintains that the disposal of goods, while often routine, can also require a conscious, emotionally-charged disconnection of the symbolic nature of the good from the self (pp. 425-429). Yet we are also restricted, socially or in terms of storage capacity, in the amount of goods that we can possess, making disposal impossible to avoid. However, this knowledge can be troubling, as Paul Ransome (2005) makes the observation that "any suggestion that there are limits to consumption is tantamount to suggesting that there are limits to the amount of identity a person can reasonably expect to have" (p. 58). Yet how identity and relationships are linked to unorthodox practices of acquisition, storage and disposal and how they are represented back to consumers through the media is noticeably absent in the literature. It is this intersection between consumption and the media, specifically through makeover television, to which I now turn.

Makeover television. Reality TV is a catch-all term for the trend, which begins in the 1990s, of filming television programmes using actual people and situations rather than professional actors in fictional scenarios. While the storylines of reality TV programmes

are often manipulated, highly edited, or take place in contrived settings and situations, they differ significantly from other television genres such as drama or situation comedy in that they are presented to the viewer *as reality*, and thus with the expectation that unexpected things may happen during the course of an episode. However many genres of television programming fall under, or can be interpreted to fall under, this reality TV umbrella. It has become impossible to talk about reality television, or even television, in a coherent way given the vast range of programming that has been and is being produced. Television content must be broken down into conceptually-similar categories—such as genres—in order to be analyzable. Following this lead, which is prominent in the field, I will present here literatures which focus specifically on the reality genre of makeover television. The primary narrative of each of the programmes analyzed here is one of transformation. Both *Hoarders* and *Consumed* fall neatly within the category of makeover television by virtue of their emphasis on, and showcasing of, expert intervention to effect and teach acceptable consumption practices. As will be shown, below and in Chapter Four, *Extreme Couponing* however compels some justification for its inclusion in this genre.

Toby Miller (2008) calls makeover television programmes “bizarre blends of reportage, documentary and fun” (p. 585). However, as fantastic as makeover television shows may seem, according to Raisborough (2011) they also most often focus on the ordinary as their subject matter (p. 3). Brenda Weber (2009) says that three elements are necessary for makeover television: (1) a focus on “improvement” through “care of the self”, (2) a belief by participants in the necessity for change, and (3) the final “reveal” of the transformed (pp. 29-30). Makeover television formats are also highly structured and

constructed events which may even take place in intensely and often conspicuously controlled environments. As Madeleine Shufeldt and Kendra Gale (2007) point out, producing makeover television always involves editing practices to frame and shape events according to the strict narrative of transformation (p. 267). The repetition of a familiar narrative format which is consistent across all episodes of a particular programme adds to its pedagogical value, as according to Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008), “TV’s programmatic serialization supports its provision of a *framework* for better living” (original emphasis, p. 17).

Although makeover television is here defined with several necessary elements, deciding what should be included in the genre is not as simple as it seems. Tania Lewis (2008) suggests that makeover television has much in common with both “instructional” lifestyle programming such as cooking or gardening shows, and reality television that relies on surveillance (p. 447). She defines makeover television as a combination of

conventions and concerns borrowed from lifestyle advice television and reality TV with a transformational ‘before and after’ narrative. [Participants] are put under the spotlight and transformed—with the guidance of various life experts—under the gaze of the watching public. (Lewis, 2008, p. 447)

In makeover television, such experts directly intervene in the everyday lives of participants *in situ* rather than merely offering instruction. Often this intervention is in the form of a regimented process of discipline, supervision and control made up of “authoritarian governing techniques such as ‘home visits’, hidden camera surveillance, pedantic lecturing, and close supervisory relationships” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 65). However, since the line between makeover and lifestyle television is a tenuous one, the role of experts is blurry as well. *Extreme Couponing* at first glance seems to be a lifestyle programme; however, it contains several elements common to makeover shows. *Extreme*

Couponing has a distinct before and after narrative, yet the focus is overwhelmingly on the post-transformation self. There is also an emphasis on the methods used by the participants to effect change in a pedagogical theme. Unlike the programmes examined in the literature however, in this kind of makeover television what once involved the direct intervention of experts also becomes a showcase for ‘regular’ people who have become experts through their own moxy, often overcoming severe financial, emotional or physical setbacks.

Weber (2009) writes that makeover television is ubiquitous in the North American mediascape at this moment, and that it can take many things as its object, including “bodies, clothes, rooms, psyches, marriages, houses, behaviour, cars, kids, restaurants, motorcycles and dogs” (p. 27-28). The increasing popularity of makeover television means that it is no longer confined to daytime slots, but now regularly appears during prime-time hours (Lewis, 2008, p. 450), in times most often reserved for ‘serious’ programming, increasing its cultural legitimacy as well as its ubiquity. In spite of this apparent explosion in popularity, Madeleine Shufeldt-Esch (2008) states that little scholarly work has been done on makeover television, specifically in a North American context (p. 160).

Ouellette and Hay (2008) place television, and particularly makeover television within a larger “analytic of government” that is neoliberal in nature and encourages the formation of subjects who take on the responsibility of managing their own self-improvement and self-care (pp. 12-13). However, self-improvement and self-care are often enacted in makeover television through the ‘appropriate’ or moral consumption of commodities, conveyed by experts as rules for behaviour. The notion that the self can be

formed and extended through consumption choices, as described in the previous section, is prominently demonstrated in makeover programmes. Gareth Palmer (2008) contends that this is based on the transfer of neoliberal economics into the private sphere through the “market model—the idea that one can create oneself from a supply of commodities” (p. 2), a position which is echoed by Raisborough (2011, p. 11) and Miller (2008, p. 586).

However, this creation through consumption is not an end, but a process which also solidifies the primacy of the commodity market. The makeover suggests that we can always change the material conditions of our lives through self-work and responsible consumption. This idea of limitless possibility for all is, according to Weber (2009), “a critical cornerstone in the mythology of a class-free meritocracy” (p. 29). Not only is transformation presented as relatively easy to do, but according to Raisborough (2011) it has now become a “cultural imperative” (p. 7), an expectation that we will initiate change at several times throughout our lives, and always for the better. How this change is undertaken, and the shape of the desirable outcome is of course based on the dominant morality (Raisborough, 2011, p. 55). Ouellette and Hay (2008b) suggest that makeover television serves a pedagogical function; it encourages neoliberal subject formation through teaching “personal responsibility, risk-avoidance and choice by diagnosing and rehabilitating cases of ‘ignorance’ and self-neglect” (p. 479). It is important to note that television does not impose such ideals upon citizens; rather it “offers” models to follow (Ouellette & Hay, 2008a, p. 14).

In makeover television, guidance on how to perform self-surveillance and self-work is most often provided through the high profile of experts on the shows (Raisborough, 2011, p. 4). Palmer (2008) points out a change in the way which we view

experts to conform to the neoliberal market model: not “as the interfering welfare workers of old but *products of the marketplace working as consultants*” (emphasis added, p. 6) which also helps to reinforce the contemporary move to a flexible, contract-based workforce. However, experts are not only engaged to act as advisors to participants since, contrary to the market model, in makeover television there is little choice in accepting or rejecting their advice. Weber (2009) calls this one of the contradictions of the makeover television format, that in order to become “empowered, one must fully surrender to experts” in a process of “salvation through submission” (pp. 6, 4). In the makeover television world, experts are a higher moral authority.

Makeover television often turns its transformative gaze upon the site of much lifestyle consumption: the home. Thus many studies of television are also necessarily studies of domesticity and familial relationships. Taylor (1989) states that

the ubiquity of television and its intensely domestic character make it an ideal narrative form in which to observe changing ideas about family. It is watched by a vast number of people in their homes; its advertising is geared to both the parts and the whole of the family unit; its images, in both news and entertainment, are stamped with the familial. (p. 1)

This positioning of television as “one of the family” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 100) gives it a unique status from which it may be possible to infer connections between its content and social anxieties or cultural imaginaries. However, this may also mean that network television most often showcases dominant values and morals. At times, these morals may be difficult to uncover and question. Kristyn Gorton (2008) suggests that the emotional aspects of makeover television are played up, and that “we are not encouraged to trouble the notions of ‘home’ and ‘family’ with which we are presented ... and we are not asked

to think about the ways in which the programme returns us to very conservative ideals of home and family” (p. 4).

While Laurel Forster (2008) has highlighted the gendered domesticity of many makeover television programmes, this does not seem to cover the whole story. In my project, a gendered analysis may even obscure other interesting aspects of makeover television such as the importance of the cultural narrative of moral consumption for families as a whole, and in particular for the proper functioning of familial relationships. Although gender may play an important role in how family members are mobilized to construct particular relationships through undertaking particular labours, just as important is how *all* members are engaged in operating within a specific, morally-driven template of consumption. Makeover television promotes the idea of a harmonious, healthy family whose unequal power relations are hidden, minimized, or at best, not apparent at all.

This image of a family based on unanimous goals is also related to the notion of the family home as a refuge. Madeleine Shufeldt-Esch (2008) maintains that “cocooning”—or the tendency to see the home as a private, sheltered sanctuary from the world of work and care is a growing cultural trend in North America (pp. 165-166). Buck Clifford Rosenberg (2008) adds to this when he suggests that makeover television’s focus on the home is due not only to the increasing importance of home ownership, but also to the “pressures of the risk society” which encourage a sheltered and comforting domestic retreat (p. 506). However, what these authors neglect is the inhabited nature of the home: the family and its relationships must also offer shelter through harmonious relations.

Contradictorily, in order to maintain a sense of effortless sanctum, the private becomes merely the work behind-the-scenes to create a public façade which now reaches

into our very bedrooms and bathrooms. Goffman-esque, the private becomes the frantic, never-ending preparation of our homes and intimate relationships for their presentation to the world. In this vein, Forster (2008) maintains that makeover television shows overwhelmingly

suggest that the cure for a fractured identity is mastery over the domestic environment. The actual systems and management of home living are seen as having an impact on psychological health as they represent the link between the interiority of the individual and the functioning of that individual in society ... in this way a direct link is made between the chores of housework and potential happiness. (p. 112)

Makeover television which focuses on the home is often about “coming to terms with and dominating the domestic space” through cleaning or organization (Forster, 2008, p. 105). This domination echoes the moral economy of consumption as acceptability and respectability mentioned above, since “there can be no choice in whether or not to keep a clean house” (Forster, 2008, p. 107).

Makeover television also often engages in a “glorification of the normative” which helps reinforce traditional, hetero-normative family ideals (Weber, 2009, p. 13). Lewis (2008) contends that makeover television holds up middle-class values as the norm which participants should strive to achieve (p. 450). This does not, however, mean that middle-class participants are always portrayed in makeover programmes. On the contrary, many shows spotlight lower-class participants in their quest to emulate the middle-class. Conforming to the middle class normative standard also means occupying a less risky subject-position. Indeed, Rosenberg (2008) relates home makeover programming directly to the management of risk through teaching “appropriate” forms of consumption (p. 508). Such morally-appropriate forms also ensure the continued working of the consumption cycle; as Raisborough (2011) points out, “the ideal consumer-citizen

is one who not only exercises control and restraint, *yet still consumes*, but for whom responsible (read 'tasteful') consumption is part of the wider process of self-investment" (original emphasis, p. 61).

The intersection of consumerism, consumption and entertainment in makeover television is an exemplar of the neoliberal model of self-improvement through commodity acquisition. However, even more subtly enforcing the market model is the fact that television itself is a commodity, and thus its everyday suggestions for making proper "consumer choices" help to frame even the most mundane activities as neoliberal endeavours, "managing all conceivable human problems from the vantage point of cultural commerce" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, pp. 39-40). Thus, since neoliberalism rests upon an economic foundation and contributes to the marketization of society, our individual, sovereign choices necessarily become consumer choices (Raisborough, 2011, p. 56).

Research questions. Several gaps in the foregoing literatures will be addressed by this thesis. First, the tendency in consumption studies to focus on acquisition means that other stages of the consumption cycle are academically underdeveloped. I have proposed a more comprehensive model of consumption which includes stages of storage and divestment that hold equal focus with acquisition. As outlined in my introduction, what I call the domestic consumption ethic is composed of three stages: restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal. Significantly, the domestic consumption ethic is a model for conformity with dominant morals surrounding consumption and care of the home and family. In this way, it can be mobilized to diagnose and correct 'deviant'

consumption behaviours, and in particular those which occur within the home. This leads to my first set of research questions:

- (1) In these programmes, in what ways is the domestic consumption ethic presented as a process of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal? Is un-restrained acquisition framed as problematic activity or a justified one? How does storage-as-display affect the perceived value of goods? And how is judicious disposal mobilized to balance the consumption cycle into an 'appropriate' form?

Secondly, there is a general tendency in the bodies of research which I have presented here to highlight individual practices rather than those of the family unit. A focus on gender, for example, acts to highlight roles and divisions within a family at the expense of an analysis of the family as a single entity. Studies of governance also ignore responsabilizing behaviours and processes at the level of family, preferring to talk about individual subjectivity. This inspires my second line of inquiry:

- (2) How is the responsabilization of families, rather than individuals, promoted through these programmes? How are family relations mobilized to strengthen adherence to the domestic consumption ethic? What happens when family responsabilization fails?

Finally, the role of the home as a sheltering space has been noted in the literature, as well as the importance of home ownership to economic responsabilization. Often neglected, however is the necessarily inhabited nature of a home and the function of the family in creating a secure, harmonious space. My third set of questions addresses this:

- (3) How are families and consumption situated in the home, particularly in regard to storage and the organization of domestic spaces? What are the ways in which familial economic responsabilization is promoted?

1.2 Values, Categories and Responsible Families: Theoretical Concepts

In this section I will outline the theoretical concepts which I will use to conduct my analysis. I will begin with a description of value assignment which draws on Jean

Baudrillard (1998) but also expands upon his work to propose the new category of *potential-value*. This is followed by an outline of garbage, categorization and storage, in which the classic work of Mary Douglas (1966) is supported by contemporary scholars Gavin Lucas (2002) and Susan Strasser (1999). The works of these authors are combined to inform and inspire my concept of *storage-as-display*. This section will conclude with a discussion of the moral and economic responsabilization of families in relation to consumption and the home. Varied sources are utilized to flesh out notions of the family and home, including Foucauldian perspectives on governance. These ideas about governance, discipline and surveillance I have altered to include *relations of accountability*, which enable the responsabilization of entire families. In addition, James Hay (2010) provides a strong base for economic responsabilization which can also be applied to family and home.

Sign-value and potential-value. Jean Baudrillard (1998) suggests that consumption operates at a level similar to that of language, and thus cannot be solely based on an economic rationale of markets and needs. To the classic dichotomy of Marx's use-value and exchange-value Baudrillard (1998) adds the expansion of sign-value, or the determining of worth based on the symbolic properties of a commodity. Although sign-value is capable of conveying a great deal of meaning, its assignment is completely arbitrary, like the link between language and referent in Saussurean linguistics (Baudrillard, 1998). Since the meanings of sign-value are contingent upon the meanings which surround them, we can think of consumption as "an order of significations" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 79). More importantly, Baudrillard (1998) states that in our

consumer society it is no longer the use-value which we consume but the sign-value (p. 77). He uses the example of the household appliance to illustrate this, writing that “the washing machine serves as an appliance and acts as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field which is the field of consumption” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 77). A front-loading stainless steel machine will hold a very different sign-value than a dented, avocado-coloured washer. Thus the consumption of sign-value is no longer solely about filling needs, but about satisfying “desire” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 77).

However, this does not seem to tell the whole story, and so I propose that another kind of value be added: potential-value. Potential-value, I argue, should be seen either as a combination of use-, exchange- and sign-value or as an extension of them. For example, a painting has a particular use-value (aesthetic pleasure), an exchange-value (tradeable commodity), and a sign-value (status symbol). Potential-value however is created from the expectation of enhancement of other types of value in a future period. The same painting could increase in exchange-value as it ages or as fashions in the art world change. Similarly, the painting’s sign-value could change from artisanal product to important cultural artwork.

This expectation of the increase of value relies, in part, on storage. If the painting is carelessly kept in a basement or garage and allowed to mold and decay, its values will not increase in the same ways. Thus, the method of storage as the proper or improper care of goods is critical to determining the potential-value of objects. Similarly, if an object is stored for too long it may lose potential-value. Food products are an example of this; their value will dramatically drop if they are stored beyond their best-by date. In addition, objects which are stored but never used may have their potential-value

suspended. Articles of clothing kept in the back of the closet and never worn do not necessarily gain or lose potential-value, however neither is their value realized.

Garbage and storage. What counts as low-value and therefore fit for disposal is a decision made by individual consumers, often based on dominant morals. Lucas (2002) suggests that trash is a “border category”; a continuum of usefulness where what counts as garbage is “negotiable” since it is based on “perceptions” (p. 15). A perceived loss of potential-value then may result in an item being classified as garbage. However, since the act of categorizing something as trash is negotiable, this perception will be different for different individuals. As Strasser (1999) suggests “if we focus on the categorizing process that defines trash, our attention will be drawn away from the rubbish heap and concentrated on human behaviour” (p. 5).

Just as we choose what to buy, we also must choose what to throw away. As Strasser (1999) points out, garbage is a process of classification:

trash is created by sorting. Everything that comes into the end-of-the-millennium home—every toaster, pair of trousers, and ounce of soda pop, and every box and bag and bottle they arrive in—*eventually requires a decision: keep it or toss it.* We use it up, we save it to use later, we give it away, or at some point we define it as rubbish to be taken back out, to be removed from beyond the borders of the household. (emphasis added, p. 5)

How such decisions about acquiring and disposing are made are not always clear-cut, and individual consumption behaviours may seep across boundaries of acceptability. These decisions can also be related to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of cultural capital, which he suggests is first transmitted through the family (pp. 48-49). Philips (2005) argues that this instruction is extended to makeover television experts, describing them as

a new form of Bourdieu's "cultural intermediaries" (p. 214). She suggests that the cultural superiority of the expert as "tastemaker" is both justified and made socially relevant through the cultural innocence of the participants (p. 223).

More nuanced, and relevant, at least to this work, is Mariana Valverde's (1994) notion of moral capital. Moral capital is the effective practice and familiarity with systems of moral regulation, which also helps to balance any immoral excesses of economic and cultural capital (Valverde, 1994, p. 215, 217). Since morality is rarely a well-articulated set of rules however, it is not always clear how certain practices fit within its bounds. According to Douglas (1966) cultural ambiguity must be resolved and dubious behaviours must be classified, so "by settling for one or other interpretation, ambiguity is often reduced ... [and] with this labelling, the appropriate action is clear" (p. 39). Thus by judging or interpreting overconsumption as hoarding, cluttering or couponing, the social response to these behaviours—whether it be therapy, organizing or emulation—is also settled. In addition, this suggests the type of intermediary who is called in to correct problematic behaviour.

Storage is not discussed directly in the theories which I have examined, but we can piece together its theoretical importance through an examination of related concepts. Douglas (1966) highlights the importance of boundaries and classification in her discussion of pollution. She writes that "matter out of place ... implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system" (Douglas, 1966, p. 35). Lucas (2002) suggests that it is our inability to distinctly categorize matter within such a system that prompts us to consider it value-less:

what characterizes the contents of a [garbage] bin above all is the fact that *inside*, matter is commonly unconstituted—or rather de-constituted, and dirty. Packages lie eviscerated or disembowelled, mixed with the spent or unused contents of themselves or other packages—things are *not* in their place inside the bin or the landfill, but indeed are disordered, mixed up and consequently elicit responses of disgust. Objects that were once individuated as cereal boxes or tins of beans, become fragmented and conjoined as in some monstrous creation. (p. 8)

Thus the ways in which we store things, separated or mixed together, adds to or reduces their potential-value. Certainly methods of storage which keep an object from environmentally-caused decay—things such as damp, dust or mold—are important to maintaining or growing value. However, the degree of segregation from other goods, allowing for clear differentiation, also contributes to greater value. Merchants seem to know this already, separating like objects into groups of tidy stacks or lined up neatly on shelves. In presenting goods for sale, “objects are never offered for consumption in absolute disorder” but are presented and displayed as “a range of differentiated objects, evoking, echoing and offsetting one another” (Baudrillard, 1998, pp. 27, 26). This separation allows us to easily assess the value of objects through reducing ambiguity, and thus becomes a desirable form of storage which we may then emulate in our homes.

This emulation is what I call storage-as-display, the second phase in the domestic consumption ethic. Storage-as-display can take several forms, but always evokes the orderly presentation common in retail arrangements. The organized grouping of foodstuffs by category in the pantry, with rows of canned goods separate from bins of flour and sugar and boxes of pasta is an example of storage-as-display. A living room “ensemble” which has cleverly-designed hiding places for children’s toys and complementary sofa and chairs with matching end tables is another example, as is the careful selection and spacing throughout the room of family photos. Through storage

however, goods are also ‘used’ in a different way. Rather than merely being ‘used up’, items stay in the home for a period of time in anticipation of future need. Nevertheless, this accumulation of possessions for delayed or long-term use can become exaggerated through un-restrained acquisition or a resistance to divestment. Storage-as-display is thus particularly important in taming overconsumption, since by keeping goods organized, separated and clean, the chaos of excessive possessions is made rational.

The family and responsabilization. As discussed above, storage-as-display is part of the domestic consumption ethic, which is a standard that reflects dominant morals.

Baudrillard (1998) points out the intensely social nature of consumption, stating that “consuming is something one never does alone” (p. 78). He extends this notion to include social values and structures in that “consumption is an active, collective behaviour: it is something enforced, a morality, an institution” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 81). Similarly to moral capital, if our judgements about consumption are governed by moral rules, those rules must be taught through socialization; since the family is one of the most important sites of socialization, it also carries the initial burden of responsibility in promoting conformity with dominant consumption morals.

As Stewart Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane Alters (2004) point out, however, what constitutes a family is also contingent on socio-historical context (pp. 54-55). Thus we should not think of the family as a social unit which remains constant across time and between cultures, but must recognize the more flexible ways in which families are formed and maintained. Although William Douglas (2003) offers a

problematic view of the family as a hetero-normative structure based on procreation, his discussion of *how* individuals interact as families is useful:

For most Americans, the family is fundamental to day-to-day life; family members ask each other for advice, when living apart they visit each other and talk on the telephone, they shop together, they worry about each other, and, when they have reason to celebrate, they often do so with each other. Indeed, the family is such an inherent and expected feature of the American experience that most people simply cannot imagine any alternative. (p. 4)

From his description then, we can develop a notion of family which is based on a certain kind of interaction rather than consanguinity. The nuclear family model, which Hoover *et al.* (2004) critique as only briefly existing, mostly in middle-class, mid-century North America (p. 58), can be discarded in favour of a more inclusive conception of family as a network of close, caring relationships built on sustained intimate contact, who share or have shared a domestic space. This definition then includes, for example, blended families, homosexual partnerships, and friendships as familial relationships.

The role of family in socializing members into the dominant morality is also noted by Michel Foucault (2000, p. 367). However, he also highlights the “diffuse” nature of morality that is deployed and reinforced by a number of sources, both subtly and overtly, over a period of time (p. 367). In addition to the family, makeover television can suggest to us how we should act in regard to consumption, including to what we should pay attention and what we should leave to the care of experts. This intersection is a sort of self-improvement text, which Foucault (2000) describes as:

written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should, ‘practical’ texts, which are themselves objects of a ‘practice’ in that they were designed to be read, learned, reflected upon, and tested out, and they were intended to constitute the eventual framework of everyday conduct. These texts served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects. (p. 366, 367)

Under modern forms of governance, such texts are offered to citizens in order to work on improving themselves. Nikolas Rose (1996) suggests that one of the functions of governance is “implanting in citizens the aspiration to pursue their own civility, wellbeing and advancement” (p. 40). This process, known as responsabilization, is also described by Graham Burchell (1996) as the ways “in which the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves” (p. 29).

Identifying as a moral subject carries with it an imperative to engage in “ethical work” on the self through “a regular checking of conduct aimed at measuring the exactness with which one is applying the rules” (Foucault, 2000, p. 368). However, ethical subjectivity and work, when applied to the caring interactions of families means that there is a checking not only of the self, but also a responsibility to surveil other family members to ensure their conformity. This process of surveillance and discipline within the family I call relations of accountability. When relations of accountability are successfully mobilized there is a dual examination of the self and of others, as well as the knowledge that one is being monitored by fellow family members. I suggest here that these relations of accountability form a powerful, intensified instance of responsabilization *as a family unit* rather than only as individuals.

Although there is a dearth of theory which deals specifically with the economic responsabilization of families and their consequent relations of accountability, other, related theories can be used to inform an analysis. James Hay (2010) suggests that some reality television encourages individual responsabilization into an entrepreneurial, defensive citizen who manages their personal risk (p. 389). He expands this notion to include programmes which showcase business and money matters (such as *The*

Apprentice, Suze Orman, and Mad Money) to show that they reflect and promote a “financialization” of everyday life, ultimately

cultivating not merely an enterprising and self-managed consumer-citizen, but a subject who is capable of demonstrating, enacting, and living (as a lifestyle) the resources of personal finance and investment... a new *homo oeconomicus*—the subject of a new political economy and governmental rationality. (Original emphasis, pp. 389-390)

However, in accepting a financialized subjectivity the citizen is not only concerning themselves with their personal economic situation, but is also submitting to the financialized gaze of institutions, becoming an object of and “*susceptible* to economic analysis” (original emphasis, Hay, 2010, pp. 390-391).

For families, perhaps the most visible and important financial asset is their home. Deborah Philips (2005) finds that design makeover television often highlights home ownership, placing the transformation squarely within a financialized frame through a “discourse of home maintenance and renovation as capital investment” (p. 228). Indeed, makeover television that deals with the organization and cleaning of junk-filled homes acts to reinforce this ethic of responsible home ownership (Raisborough, 2011, p. 65-6). Thus through many makeover shows it is not only the fact of owning a home which is promoted, but also the moral obligation of protecting and even growing the investment, or potential-value, through knowledge of techniques for preservation and improvement. The focus on consumption, particularly specific, morally-acceptable forms of consumption such as the domestic consumption ethic described here, can be taken as further evidence of the financialization of everyday life. As well, the focus on family homes suggests that economic responsabilization applies not only to individuals but also to families. According to Michelle Janning (2008), the conflation of family and home

present in many makeover shows reproduces the idea that “the location of families is not only *in* homes, but also the definition of family is *constitutive of* that home, and vice versa” (p. 428). In makeover television then, consumption which impacts the home can be directly linked to the health of familial relationships.

1.3 Research Methods

In this section, I will begin with a brief description of each of the three programmes that I analyzed, followed by a rationale for my method of analysis. To conclude I will outline my research design and provide a description of my sample. Initially, I came across these programmes rather by accident as I was exploring a hunch that reality television was increasingly producing programmes which showcased excessive behaviours. Through my casual watching of programmes such as *Intervention*, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, *19 Kids and Counting*, and *Toddlers and Tiaras*, I noticed advertisements for even more programmes dealing with the extreme and excessive. I was already familiar with *Hoarders* when I first encountered *Extreme Couponing*, and my initial reaction was to compare the two. Soon after I discovered *Consumed*, and through further viewing recognized that the three programmes mapped onto a spectrum of excess related to consumption and the home. What I find most fascinating about these three programmes is their moral ambiguity in presenting the extraordinary everyday. Their focus on the ordinary and domestic as sites of problematic consumption behaviours is unlike many of the other shows which I mentioned above, which tend to present absolutes of addiction (*Intervention*), child sexualisation or exploitation (*Toddlers and*

Tiaras, 19 Kids and Counting), or the ‘strange’ cultural practices of outsiders (*My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*).

In its fifth season in 2012, *Hoarders* airs on the American cable channel A&E, and is described as “a fascinating look inside the lives of two different people whose inability to part with their belongings is so out of control that they are on the verge of a personal crisis” (A&E, 2012). *Consumed* debuted on the Canadian HGTV cable channel in 2011. Now renewed for a second season, the host of *Consumed*, Jill Pollack, describes the programme as a way “to utilize her honed organizational skills to truly help people live their best life by getting rid of clutter in their homes” (Shaw, 2012). Entering a fourth season in 2012 on the American cable channel TLC, *Extreme Couponing* invites viewers to “witness amazing shopping skills and shocking stockpiles of merchandise, as everyday people go to extremes in pursuit of extraordinary deals” (Discovery, 2012). All of the programmes air on week-days during later, prime-time slots.

As mentioned above, these three programmes offer a continuum of overconsumption practices which has proven to be rich for analyzing the various ways in which excessive consumption can be represented, and the judgements made in constructing these representations. If we take Ouellette and Hay’s (2008) suggestion that “TV’s programmatic serialization supports its provision of a *framework* for better living” (original emphasis, p. 17), then examining the frameworks, or the narrative structures, of the episodes reveals much about the kinds of better living which they are offering. Their highly-structured, consistent and repetitive formats suggest that the elements common to every episode are very important, increasing their pedagogical value.

Michael Porter, Deborah Larson, Allison Harthcock and Kelly Nellis (2002) suggest that narrative is an important aspect of fictional television programming as it links episodes together through continuous storylines and character development (p. 23). It is through narrative, in their opinion, that certain kinds of programme can be identified and grouped together, stating that “by examining structure, one can begin to identify the rules and patterns in a particular genre of television narratives that help to create meaning” (Porter *et al*, 2002, p. 23). Fiske (1984), in what he calls a structural reading of *Dr. Who*, describes narrative as composed of two elements: “story (what happens)” and “discourses (how it is told)” (p. 168). Thus the structures of television stories, as a set of happenings and the ways in which characters interact, is in part made meaningful by the choices producers make when scripting and editing these elements.

Beginning with Brenda Weber’s (2009) basic descriptions of makeover television’s narrative structures, I have examined the particular narrative arcs of each programme in order to uncover the more detailed script which constrains the participants.

Weber (2009) describes the makeover narrative as a trajectory of six elements:

- 1) the initial shaming of the pre-made-over “ugly” subject, 2) moments for surveillance by audience and experts, 3) pledges from the subjects that they will put themselves fully in the hands of the authorities, 4) the actual work of the transformation (sometimes with didactic teaching moments included for the benefit of subject and audience), 5) the mandatory “shock and awe” of reveals, and 6) the euphoria of the new-and-improved subject and satisfied experts. (p. 31)

During the course of my analysis, I modified and simplified these stages into a narrative arc which better describes the three programmes under study. This general narrative, always a transformation story, is composed of four phases: the Definition Phase, the Assessment Phase, the Teaching Phase, and the Reveal Phase. These phases allow me the

flexibility to discuss the different narratives of the programmes while also highlighting their similarities.

During the course of this analysis I watched an entire season of each programme to identify and map its narrative elements. I chose the first season of each programme, since it seems as if over time many such programmes begin to portray increasingly extreme cases to maintain audience interest; thus the earlier episodes showcase more everyday examples of overconsumption. These more ordinary excesses plausibly elicit a more emulate-able correction from the programmes' experts, giving them more responsabilizing power. This initial narrative set-up reveals much about the assumptions producers make about our moral choices regarding consumption.

Through multiple viewings and detailed transcriptions I identified and highlighted the repeated use of structural elements in each episode, such as the 30-day challenge in *Consumed*, in order to examine how they contribute to our cultural and moral ideas surrounding family and consumption. Using the four phases of the transformation as a guide, I looked for narrative aspects which produce a particular kind of progression in the stories told in each series. I mapped the narrative structures and interactions in relation to my research questions about the domestic consumption ethic, the responsabilization of families, and economic responsabilization and the home. In the Definition Phase, for example, I have documented how the problems—or solutions—that overconsumption has caused are defined and presented to audiences. Are they described by the participant, by other family members, or both? How are the domestic consumption behaviours of the participants presented visually? I also looked at their descriptions of the processes which led to the state of affairs, and the before and after narrative of this phase in itself. Often

participants have not always been “this way”, and so their downward slide or upward trajectory may feature as a part of their definition. Do family members blame each other for the way things are? Or is one person held accountable for the success or failure of the family?

In the Assessment Phase I focus on expertise and the ways in which the domestic consumption ethic has been enacted by participants. Is there a problem with acquisition, storage-as-display, or judicious disposal? How is the imbalance described, as a problem or a solution, and how is the domestic consumption ethic mobilized to correct it? In this phase descriptions of and explanations for the state of affairs are also presented. Is a participant given the opportunity for a private assessment with the expert, or is the entire family involved? Are a participant’s justifications ridiculed by the family or expert, or are they encouraged to elaborate in a non-judgemental manner? Does the camera work support or undermine these explanations? Here I also looked at the ways the experts themselves were presented. Are they medical professionals or lay specialists? Do they present themselves through their experience or their specializations? Or, are the participants themselves acting as experts, and how do they characterize their expertise?

The Teaching Phase often involves highly-structured moments of instruction between expert and participants, or expert and viewers. I documented and analyzed these structures, as well as the role of the expert in judging, implementing change, or teaching consumption habits. It is here also that I examined the structured behaviour in which participants engage, such as coached discarding, timed purges, or the counting of goods. How are these behaviours presented visually? As a focus on minutiae, an emulation of retail, or a spotlighting of multiplicity and abundance? Not only is the structure important

here, but also processes of negotiation. Are behaviours negotiated between family members, between a participant and an expert, or is negotiation completely absent? Additionally, I looked at how relations of accountability are expressed in this phase: are there opportunities for the family to work together, or do they remain at odds? Whose anxieties are articulated, and for whom are they anxious for?

Finally, in the Reveal Phase I documented if, and how, a participant's behaviour changed, and how family involvement in the domestic consumption ethic helped with or failed the transformation. I also looked at the presentation of the home in the reveal, and how the transformation could be used to convince participants to maintain these new configurations. How did experts use the state of the home to 'sell' participants on the domestic consumption ethic? Who is satisfied, who grudging, and who unconvinced? And how do family members react to each other in the transformed domestic space?

I have supplemented these high-level narrative maps, generated from my viewing of entire seasons, with close readings of individual episodes to illustrate how these schema frame the stories of particular families within each season. Rather than the more extreme examples which would be used to draw viewers to a season première or finale, I wished to examine how the shows *typically* present individual families, and so have selected episodes from the middle of the season for the close readings. These individual episodes have been selected as representative of the narrative norms of each series.

Chapter Two details my analysis and discusses my findings for the programme *Hoarders*. As I will show, relations of accountability feature prominently in *Hoarders*, and I will argue that part of what frames a participant as pathological is the uncertainty of their reciprocity in familial responsabilization. The focus of this programme is most often

placed on a stoppage of the cycle of the domestic consumption ethic at the point of judicious discarding; however this accumulation of goods also presents issues with storage-as-display and un-restrained acquisition.

Chapter Three analyzes *Consumed*, contrasting the successful mobilization of relations of accountability with the failure often encountered in *Hoarders*. The cultivation of familial responsabilization plays a large role in *Consumed* since the participation of all members of a family is what signals the completeness of the transformation. The flow of goods through the domestic consumption ethic is not as unbalanced in this programme; rarely is un-restrained acquisition cited as a problem; however, judicious discard is slowed and most often confounded by the improper application of storage-as-display.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the programme *Extreme Couponing*, which again features family involvement in enacting the domestic consumption ethic. In this programme however, relations of accountability are hidden beneath a façade of harmonious family unity, and are thus assumed to be producing familial responsabilization. *Extreme Couponing's* focus seems to be squarely on un-restrained acquisition, yet to balance this inequality in the consumption cycle extreme measures are often taken with storage-as-display, and donation is sometimes employed as a form of judicious disposal.

To conclude, Chapter Five presents a brief discussion the programmes as a cluster of similarly-themed makeover programmes, having considered them separately in the preceding chapters. The focus here is on economic responsabilization and its intersections with overconsumption and family; however, other outstanding themes are touched on, such as discourses of addiction and mental health, and alternate forms of divestment and

the do-it-yourself ethic. The care and control of consumer goods is taken up in this chapter, and is in particular extended to include the house itself as an important property (in all senses) of family and the role of the domestic consumption ethic in the preservation and growing of potential-value.

2 *Hoarders* as Consequences: Irresponsible Families and Loss

In Episode 6 of *Hoarders*, Bill, a compulsive hoarder who styles himself a handyman, has been given an ultimatum by his partner Lorelei: clean up the house or she will move out. Their home, in which their adult daughter also lives, is so cluttered with Bill's tools and various projects that several spaces have lost their functionality. To help, the family has enlisted David, a medical professional who specializes in treating hoarding behaviours. David, Bill, Lorelei and Bill's daughter Amelia are gathered in the dining area as Bill attempts to organize some of the seemingly-random boxes and piles of possessions which fill the room. The music accompanying this scene is quirky, lilting and almost carnival-like, simultaneously comic and dark in mood. David is asking Bill to go through his things one-by-one to determine if anything can be thrown away. The camera moves from Bill to focus on David, Lorelei and Amelia as they look on with tolerant yet bemused expressions as Bill continues to declare "keep" for every item with which he is presented. David finally intervenes, asking Bill about a tool they have just found: "How many stud-finders do you have?" to which Bill answers, brusquely "Two". David pushes "how many stud-finders do you need?" As the camera focuses on Bill's slightly defiant, sidelong expression, he again answers decisively, "Two", foreclosing further negotiation.

While this may not seem to be problematic—after all, refusing to discard a useful duplicate of something would likely make most people hoarders—later in the scene Bill's behaviour contravenes boundaries of personal space and of value. Bill finds a package of "hand cleaners" which he wants to keep. Amelia recognizes the package as some of her face-cleansing pads—ones that she had thrown away because they had dried out. As the

camera is pointed at Amelia, her expression seems to convey that this is a small victory for her, as David's expert confirmation of Bill's irrationality serves to justify her own frustrations with her father. The music has now turned mournful, almost ominous in tone; David asks Bill to explain, saying "you went into the garbage can and got them" and Bill interrupts "No." As Bill struggles to articulate his definition of garbage, the scene cuts to David explaining "Recycling is fantastic. Hoarding, hoarding is not so fantastic." While David speaks the camera lingers on Bill's suspicious expression, so that while verbally he may agree, his face reveals that he is not convinced.

This scene illustrates the core narrative premise of *Hoarders*: to showcase the last-ditch efforts of a family in crisis because of overconsumption. Participants have reached the limits of what they and their families can do on their own, and face dire consequences unless they can begin working to overcome their illness. Expert intervention is central to the narrative as a professional brings a crew of workers to aid the family in changing the participant's hoarding behaviours. Time constraints are doubly crucial here since experts are assigned by producers to help an individual for only a few days while an episode is filmed, yet the participant may also have a particular date by which they must clean up or face a particular consequence.

At first glance, the presentation of overconsumption in the programme *Hoarders* may seem to be a problem with un-restrained acquisition. However, our cultural scripts regarding consumption are both complex and subtle—in the television programme *Hoarders* the messages are covert, showing rather than telling how we should respond to the 'deviant' consumption behaviours of the mentally ill. In the course of each episode all aspects of the domestic consumption ethic receive some focus, and while judicious

discarding is centre-stage, it is encouraged in order to correct problematic behaviours surrounding un-restrained acquisition and the absence of storage-as-display.

Families are highly visible in *Hoarders*. Family members and friends are interviewed extensively and are usually present to help with both the physical cleanup and the mental progression. The families are often non-traditional in that they do not necessarily co-habit, may consist of failed relationships such as divorced partners, or may even be composed entirely of friends. Relations of accountability are still attempted, although the severity of the participant's illness may make them resistant to engagement. Sometimes relations of accountability fail completely.

The narrative of *Hoarders* is very similar across all episodes of the first season. Most episodes contain the same story elements; however there is quite a lot of variation in the order in which they appear. Each episode follows two participants, switching back and forth between their stories to compose a double-arc which increases the suspense leading up to the reveal phase. This may also serve to increase the cultural salience of the program by suggesting that hoarding is more prevalent in society than assumed. To begin, I will present a description of a single story arc which can be generalized with a minimum of alteration across each of the participant stories in season one. This narrative has been divided into four phases: the Introduction Phase which presents the participant, their behaviours and the problems they have caused; the Assessment Phase during which experts examine the participant, their situation and their behaviours; the Teaching Phase that focuses on the work of experts and family to challenge and change the participant's behaviours; and the Reveal Phase which presents the cleaned-up property or the failure of the participant to effect change. To support this description I have included observations

from a close reading of Episode 3 which features the separate stories of Betty (3/1) and Tara (3/2). I then discuss at length some of the themes uncovered during my narrative analysis.

2.1 The Narrative of *Hoarders*

Hoarders begins with a lead-in composed of emotional or shocking clips from the body of the episode ending with the show's title. Viewers are then shown the first of what I will call *text screens*: a black screen with white text centred in it which replaces voiced narration. This text screen sets up every episode in the same way, punctuated by a single, short, discordant note reminiscent of a piano, and reading "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." A second screen reads "More than 3 million people are compulsive hoarders. These are two of their stories."

The Definition Phase. Participants then introduce themselves by stating their name and, usually, their age. The participant and his or her family and friends describe the problematic consumption behaviours. For Tara, a move several years ago prompted her to keep many of her belongings in boxes rather than unpacking, further complicated by her habit of un-restrained acquisition. Over time, the situation escalated to the point where she was forced to rent extra storage to contain the overflow of goods from her already overcrowded apartment. 68-year-old Betty characterizes herself as a scavenger of still-useful things whose only enjoyment comes from scrounging in garbage left at the curb and buying at garage sales. Betty's family however, is becoming increasingly frustrated

with her inability to discard. These anomalies in the flow of the domestic consumption cycle, particularly at the discarding stage are central to all of the episodes in season one.

In *Hoarders*, problematic relationships go hand-in-hand with hoarding behaviour, both as leading to, and as a result of, this divergence from the domestic consumption ethic. In several episodes participants report failed marriages, children removed by protective services, or living with enabling partners. In this phase, however, family members are portrayed individually through excerpts taken from private interviews. This individual testimony appears to be in response to directed questioning; however, the interviewer's queries are never heard. The absence of the interviewer allows producers to edit and frame the responses into a particular narrative. The ways in which family members interact with each other are not yet portrayed.

Some participants also regard their hoarding as a learned behaviour. Tara blames her childhood spent living in a crowded apartment which was much too small for the size of her family. There was little space available to the family for storage-as-display, so their possessions were usually unorganized. Tara feels that part of her current problem is that she “never learned how to organize” and it wasn't until later in life that she realized “this is not the way people live, I mean, everything has a home, and in my case nothing has a home.” Betty says that she takes after her father, employed as a garbage collector, who scavenged as he was working and was constantly bringing things home. Betty's son, on the other hand, thinks this is an excuse that she uses to engage in hoarding as a response to her husband Charles's alcoholism, suggesting that by not ‘keeping house’ Betty is rebelling against Charles's perceived failure as husband and provider. Both Betty and Tara maintain that they don't want their homes to be so full of items—as Betty says

“I have nowhere to put anything”—which suggests that they are aware that there is a problem with storage-as-display; however, neither seems to recognize the contributions that their un-restrained acquisition and refusal to discard make to this problem.

This kind of behaviour-in-the-home can be related back to the idea of *home* itself. Home is necessarily an inhabited space, most often defined by the presence of a family. Homes, however also perform particular functions; as Douglas (1991) points out homes are anticipatory in nature, and their repetitive capacities as shelter, sleeping place, and pantry which is forever filled and emptied are integral to their definition as such (pp. 294-295). Houses, then only become homes through the habits of a family. As will be reinforced later in this chapter, Betty’s actions are framed as a deliberate attack on her home—by what seems to be a willful neglect of the habits and comforts espoused by the domestic consumption ethic. Tara, on the other hand, seems to be home-less despite her residence within a house. That she has never unpacked many of her things from her move also suggests that she has not completed one of the hallmarks of creating a home, that of putting everything in its place in anticipation of habit and need. Tara even uses the metaphor of the home for the placement of her things, saying “in my case nothing has a home”, agonizing over her inability to set up her domestic space according to convention.

After this introduction by self and family, a text screen describes the impending consequences of the participant’s hoarding behaviours. The consequences described in the episodes often centre around intervention in the care of the home by authorities such as municipal safety inspectors, landlords or lending institutions. In Tara’s case, someone unknown to her has called municipal authorities to investigate, and she now faces eviction from her home. Betty’s situation is dire as well; the text screen discloses that

“Betty and Charles have been evicted from four rental properties in the last ten years. With the help of their children they finally bought their own home. Now authorities have declared it uninhabitable.” This text screen also points out the familial relations of accountability at play by mentioning the role of Betty’s children in her home ownership and caretaking. It is implied however that Betty has refused to engage in relations of accountability since she has continued to flout the standards of the domestic consumption ethic despite her family’s aid. No longer solely a moral issue, this refusal has resulted in the legal negation of the domestic function of her property, with these unnamed ‘authorities’ classifying it as no longer suitable for habitation.

Ultimately however, hoarding’s consequences are presented as the destruction of the family through such things as the loss of the family house or apartment, the removal of children by authorities, separation and divorce, the loss of familial financial solvency, or even the threat of suicide. Text screens relating these consequences are present throughout every episode, both framing the narrative by highlighting certain aspects and tying together what would otherwise be fragmented individual perspectives. The text screens function as narration, appearing to be impersonal and void of emphasis, yet actually allowing producers to edit and place segments of personal interviews and video clips of the cleanup process in a particular order, conforming to the general narrative structure of the show. Throughout each episode, the repetition of text screens describing the moral and legal consequences and their immanence creates drama and suspense within the narrative but also highlights the damage that can be caused by a refusal to participate in relations of accountability and adhere to the domestic consumption ethic.

The 'need for help' now takes centre-stage in the narrative of *Hoarders*. While this is, to a certain extent, articulated by the participant, it is the family, in an administration of relations of accountability, which seems to exert most of the pressure to seek professional intervention. Safety is often cited as a concern. One of Tara's close friends is a fire inspector who states that the homes of hoarders are quite commonly reported as, and are found to be, dangerous. Betty's daughter Michelle characterizes her home as, "not safe; it's not sanitary; it is a stockpile for everything under the sun." Indeed, recently there was a small fire in Betty's home, and the possessions which filled the hallways and rooms prevented emergency responders from accessing her injured husband Charles with proper medical equipment. The paramedics reported the situation to adult protective services and it was at this point when authorities declared that Charles was no longer allowed to live in the home. During this explanation the camera focuses on a singed and bubbled teddy bear which remains desultorily tossed atop a stack of items. Yet rather than clean up the property, a text screen states that "Betty and Charles have been living in a motel. They are running out of money and the house remains uninhabitable. Betty must clean up her home immediately or she and her husband will be forced to live on the streets."

The irrational nature of hoarding is also emphasized in the narrative. One of Tara's friends talks about Tara's obsession with collectibles, saying that anything which is part of a series is "a trap for her." Tara herself talks about her collections with excitement and obvious enjoyment, but is distressed when she remarks "when you care about something you're supposed to display it, but this is not displaying it if it's just amongst your clutter." Betty refuses to characterize herself as a hoarder, saying that she is

merely “a saver, a rescuer of things.” Her daughter Trieste, who also lives in the house and engages in hoarding behaviours, is more pragmatic about the situation saying matter-of-factly “I’ve got the bug.” It is clear that Trieste acknowledges that her behaviour is causing her family some concern, yet Betty does not.

The Assessment Phase. To begin this phase, a text screen suggests the possibility of avoiding the consequences brought on by hoarding through the submission of the participant to expert advice. In Tara’s storyline this informs the audience that “a crew capable of cleaning her house is standing by to help.” The wording also involves some doubt as to whether the participant will accept the aid which is offered, leaving open the possibility of a failed transformation and injecting some dramatic tension into the narrative. The intervening expert then introduces his or her self in one of two ways: either as a medical professional such as a therapist, or as an organizing specialist whose area of expertise is hoarding. While the same expert does not appear in every episode, the programme draws on a very limited pool of professionals who often make repeat appearances, including four medical specialists such as cognitive behavioural therapists and psychiatrists, and four organization experts who specialize in hoarding cases.

This combination of medical and lay experts suggests that hoarding is an illness which has been ignored by both medicine and larger society. The inclusion of organizational experts who have little, if any, clinical training seems to promote the idea that hoarding has not been addressed enough by the medical establishment. The small pool of experts drawn on by *Hoarders* also insinuates that there is a lack of qualified help available. Whether hoarding cases have actually been increasing, or if more attention is

being paid to the disorder is unclear. Certainly it seems as if the programme is attempting to encourage the cultural salience of hoarding as a form of overconsumption.

Until this point the narrative has been composed of individual testimony. During the Assessment Phase viewers begin to witness some interactions between the participant, family members and experts. These interactions continue to be supplemented by interview clips, which act to elaborate and frame the scenes. The expert tours the home with the participant, taking care to appear non-judgemental while asking the participant to rationalize their behaviour. The expert is of course making judgements about how to work with the participant, and remarks made outside of the participant's presence are often edited into the storyline. Tara welcomes the help of Brenden, a professional organizer. Brenden asks Tara about her goals for her home and invites her to "show me some things that are bothering you" as she guides him on a tour. As the camera follows them, it shows piles of goods in overflowing, open boxes that are stacked to the level of the windows. As Tara tells Brenden about her plans for decorating the room, the camera cuts to a shot of the television stand, filled with teddy bears, papers, calendars and decorations. The television itself is shown to be on the floor, with a three-foot-wide pathway snaking around it through the piles of clutter into the next room.

Dorothy, also an organizing expert, asks Betty what her home would look like in a perfect world. As Dorothy enters a room, the camera shows her struggling to step over the baskets and boxes of items that litter the floor. Betty talks about her ideas for storage-as-display while the camera focuses on their disarray: a grime-covered sewing machine trapped behind clutter and a bed surrounded by linens and clothing stored any-which-way on floors and walls. Later, alone, Betty confesses to the camera that "I've got a good

plan; that's one reason I resented this organizer thing, but I'm willing to go along with it 'cuz she may have ideas that I hadn't thought of or may be able to use." It is clear that Betty does not regard her own behaviour as outside of social acceptability, yet still acknowledges Dorothy's expertise.

This phase may also include some anxious or skeptical reactions from family members. Tara's friends, while willing to help with the cleanup, individually express their concern about her extreme emotional responses regarding her possessions. In their interviews Betty's children continue to focus on the excessive amount of objects in her home and are unsure about their mother's commitment to overcoming her hoarding tendencies. Indeed, Betty emphasizes her enjoyment of garage sales and re-states her intention to fight for the one thing that brings her pleasure. Her son seems defeated, telling the absent interviewer, "it's all for naught. Nothing's ever gonna get better." Betty and Charles are also at odds, seemingly re-hashing an old argument during their individual segments. Betty says derisively "his solution would be just to throw everything away and not save what is valuable or sentimental or useful", whereas Charles uses a hard-headed kind of logic to determine the value of their possessions, proclaiming that "it's worth something, but it ain't worth going to jail." It is these differences in the attribution of potential-value which seem to cause divisions within the family, and often in the programme are shown to stymie relations of accountability. This presentation of the participant in opposition to the rest of the family encourages viewers to sympathize with the 'long-suffering' family, positioning the participant as selfish and irrational by resisting familial responsibility.

The expert then coaches the participant as they sort through their things in an attempt to clean up the property through discard. This may also involve reassurances of the expert that the participant is in charge of the process and that no classifications will be made without the participant's consent, leaving them the final decisions on divestment. Sometimes the expert will reassure the participant that they will not be forced to throw anything away—it is explained that for therapeutic purposes the hoarder must make such decisions on their own. This pattern is contravened in the single episode featuring a child hoarder. In this case, deception is encouraged, and possessions are taken away without the consent of the child. Relations of accountability are abandoned in favour of the direct application of power in order to provoke immediate change. This may be due to cultural beliefs that children are less rational and have not learned impulse control and so would not respond to reasoning-based treatment. However, in the cases dealing with adults, transparency and control are emphasized as crucial to the therapeutic process. As will be shown in the next two chapters, it is not uncommon for children to be included in relations of accountability through unequal power relations involving coercion, manipulation or deception.

The Teaching Phase. Just as the Assessment Phase included the apprehensions of the family, the Teaching Phase begins by spotlighting the anxiety of the participant. As the cleaning crew arrives with several garbage trucks, Betty, still denying that her hoarding is problematic, says that she is “already worried about how it’s going to be handled because two or three trucks would carry out everything I’ve got in the house. I’m going to dig my heels in right now and say that there better not be that much stuff going out of here.” A

text screen re-emphasizes the consequence that Betty's husband will not be allowed to live in the home unless it is cleaned, yet even so she continues to resist the process. Both Betty and Tara resist discarding while desiring storage-as-display, but in different ways. Betty regards storage-as-display as something that will happen at some undetermined time in the future when she has had enough of acquiring, whereas Tara sees storage-as-display as the solution to her overconsumption. Tara seems to welcome the cleanup help, but she refuses to make any decisions on what to throw away, seemingly convinced that she can organize items first and then cull them later. As Brenden pushes her to divest, Tara sorts through her possessions but avoids any divestment, saying "I can't do it right now ... my brain is not wired right now for that."

The Teaching Phase spotlights the efforts of the expert to encourage the participant to discard some of their goods. This normally involves the expert pushing the participant to rationalize their behaviour in an attempt to recognize and change habitual patterns. This questioning and probing may also encourage viewers to evaluate and correct their own behaviour by showing them examples of pathology. Complications may arise during this process, however. In some episodes things are thrown away, either deliberately or in error, without the participant's consent. When discovered, this always leads to a breakdown of the participant, shaking their faith in the therapeutic process through the breach of trust. Often, however this is framed as a reversal by the participant of instruction they have given to the cleanup crew. This further encourages viewers to see the participant as irrational, particularly since this is usually accompanied by shots of the participant rummaging hopelessly through a dumpster or garbage bag filled with bits of broken trash. A breakdown may happen for other reasons however, with the mental and

emotional strain simply becoming too much for the hoarder, or through their deliberate resistance. This may signal a setback in the process, or may be a precursor to a complete failure of the transformation and the participant's continued refusal to divest. Following a breakdown, family members will again individually state their anxiety and frustration with the participant. This may also be followed with a text screen reminder of the limited time and resources available for cleanup before the implementation of consequences. Tara's friend hopes for "a miracle", and Betty's daughter Michelle laments "my dad's life is at stake." However there are also episodes when participants both welcome and learn from the questioning and probing of the experts. While specific strategies are not often portrayed, the beginning of a successful transformation is presented as the recognition of pathological behaviours in the self or a member of the family. In *Hoarders* this is characterized as an irrational adherence to consumption patterns which grossly contravene the domestic consumption ethic, particularly through an inability to enact judicious disposal because of a flawed perception of potential-value.

The Reveal Phase. During the Reveal Phase the success or failure of the transformation is presented to the audience. Rarely in *Hoarders* do viewers witness a complete transformation and cleanup, but just as rarely, a complete failure; most often there is a partial reveal of a particular area of the home. This reveal is a combination of before-and-after shots of the 'cleaned-up' area, perhaps with a voiceover of the participant or the expert. Tara, with the help of Brenden and her friends, has cleared her living room; however, a text screen warns "the threat of eviction is looming yet Tara continues to resist the cleanup process." Brenden is more optimistic about Tara's progress, citing

“small victories” as the key to long-term success. Betty, however, continues to feel little responsibility for the damage her actions are causing the family. Dorothy tells Betty that her family has made a commitment to stop helping her deal with her scrounging habit, to which Betty callously replies, “if they choose not to come back because I’ve kept stuff, well that’s going to be their problem. I got along without you before I met you, gonna get along without you now.” This denial reveals Betty’s utter refusal to acknowledge or engage in relations of accountability, rendering them useless by withholding reciprocity. Betty subverts processes of governance, circumventing responsabilization through her complete abstention from familial relations of accountability and, perhaps more importantly, the morality—which includes the domestic consumption ethic—upon which they are based.

Each episode ends with text overlaid on shots of the made-over sections of the home, describing the efforts of the cleanup crew and their effect on the impending socio-legal consequences. Most often consequences are delayed or even reversed, especially if the participant has agreed to continue to work with organization or therapeutic professionals. The wording also often highlights the precariousness of the transformations. The end of Episode 3/1 reads: “Betty was offered follow-up care but has refused to work with a professional organizer or see a therapist. Betty still doesn’t think that she is a hoarder. Betty made enough progress to appease the court. Charles was allowed to return home a week later.” Episode 3/2 ends with “Tara refused an offer of mental health counselling, but is interested in working with a professional organizer. Her landlord has agreed not to evict if progress continues. Her garage remains packed with items transferred from the living room.” Since, as Weber (2009) pointed out, a

participant's "salvation" lies in their "surrender to experts" (pp. 4, 6), both Betty and Tara's refusal of medical help puts their transformative work in jeopardy.

2.2 Value, the Domestic Consumption Ethic and Family in *Hoarders*

As presented in *Hoarders*, hoarding tendencies are not necessarily representative of a conscious divergence from the domestic consumption ethic of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal. Both Tara and Betty articulate their desire for homes that utilize storage-as-display; however they fail to recognize how their actions on either end of the consumption cycle are preventing them from having the homes to which they aspire. Potential-value plays a large role in acquisition, but in *Hoarders* it is often exhausted, or at best suspended, by a lack of storage-as-display. Both Tara and Betty acquire with the intention of capitalizing on potential-value, yet are ultimately unable to do so. Tara plans to sell some of her collectibles on Ebay, and loves to buy gifts for friends. Thus a large part of her divestment process should include a recognition of this potential-value through gifting and selling rather than trashing. Yet Tara cannot follow through; her gifts never get delivered, and she neither owns a computer nor is she organized enough to be able to put multiple items up for auction. Thus rather than realizing their exchange-value through the judicious discard of gifting or selling, the potential-value of her possessions remains in a kind of limbo as they are boxed away to be dealt with on a future date.

Betty also acquires with potential-value in mind. Her description of herself as a "rescuer of things" implies that she sees potential-value in the objects that she brings home. However, even though she says that she buys things in order to use them, she is

never able to realize much of their potential-value. Her total lack of storage-as-display prevents this; the example of a kitchen pot which has through neglect become frozen in a bucket of water in her backyard belies her intention to exhaust the value of the item. Betty does however state that her things are “always there” while her family is not, echoing the suggestion of Robins (1994) that consumption can also act as a buffer against “discomfort and unpleasure” (p. 455). It may be that this is the value that Betty finds in her possessions.

Tara seems to be engaging in what is often a rational pursuit: attempting to increase the value of her possessions by increasing their number, which is perhaps why collecting is such a trap for her. The value of a collection is dependent upon its completeness thus the more items of a collection that one owns the higher its worth. Tara, however, has multiple collections, and seems to have difficulty in controlling her impulse to begin new ones. In addition, the proper storage, display and organization of collections is important to their value. Tara recognizes and bemoans her inability to display her collections, yet refuses to recognize that it is her un-restrained acquisition and resistance to judicious discarding that is, in part, inhibiting her performance of display. This, in turn frustrates her efforts to both grow and capitalize on the potential-value of her collectibles. It may be this frustration which then leads her to start new collections, in an effort to complete the performance of collecting according to the domestic consumption ethic.

The assignment of value to goods is very different between members of a family in *Hoarders*. These differences in the recognition of potential-value provoke strong feelings of anxiety about the possibility of change and the responsabilizing of the participant into relations of accountability. In one particularly agonizing scene, Dorothy

and Betty are outside attempting to clear parts of the snow-covered backyard, snarled with haphazard clumps of wayward items and divided by long strings of hanging clothing. Dorothy asks Betty about a vacuum cleaner which she has pulled from the jumble of goods at their feet. Betty replies that although she won't use it because she doesn't have rugs, she could clean and sell it at a yard sale, financially benefiting from its potential-value. Dorothy counters by asking "what's your history of repairing things and actually selling them at a yard sale?" and Betty is forced to admit that she has never done so. Dorothy pushes her point further, asking "what's more important, repairing this vacuum cleaner, maybe or maybe not, or having dinner and cooking for your family and having everybody over?" Betty visibly struggles to answer, since she knows the socially-acceptable answer is to spend time with family, yet her attachment to possessions is so strong that she cannot decide. Her daughter Krista steps in, begging her to choose family over things. And while Betty does throw away the vacuum cleaner, she confesses later to the camera that "[stuff is] always there and my family isn't", revealing her lack of confidence in relations of accountability, even after all the help her children have given her. Krista characterizes Betty's struggle as "stuff over relationships", emphasizing Betty's failure to reciprocate relations of accountability, which leads ultimately to the failure of the family itself, and the distancing of the adult children from their mother.

Conclusion

Potential-value, and its role in the domestic consumption ethic, is central to the narrative of *Hoarders*. Betty's enjoyment of scavenging seems to be partly rooted in her perceived ability to recover the potential-value of goods that others have divested. Betty

sees value in almost everything, even if it is broken or a duplicate of something she already owns, and whether or not she actually uses it. Tara seems to enjoy acquiring things in which other people would find value—she focuses on the potential-value that goods would have for others and cannot resist buying them as gifts. Yet the potential-value of these gifts remains un-realized since Tara never actually delivers them. These ‘deviant’ ways of interpreting and ascribing potential-value frustrate processes of divestment necessary for conformity with the domestic consumption ethic. Betty and Tara do not recognize the depletion of value which according to the dominant morality would prompt judicious discard. This also prohibits effective storage-as-display due to the excessive numbers of items which are brought into the living space. Thus an ability to judge potential-value also is part of the ability to control goods by moving them through the cycle of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal, which in turn is crucial to the growing of and capitalizing on potential-value.

The focus of *Hoarders* on the consequences to family structures emphasizes the cultural importance of relations of accountability and familial responsabilization. The failure of the family structure due to non-compliance with the domestic consumption ethic is a powerful message. Tara’s friends question her decisions and thought processes, engaging in one-way relations of accountability. At one point in the episode Tara is trying to decide what to do with a day-planner. She is drawn to the quotes from scripture at the bottom of each page, and suggests that she might cut out all the quotes and keep them while throwing away the book. Her friend points out that Tara already has all of the quotes—in her Bible. This interruption of the hoarding impulse is part of relations of

accountability, and of responsabilizing friends and family to care for and bolster up the weak link, so to speak, in order to create a stronger familial unit.

There are times however when there is a complete refusal to responsabilize, and for the good of the family a severance must be made. An absolute denial or inability to engage in and benefit from relations of accountability, even if one-way, may result in the participant being placed outside of the family unit altogether. In a climactic scene, Michelle confronts her mother Betty about a pact they had made to keep a particular part of the house clean. As they stand together in a cluttered, dusty room Michelle tells Betty:

We promised each other you would not f(censored) this room up. You wanna live in the filth and the (censored), have at it, have fun. Me and my kids aren't playing along anymore. This is what you choose, this is what you always choose, and I believe in my heart this is what you will continue to choose. So from now on I choose me. I have abandoned my children and my family for way too long to help you—so I choose me.

Torn between caring for her mother or for her children, Michelle chooses to engage in relations of accountability with those whom she knows will reciprocate, focussing on her own children rather than expending her energy on Betty. By placing Betty outside of her family structure, Michelle strengthens her family as a responsible unit rather than weakens it. As will be shown in the next two chapters, a strongly-responsibilized family is crucial to the successful adherence to the domestic consumption ethic.

3 Consumed as Preventative Strategy: Strengthening Family Relationships

In a scene from Episode 2 of *Consumed*, host Jill returns to the home of ‘clutter bug’ Debbie to challenge her with her shoe- and purse-buying habit. Jill displays all of Debbie’s shoes and bags in an empty room, stating that she “wanted to display the shoes and the bags to show the enormity, the just sheer amount of stuff that she had had hidden away.” Debbie’s 100 purses and 200 pairs of shoes are placed in the room in a stop-motion-style sequence where they appear one-by-one, lined up on the floor and hanging on the walls. The music is a quick-tempo techno which fades away as the family enters the room. All four members, mom Debbie and her three daughters, begin to giggle when they see the display. Debbie defends herself, saying “they’re all nice, though” to which Jill replies “I was not discussing the quality of the shoes; I’m talking about the quantity.” Clearly all of these items have value; however, the excessive number of accessories precludes, in Jill’s opinion, any true enjoyment of their value.

Later in the scene, despite Debbie’s arguments that she neither wants nor needs this many things and is able to get rid of them herself, Jill asks each of her three daughters to make the first judgements on the mass of accessories. Before Debbie is allowed to make any decisions, Jill instructs the daughters “pick two pairs of shoes each that you think your mom is not ever going to miss.” Still later in the scene when dealing with Debbie’s bags, Jill asks the girls “how many purses do you think your mother needs?” Her children dive in, picking over their mother’s things with the cold judgement of outsiders, when in fact they are her closest family.

What this scene shows is the importance of discarding to the maintenance of the domestic consumption ethic, as well as the entire family’s involvement in maintaining

this ethic of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal. In *Consumed*, the inefficient or improper management of goods within the home is corrected by expertise through a specific regimen of deprivation and divestment. This regimen, or “experiment”, requires the complicity of the whole family to bring about a cementing of responsabilizing attitudes. The basis of the show is that under the guidance of organizational expert Jill Pollack, a family agrees to live with nothing but basic possessions for one month. At the end of this period they must go to a warehouse to sift through and classify their stored things as “keep”, “toss” or “donate”. In the meantime Darren—a construction and renovation expert—re-configures their domestic space with innovative storage and organizational solutions. Storage-as-display plays a large role in *Consumed*, both in presentations of how the family home ought to be organized and in the teaching processes of the programme itself, as do related issues concerning the efficient use of spatial resources in the family home.

In this chapter I also argue that donation plays a crucial role in the divestment which is encouraged in *Consumed*. As mentioned above, the classificatory triad of *keep*, *toss* or *donate* is used in the programme as a reasoning tool. *Donate*, as a form of judicious discard, allows for a passing on of potential-value to others rather than the more wasteful *toss*. Yet how donation fits within the spectrum of consumption presents a difficulty. Often the exchange of goods is sorted into two separate economies of commodities or gifts, a dichotomy suggested by Marcel Mauss (2002). This binary however, is difficult to maintain, and according to Nurit Bird-David and Asaf Darr (2009) we should at the very least recognize that hybrids occur. James Rice (2007) maintains that donation should be one such exception, occupying a position somewhere

in-between commodity and gift (p. 7). Regardless, he points out that charity, and particularly donation, is often “framed in the discourse of gift” (Rice, 2007, p. 7). In *Consumed*, the gift-like qualities of donating allow participants a third option between *keep* and *toss*. Since giving away possessions allows participants to recognize any remaining potential-value, they are less likely to argue for keeping something. The knowledge that someone else will conceivably find an object useful is a powerful justification for passing it on.

In *Consumed* relations of accountability are successfully mobilized through the acquiescence of the ‘problem’ family member to familial surveillance and adherence to family power structures. As illustrated in the scene above, children are expected and encouraged to question the behaviours of their elders just as much as parents are presumed to monitor the activities of their children. To foster this kind of relationship, the notion of quality family time, particularly that of shared meals, is presented as critical to the functioning of relations of accountability. These structured periods of togetherness act as technologies of accountability, allowing for mutual surveillance through everyday habits of story-telling, questioning and justification which involve the entire family.

In this chapter I will present a description of the common narrative structure of *Consumed*. Similarly to the other programmes analyzed in this thesis, not all elements of the narrative will appear exactly in this order in every episode. However these elements are present in the majority of episodes and as such, all play a role in shaping the general narrative of the show itself. I will illustrate this general story arc with examples taken from individual episodes; in particular from my close readings of Episode 5 which features Joan, her husband Ron and their adult sons Stephen, Neil and Daniel, and

Episode 7 which involves Mary, her daughter Nicki, and Nicki's teenaged children Theresa and Anthony.

3.1 The Narrative of *Consumed*

Like *Hoarders*, each episode of *Consumed* begins with a preview composed of clips of emotional moments from the upcoming episode, interspersed with the measured narration of the show's expert, Jill. This introductory narration is almost exactly the same in every episode, following very closely these lines taken from Episode 5: "A family drowning in all their stuff/gets an opportunity to change their lives forever/but before they can have it all/they'll have to let go of everything". The implication here is that not only will the family have to forgo its possessions, but will also need to change its habitual interactions and problematic relations. This immediately sets up the participants as suffering from the impact of having so many goods, and thus in need of intervention due to their 'unhealthy' ways of interacting.

The Definition Phase. After this brief preview, the programme moves to the Definition Phase, where expert intervention is further justified through a more detailed presentation of the participants, their consumption habits, and their family relationships. This section begins with Jill's description of the family shape, for example framing Joan as a busy working mother of three adult boys with a semi-retired husband. This initial portrayal most often presents the female head of the household—always also a mother—first, giving the impression that either she is most responsible for the problem, or that she is most willing to transform, and often both. This framing also presents the mother both as

taking greater responsibility for the state of affairs as well as a lead role in effecting change. This initial gendered division of responsibility is not surprising since our cultural stories often place the domestic arena under the control of the mother. However, as will be shown later, the entire family will be responsabilized into conforming to the domestic consumption ethic through relations of accountability.

As in *Hoarders*, through clips taken from individual interviews, family members describe the process of clutter buildup and the problems which it has caused. Again, this testimony-style commentary is taken from separate, individual responses to an absent interviewer's questioning in order to elaborate and explain the scenes of interaction. Often, these interviews are portrayed as a blame-game, and the individual questioning may even encourage family members to place fault on someone else. Certainly the recording of separate interviews, and the removal of the questions asked, allow producers to construct a narrative of family dis-harmony and the shirking of relations of accountability.

The reasons given for living with clutter are varied; however two themes are prominent. In seven episodes there is a catalyst which leads to a divergence from the domestic consumption ethic. This catalyst, such as an injury, a period of mental illness, or the death of a grand/parent, serves to remove some blame from the participants, since it is through an uncontrollable circumstance that their ability to divest is compromised. In Episode 7, for example, following the recent death of her mother Mary has taken on all of her mother's possessions in addition to her own. In some episodes there is also oblique reference made to the possibility that these are learned behaviours. In three episodes Jill talks about "bad habits" as the cause of clutter, implying that such habits can be learned.

In Episode 5, Joan says that her husband and sons “have to learn to clean up after themselves”; and in Episode 7 Jill’s plan is to interrupt the “family tradition of passing things down.” Through this connection of behaviour to socialization, and particularly the primacy of family as the socializing agent for consumption behaviours, *Consumed* highlights the socially-constructed nature of the domestic consumption ethic. This also reinforces the notion that transformation is always possible, merely needing the right impetus. This phase builds up the need for intervention, often articulated by a family member as a plea for help and capitulation to expertise, setting up Jill’s arrival and cementing her authority.

The Assessment Phase. To begin the Assessment Phase, Jill introduces herself and outlines her plan to transform the family. The introduction is always very similar to this one from Episode 7: as Jill walks toward the house purposefully, yet relaxed, she says in voiceover, “My name is Jill Pollack. My job is to de-clutter people’s lives. What’s my method? Shock therapy. I make families live with next-to-nothing for thirty days. And when it’s all over they’ll gain a whole new perspective on how little they really need.”

Jill inspects the family home, pointing out ‘improper’ or inefficient storage habits and asking participants to rationalize the specific ways in which they interact with their possessions. In Episode 5, Jill asks each family member individually to show her their living space and explain their behaviour. Daniel keeps important things safely under his bed and Neil leaves his sports equipment in another room so that his bedroom won’t smell. Joan has kept objects from her sons’ childhoods, and when Jill questions “why are you keeping this?” Joan responds, confused, “well, ‘cuz it’s memorabilia, isn’t it?”

Throughout this process viewers are shown shots of cluttered floors, desks and closets to highlight short scenes of interaction between Jill and the participants. These brief, multiple close shots of clutter undermine attempts by the family to rationalize their behaviour, providing ‘evidence’ of their transgressions. In Episode 7, the entire family follows Jill from room to room, and as she asks for explanations they talk over each other and giggle. Close-ups of particular piles of clutter punctuate their explanations, accompanied by an ominous-comic soundtrack of plucked violin strings. Potential-value is called into question when Jill points out that the family cannot easily get to their emergency preparedness kit. Jill focuses her attention on Mary’s multiple sets of china, which producers underline with multiple close shots of cabinets filled with dishes. While Mary has organized her collection neatly in buffet cases, viewers are encouraged to judge this excessive amount of storage-as-display as taking up too much space in the home. Standing beside a bank of storage cabinets, Jill exclaims “this is like, I feel like I should get married and pick my pattern!” emphasizing that some mimicry of retail is acceptable, but too much overwhelms and confuses whoever inhabits the space.

These problematic uses of the domestic space are also emphasized in a recurring tension between private and public. In *Consumed* the ideal family inhabits a shared space; however there is also a recognition that certain spaces within the home should be set aside as private, individual areas. Though not always connected, in Episodes 5 and 7 this need for privacy is directly tied to adulthood. Stephen, Neil and Daniel are considered adults, and as such the Darren and Jill agree that they should have their own, separate spaces. Nicki, on the other hand, is presented as emotionally stunted by her role as mediator between her mother and her children. Nicki’s room, while clean, is furnished

with a single-size, obviously chaste bed decorated with stuffed animals. Jill says, with a pitying expression “Nicki’s room is like a child’s room. It’s pretty sad in there.” Often at this point in the narrative Jill indulges in diagnosing the family through a kind of pseudo-psychology, although she has no clinical training. In Episode 7 Jill classifies Anthony, who is autistic, as more able than his family thinks he is and encourages him to take on more responsibility for himself. Later, when Anthony fails to complete a task, Jill barely holds her frustration in check. Rather than an admission of Jill’s possible over-estimation of his abilities, Anthony is presented as willful and even lazy, requiring a higher degree of expert intervention. It is suggested that Anthony is selfishly using more than his share of the family resources, since Jill is shown coaching him through his tasks step-by-step, for the duration denying the rest of the family the benefit of her advice.

Jill then explains to the family the rules of the thirty-day challenge, her “shock therapy” method. The mental health connotations of this term are powerful: electro-shock therapy was once a widely-used psychiatric treatment. In addition, the idea of quitting overconsumption ‘cold turkey’ is evocative of a strategy to overcome addiction. Thus the use of this term implies that participants have been consuming in irrational, even harmful ways. These pathological behaviours then merit drastic measures for intervention, yet not extreme enough to involve medical or state authorities. Thus Jill’s use of “shock therapy” as a colloquialism lends a scientific air to her method, yet falls short of any kind of ‘official’ mediation.

In a stripping of their identities and agency, for a period of thirty days family members will have to live only with what Jill has determined are their most necessary possessions. Certainly this would fall under Ouellette and Hay’s (2008) description of

makeover interventions as “authoritarian governing techniques” (p. 65). She presents them with a set of objects, of which they will each be allowed one: one towel, one plate, one mug, one fork, one knife, and so on. Each family member will also only be allowed to pack a single, small suitcase with clothing and shoes for the duration. However, there is one more rule which Jill then imposes: only ten “non-essential” items are allowed for the entire family. The family often reacts with shock and incredulity at this condition, and often struggle to negotiate which items will be kept. It becomes clear that not everyone is equally enthusiastic about the process, and younger children may become upset when they don’t understand why their toys are being taken away. As was pointed out in the previous chapter children, particularly the very young, may not have been given a choice in whether or not to participate. The ethics of this imposition of power by parents onto their children, coercing them into relations of accountability, goes unremarked and unquestioned in *Consumed*.

Jill considers this process “telling”, in that the items which a family picks can reveal things about its dynamic. Thus Jill reserves for herself veto power, and most often uses it to forbid entertainment technologies. Screen time, according to Jill, takes away from quality family togetherness. Interestingly, she does not place the same restrictions on the solitary pursuit of reading books, nor does she consider the possibilities of families watching television or playing video games as quality time spent together.

The camera then follows Darren and Jill as they tour the home without the input of the family and point out problem areas which need to be altered to make it more functional and efficient. The attention which the experts draw to specific issues invites the viewer to pass particular judgements on the family, but also encourages viewers to

perform similar inspections in their own homes to identify and improve possible ‘problem’ areas. This efficiency often enables storage-as-display through clever configurations of the existing spaces or the construction of multi-functional furnishings. The inefficient, even problematic use of space and furnishings is seen clearly in Episode 7 when Darren proclaims that “they had every room filled to the point where it completely lost its functionality.” Divesting some of the multiple dressers, side tables and cabinets is, in this episode, presented as the solution to inefficient storage-as-display. In other words, too much storage can be just as detrimental to the domestic consumption ethic as not enough.

Professional movers arrive to help the family pack their possessions for storage in a warehouse for the duration of the 30 days of austerity. A montage of wrapping items, placing them in boxes, taping them up and loading the truck is accompanied by up-beat music composed of acoustic guitar and minimalist percussion. At this point, a family member may rebel or fall back into familiar patterns requiring Jill’s intervention to bring them back on board. For example, the packing montage is interrupted in Episode 5 when the camera finds Ron reclining in an easy chair watching television; Jill then cajoles him into tackling a specific project. In Episode 7, autistic Anthony shuts down in reaction to the chaos in the house, prompting Jill to set him up with tasks in the relative peace of his own room.

These two examples show the responsabilizing function of *Consumed*. Here it can be seen that not only is the programme about molding families into adherence to the domestic consumption ethic, but underlying that is also a concern with relations of accountability. By intervening with divergent family members Jill shows that all

members of a family can and should be responsabilized so long as they are approached in the right ways, according to their abilities. Thus no member of the family is exempt from relations of accountability. This treatment of the family as a single unit is in opposition to the presentation of family in *Hoarders*, where family members express skepticism about the abilities of the hoarder to transform, or fail altogether to bring the hoarder back in line with relations of accountability. Thus while *Hoarders* presents ideas about how families do not work, *Consumed* works to maintain the cultural ideal of the family as a cohesive unit.

The Teaching Phase. At this point the narrative switches gears, showing the individual reactions of family members to their newly-emptied home. The camera may show participants dancing around their empty spaces, or playing games on a floor cleared of furniture, or quietly enjoying a book on the couch. Often participants report feeling less stress and sleeping better. With the home emptied of clutter Jill may lead the family in giving it a thorough cleaning; in Episode 5 she supervises sons Stephen, Neil and Daniel as they clean while also reinforcing the cultural importance of maintaining a hygienic home. In Episode 7 Theresa cleans her emptied room—which was the messiest in the house—and Anthony is tasked with posting advertisements online to sell some of their unwanted yet still valuable possessions. In Episode 5 Jill also encourages the family to take advantage of the change in their space to enjoy more family meals. As in other episodes, Jill demonstrates her belief that shared mealtimes are crucial for the functioning of a family, stating that “this is an amazing opportunity for you guys to sit down together, have meals together, maybe, you know, we can start to communicate in ways that maybe

you haven't communicated [dramatic pause] in years." Meals are also critical to the formation of a home, as according to Douglas (1991), "the time devoted to the common meal is a conclave, used for coordinating other arrangements, negotiating exemptions, canvassing for privileges, diffusing information about the outside world, agreeing for strategies for dealing with it and making shared evaluations" (p. 302). Mealtimes also enable relations of accountability by acting as moments for testimony and justification, times when family members can question, evaluate and judge each other. Additionally, they teach and perpetuate these relations through observation and socialization, and normalize them through the mundane repetition of shared suppers.

Jill returns to the home several days later to confront the family with a particular kind of clutter such as laundry or paperwork in order to "purge" some of it by classifying things as donate, toss or keep. This is always very much a process of negotiation between the participants and Jill, and between individual family members. Jill's role here is to coach participants into discarding as much as possible by asking them to rationalize everything they want to keep—simultaneously opening them up to relations of accountability as family members can approve, question, or ridicule their justifications. In Episode 5, brothers Stephen and Daniel argue about a scarecrow decoration that Daniel wants to keep; Stephen argues that it has sat unused, gathering dust, in the hallway for over two years. Stephen signals his own adherence to the domestic consumption ethic here as he suggests that Daniel does not care enough about the item to maintain its value through storage-as-display. As Jill pushes Daniel to explain his motivation for keeping it, the rest of the family and Jill ridicule his answers. Daniel counters with "just because you

can't justify everything doesn't mean you toss it out!" to which Jill responds "Ya, it actually does."

This exchange also represents a clash of ideas about acceptability in our relationships with possessions and how our homes are organized. And indeed, Jill does sometimes relent, particularly with items that have clear sentimental meaning. In Episode 7 Mary is asked, with the help of her family, to sort through the boxes of her recently-deceased mother's things which have been stored in their home. Mary refuses to give up her mother's china—adding yet another set to a collection which was already judged to be taking over the house. Even though Mary says that she will use it, its potential-value is still in question as Jill remarks "there's just one problem with keeping all this crystal and china: where are we gonna put it?" If the china is not displayed, through use or storage, its potential-value remains in limbo, yet the sheer numbers of dishes in Mary's keeping—seven full sets—must necessarily crowd out the display of other goods.

Jill returns again, close to the end of the thirty days to engage the family in one last teaching moment in the home. This may involve some fun teamwork such as hosting a party, may also involve a second purge of specific clutter, or an intervention with a resistant family member. In Episode 5, brothers Stephen, Neil and Daniel are asked to build a wardrobe for their parent's bedroom—a furnishing representative of failed storage-as-display since it had sat in the hallway in boxes for months after its purchase. In Episode 7 Mary teaches her grandchildren some "life skills" by cooking a meal with Theresa and supervising Anthony as he changes a light switch. Taking into consideration Theresa's professed love of cooking and Anthony's probable preference for short,

structured tasks this seems to be an example of suiting the task to the abilities of the individual in order to strengthen relations of accountability.

Finally, in this phase individual participants speak directly to the camera about their anxieties about facing the warehouse. They may have trepidation for themselves, or for another family member. Relations of accountability are beginning to take root; however the family is not yet completely responsabilized. The final parts of the narrative will test and then showcase a family which is now a single responsabilized unit rather than a group of individuals.

The Reveal Phase. I have included several steps leading up to the actual reveal, choosing to begin the Reveal Phase at the point which the family begins the warehouse purge. This marks a significant change in the narrative—visually, in location and as a plot shift—as the family leaves the home and faces their final trial, so to speak, to see if their experiences during the preceding thirty days have changed their outlook regarding possessions. First, the extent of the objects which were stored in their home is revealed to the family in the warehouse, where certain items have been unpacked and arranged in storage-as-display while the majority remains in boxes. The camera cuts to individual items and pans over colourful displays of stacked books, knick-knacks arranged in front of framed photos, or clothing hung up on rolling racks. Stuffed animals may be seated together as a group, and board games will be stacked and leaning as if they were a store display. This entire arrangement will be whimsically decorated with the family’s Christmas lights, feather boas or colourful kites. This is done deliberately to highlight the

multiplicity and excess of the family's possessions, and indeed as Jill exclaims "welcome back to your stuff", the participants are shown to be amazed at the amount of goods.

The separation of goods is critical in the warehouse scenes. Goods are not presented as amorphous boxes of random possessions, but are set up for the family to encounter in a particular way, as storage-as-display. If the objects were presented as random piles, their potential-value would be diminished because they would no longer be separate (Douglas, 1966) but would be mixed, blending with and contaminating each other (Lucas, 2002, p. 8). Thus the potential-value of the family's possessions also remains intact because of this presentation as storage-as-display. Design principles regarding colour, proximity and repetition are used to display goods artfully and even playfully, but always separately. As a participant comments in Episode 6 "it looks so nice, like a beautiful store"! This is a transformation of its own, removing the items from the unruly storage of the home and re-positioning them in the more abstract setting of the warehouse. Further, although this display is similar to what one would encounter in a store, usually a shopper has need of only *one* item from the arrangement, not all. For the family, the warehouse is both a careful confrontation of their relationship with their possessions, as well as a highlighting of the extreme and multiplicitous nature of their 'problem'.

Here participants begin the "final purge" with a warm-up "speed purge" lasting 15 minutes. During the speed purge Jill encourages swift decisions on whether to donate, toss or keep items in preparation for a full day of classification. Since families have the limited timeframe of a single day in order to go through all of their boxes, Jill coaches them to keep on track. It is clear at this stage that very little clutter has *no* value. The

warehouse purge is designed so that most objects have some value through the keep, toss, or donate classification system. Donation here acts as a rationalization technique, allowing Jill to coach participants into divesting. For example, a participant may want to keep an item, particularly one on which they had spent money and judged as still holding potential-value. The possibility of donation, however, allows for a third kind of justification of divestment. As Jill would likely say, if the only reason you want to keep it is because you can't bear to throw it out, then donate it to someone else.

Rice (2007) disputes that this kind of divestment is actually a gift in the way that Mauss intended. Rather, he considers this kind of divestment more of household "waste management" rather than a considered gift (Rice, 2007, p. 17). However, he also points out donations "do not fit comfortably within the category of gift ... yet are not entirely devoid of [Mauss's] obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate" (Rice, 2007, p. 17). In the classification processes of *Consumed* however, it does seem as if participants receive something from designating their possessions as worthy of donation. It could be that the very anonymity of the household 'waste management' style of donation is what allows participants to recognize the potential-value still residing in their goods. Merely throwing goods in the trash means that any residual or potential value would be wasted; however donation, particularly anonymous donation, leaves open the possibility that someone else can still reap the potential-value of the items. Thus the participant does not feel guilty for acquiring and possessing the goods in the first place. Anonymity also distances the participant from the possibility that no-one will appreciate the item in the same way, or may even completely reject it.

In *Consumed* viewers are also presented with an idea about organization that emphasizes the importance of a visual inventory; an idea that one needs to be able to see everything to know what one owns. If out of sight is out of mind, then keeping too many items means they cannot be properly seen, and thus cannot be enjoyed or used, placing their potential-value in abeyance. Thus the amount of space and its functionality are also critical to the execution of storage-as-display. One purpose of the purge then is to reduce the amount of goods to be level with the capabilities of the domestic space.

This is illustrated in the scene immediately before the reveal of Episode 5, where Jill and Darren are shown putting the final touches on the newly-organized home. Jill describes the resulting storage-as-display as an uncovering of the latent potential-value of the family's things, saying, "I've gone back into the house and used their own things to make the home really shine. Beautiful family objects have the freedom to breathe, and sacred space has been created where family memories can find a home." The family then tours the home, marvelling at the spatial and organizational solutions the experts have implemented. The family members then reaffirm their commitment to staying clutter-free, saying that the new configurations make them want to stay organized. Further, this transformation from house to home is not only enacted in its conformity with the domestic consumption ethic, but also in the harmonious relationships of the family who dwell within it.

There is always the possibility for a failed transformation, however. In Episode 7 Mary resists divestment, and while she dutifully sorts through her things she ends up keeping most of them. Jill is disappointed, remarking in an aside that "she thinks everyone should get rid of everything else but she should keep her stuff." During their

time at the warehouse the family tries to gently encourage Mary to get rid of more, and Jill intervenes at one point to remind them, as a family, of the opportunity they have to divest without singling Mary out. Mary's refusal to engage in relations of accountability leaves the other members of the family feeling frustrated and disappointed.

As in the few other episodes which feature a failed transformation, Jill and Darren dress the home *as if* the family had met their discarding goals. Jill states that "today Darren and I are going to show Mary how beautiful her home can be; I'm hoping it will inspire a change of heart." After the tour, Jill shows Mary the garage full of boxes—things which have not been included in the new domestic configuration. Faced with the choice between the new home and the old, Mary does indeed reconsider her habits, vowing to continue the process of divestment.

Each episode wraps up with several still images of the family, sub-titled with text describing the continued success of their transformation three months later.

3.2 Storage-as-display and Relations of Accountability in *Consumed*

In *Consumed*, acquisition which exceeds the capabilities of the domestic space and a resistance to divesting creates a problem with storage-as-display. Unlike *Hoarders* however the lack of storage-as-display does not necessarily degrade the potential-value of goods. The pressure by Jill to discard items which have retained some potential-value may seem irrational to some participants, possibly complicating the transformation process. Mary, for example has a large number of highly-specialized kitchen tools, such as a cherry-pitter. When Jill presses her to get rid of them, Mary protests that she actually does use them—there is a cherry tree in their backyard. It seems, however that Mary can

rationalize the potential-value of almost anything, frustrating any attempts to convince her to divest.

For most participants the process is more successful. The show's classificatory triad—keep, trash, and donate—places the focus of the show on judicious discarding, with donation allowing participants to recognize the potential-value of goods without retaining them and compromising storage-as-display. Donation does not allow for any recognition of sign-value, however. Memorabilia, as in Episode 5, if there is no room for it in the home must be trashed, since it has value only for the family. Storage-as-display plays a large role in the presentation of goods. The home assessment, the warehouse encounter and the home makeover itself all focus on this stage of the domestic consumption ethic. This contributes to the idea of the importance of a visual inventory in both the determination of potential-value and the effecting of storage-as-display. Storage-as-display is also used to sell the value of discarding to resistant participants through the presentation of a possible made-over home.

The use of the word *purge* in the programme during structured periods of divestment such as the warehouse scenes is much more evocative than a term such as *cull* or *eliminate*. Similarly to the irrational behaviours of mental illness or addiction which “shock therapy” conjured, *purge* also implies extreme measures to counter hedonistic, immoderate behaviour. The opposite of *purge* is *binge*, which implies that the family has gone over-the-top in accumulating goods in the first place. On the surface, *Consumed* has little to do with restrained acquisition; however the use of *purge* obliquely references this part of the domestic consumption ethic, working to complete the cycle. The cyclical nature of the domestic consumption ethic is reinforced during the warehouse scenes

through the manner in which families are encouraged to divest. Families re-encounter their possessions as storage-as-display in the warehouse. This retail-invoking environment encourages a particular kind of divestment which is enacted through re-acquisition. Like shopping in a store, family members are asked to select, from their entire collection of possessions, those items which they would like to bring back into their home. While the option to rebel against the structure of the programme and bring everything back into the home is always there, in all cases participants submit to social pressure and choose only a portion of their stored goods. Thus re-acquisition serves simultaneously as a model of both judicious divestment and restrained acquisition.

Consumed also actively works to responsabilize entire families into adhering to the domestic consumption ethic of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display and judicious disposal. It does this through mobilizing relations of accountability, which includes tailoring responsibility to individual capacities and preferences. The structure of the purges as processes which involve the whole family ensures that the negotiations surrounding the classification of clutter occur through relations of accountability. These relations are also mobilized through the teaching of new behaviours to replace the old, ‘bad’ habits. Through teaching all members of a family to contribute to the running of a household, such as the brothers and husband in Episode 5 and the children in Episode 7, they are responsabilized into a cohesive family unit. Finally, the emphasis on ‘quality’ family time as time spent interacting also encourages strong relations of accountability. Time spent together, in particular through scheduled daily meals presents the opportunity to observe and be observed—the very heart of responsabilizing relationships.

Conclusion

Consumed tells stories about what we should consider acceptable consumption practices, with a focus on storage-as-display and its role in determining the potential-value of goods. However a second, important theme in this program surrounds family, responsibility and relations of accountability. While too many possessions interfere with the proper functioning of the domestic consumption ethic, clutter also contributes to the inefficient use of space and creates tensions between private and shared. This also highlights the role of space in relations of accountability, allowing for familial surveillance and questioning during interactions in shared spaces.

Mealtimes have a particular significance in *Consumed*. Sharing a common meal is an important technology of accountability as it offers a daily opportunity to surveil and be surveilled. While their functions are not specifically pointed out as technologies of accountability, mealtimes are held up as somehow critical to the health of familial relationships. Significantly, family meals are part of a household routine; they are communal, bounded and repeated. Their habitual performance means that familial interactions are regulated, to a degree, while their relatively brief, delimited nature means that they are easy to engage in. Also important is their micro-effecting of the domestic consumption ethic: the restrained acquisition of ingredients, the presentation of the meal and family at table, and the process of ingesting (similarly to divesting) food into bodies. It is the interaction which takes place during these times which is most important, however. In Episode 5, Jill mourns the absence of the communal meal, saying “all this separate eating is really an example of how they’re all living separate lives; this stuff has created walls, and they’re just drifting more and more apart.” In Episode 7, Jill is shocked

that Mary demands silence in order to watch television news rather than converse with her family during supper. The lesson here is that the absence of such opportunities for interactive surveillance degrades relations of accountability, fracturing the unity of the family.

While billed as a specialist in organizing, Jill often acts more like a morality expert in the programme. This is evidenced by her focus on family togetherness through shared meals and her consistent prohibition on screens during the 30-day challenge. Jill's insistence that families forgo "technology" is based in her opinion that television viewing, computer use and gaming are solitary pursuits which impede quality family time. This is reminiscent of the effects model of television, critiqued in the opening chapter as the misplaced tendency to blame television for social ills.

Jill's judgements on whether or not a behaviour or practice fits within the domestic consumption ethic is a key focus in each episode. Her use of coercive, even bullying tactics such as ridicule, to convince participants to discard treasured items browbeats them into conformity. In Episode 5, Jill tells the family to "donate anything that's not garbage." The categories of keep, donate and trash ensure that nothing is classified as ambiguous; further two of the three categories are discard. However, discard is not always as simple as throwing something away. As the next chapter will show, even conformity with the domestic consumption ethic is not always straightforward.

4 *Extreme Couponing* as Problem-solving: Family as United Front

Episode 11 of *Extreme Couponing* begins with the narrator proclaiming “American food prices are rising faster than the general inflation rate, making milk more expensive than gas”, while Joni and her family put together a care package from the shelves of food and toiletries that line the walls of her garage. The scene shifts to an interior shot, and as the camera pans around the extremely-well-stocked walls of her pantry, Joni points out “pasta free, rice free, and our favorite candy, totally free.” The camera comes to rest on Joni herself, a proud smile lighting her face.

Cut to a grocery store scene, and Joni, her husband and daughter strut through the aisles with shopping carts full to the brim. They are filmed in slow motion, arranged in a wedge like a team of superheroes about to take on a challenge. Joni smugly says in voiceover, “when I go shopping the girls at the register already know ‘there’s the crazy lady.’ But it’s exciting ‘cuz you walk out with three cartloads of stuff and you got it totally free.”

The scene returns to Joni’s home, and the camera cuts, closes in and pans through room after room of racks and shelves holding multiple grocery items. The narrator explains “going coupon-crazy has had its perks for Joni as it allowed her to amass an estimated \$20,000 stockpile that feeds her family of nine and their friends.” Indeed, we learn from Joni that her son has recently moved out, and routinely returns to ‘shop’ from her stockpile. The camera then focuses on Joni as she counts and arranges the items that she has stored. She says of the stockpile, “because I am such a perfectionist, it has to be organized, lined up perfectly. It’s very annoying to me if I walk in the pantry and

somebody's moved something"! As the camera cuts to her she shrugs, wearing a sheepish grin.

Joni, however, is not acquiring all of these goods solely for her own family. Here viewers are shown more images of the stockpile—the camera cuts and closes in, draws away and pans, always moving to present a frenzy of colour and excess. The narrator describes how “over the last three years, Joni’s home stockpile has evolved into a community food bank, because she’s donated over \$100,000 worth of food since her couponing began.” Joni, seated in front of her stockpile, explains her motivation for giving, saying, “it feels good to be able to give back to people, and at one point in my life I was in the same boat where I needed help so I understand what it’s like.” Visibly emotional, she goes on: “it was a very scary moment, because as a parent you’re supposed to provide for your kids.” Overcome, the scene ends with Joni turned away from the camera, wiping tears from her eyes.

While *Hoarders* and *Consumed* focus on the problems that overconsumption can cause with the domestic consumption ethic, *Extreme Couponing* showcases its successful implementation through rigid adherence to storage-as-display and judicious divestment. Hyper-acquisition is the name of the game in this programme; interestingly this enthusiastically over-the-top procurement is not presented as pathological. Rather than framing un-restrained acquisition as socially inappropriate, *Extreme Couponing* suggests that the participants are savvy consumers who excel at “bein’ smart and savin’ money” (Grandmother, Episode 9). These driven, even obsessive, shoppers are followed and interviewed by producers as they prepare for and execute large grocery shopping trips which cost them next to nothing thanks to coupons. The programme also focuses on the

size of the “stockpile” of goods stored and displayed in the family home. Extreme versions of the kitchen pantry, these stockpiles are composed of multiple cans and packages of both staples and treats arranged in a manner similar to the grocery store.

Donation and the gift economy also play a role in *Extreme Couponing*, albeit in a slightly different way than in *Consumed*. One of the ways in which participants in this programme defend their un-restrained acquisition is by donating part of their haul—and their effort in acquiring it—to charity. Mauss’s (2002) three aspects of the gift—to give, to receive, and to reciprocate—are here important to *Extreme Couponing*. As illustrated in the first paragraphs of this chapter, some participants even deliberately shop for goods to donate to charity. Joni, for example chooses to ‘pay it forward’, passing on her abundance to other, less fortunate, families in recognition of the aid which she received at a critical time in her life.

Each episode of *Extreme Couponing* focuses on an individual couponer; however families do play a prominent role. During the course of the season it becomes clear that the perspectives of other family members are minimized, if not entirely absent. Beyond obscuring the power relationships at work, the implication is that all members support couponing as a way of life. The participant then acts as spokesperson for a seemingly strongly-responsibilized family unit, and the workings of relations of accountability remain hidden behind this responsabilized façade.

On the surface, *Extreme Couponing* may not seem to conform to the makeover structure; however I will show that, while re-configured, it shares enough plot points to merit its inclusion in this analysis. The narrative structure of the show is very consistent; indeed so consistent that recurring themes are more often enacted by the individual

participants rather than the narrative structure itself. Each episode tells the stories of two couponers, but unlike *Hoarders* they are shown one after the other rather than concurrently. Since there are two separate plot trajectories in a single half-hour episode the narrative proceeds at a very fast pace, yet still manages to convey multiple responsabilizing stories and strategies. Episode 9, featuring Amber and Amanda, was selected for a close reading.

4.1 The Narrative of *Extreme Couponing*

The introductory narration in *Extreme Couponing* is different in each episode. There are some common elements however, such as a focus on the intensity and excess of couponing practices and a brief introduction of the two participants. It also always has a playful, over-the-top feel, which often includes word play and prohibits the programme, and its viewers, from taking itself too seriously. The introduction is always accompanied by anxious or emotional clips from the upcoming episode as well as the intense, suspense-inducing music of strident violins and clashing cymbals. Viewers are not invited to feel sorry or anxious for participants, but rather are encouraged to enjoy this spectacle of excess as a story of success. This text from Episode 9 is illustrative of the ballyhoo-like introduction:

Get ready to meet two extreme couponers whose lust for discounts knows no limits/A newbie to the couponing scene with a stockpile so big it has its own frozen food section/And a legendary bargain hunter who's back for another extreme couponing rush/They're hitting the markets to bring in their biggest hauls yet/And nothing is going to stand in their way. Nerves are on edge and tempers are flaring/This is Extreme Couponing!

The Definition Phase. After this general preface the first participant is introduced through a combination of their own words and those of the narrator. As illustrated in the introduction to this chapter, this back-and forth is punctuated with shots of the stockpile. Similarly to both *Hoarders* and *Consumed*, participants have taken part in solitary interviews with producers, which are then edited and used to construct a particular storyline. This initial phase of the narrative is always conducted in a domestic setting: either in front of, or interacting with, the stockpile in the home, or during a shopping trip intended for the home. Since the processes of acquiring for the home, storing, and divesting in the home are so intertwined in *Extreme Couponing*, the grocery store itself could be seen as an extension of the home, more so than other separate, public areas such as a gym or school. As I will elaborate later in this chapter, the organization of the stockpile is very similar to the arrangement of goods in the grocery store. Thus, with the camera work of the programme this becomes not only a conceptual blurring but also a visual blurring. In addition, the elaborate knowledge of, and concern with, retail procedures shown by participants when they are preparing, in the home, for a shopping trip further clouds the division between home and store.

The narrator's introduction often describes the participant in relation to family, as in Episode 9 when Amber is characterized as a "mother of four." This is always supported by a shot of the couponer standing proudly outside of his or her house accompanied by a graphic of their name, age, location and occupation. This is a brief image, barely enough time to read the graphic, which seems to act as a summary of the introduction rather than a primary source of information itself. Indeed, the inclusion of age, location and occupation may serve little purpose beyond promoting the idea that

couponing is a widely-distributed practice, since they are rarely referred to in the body of the episode.

The participant then explains his or her shopping philosophy while seated in front of the stockpile of household goods which he or she has accumulated through using coupons. While some describe it as a way of life, others highlight their refusal to pay full price as much as possible. Most often participants describe the pride or pleasure received from their success at couponing. Amber says that when she thinks about couponing “I get so excited and just happy and tingly inside.” However several of the couponers featured liken their experiences to addictive behaviours, feeling a “thrill” or “rush” when they are able to significantly lower their shopping bills. Amanda even directly references drug abuse to describe her satisfaction, saying that “anytime that I can land a really great deal feels like I’m on crack or that I’ve just done a bunch of crystal meth.” This analogy seems a touch heavy-handed, since it is doubtful if Amanda has actually ever experienced a crack or meth high to be able to compare. This trope, however does acknowledge the possibility that couponing behaviours could be pathological. The uneven presentation of goods for free contrasted with addictive behaviours encourages a lingering doubt surrounding the acceptability of extreme couponing as consumer behaviour, ‘allowing’ viewers to pathologize couponers and their practices or not.

This rush, associated with the un-restrained acquisition of incredible amounts of items, for free, occurs at the conceptual beginning of the domestic consumption ethic. The initial focus of each episode however is placed upon storage-as-display. The excessive amounts of stockpiled goods gleaned from extreme couponing are impressive examples of domestic storage. As referred to in Chapter 2, Douglas (1991) has, in part,

defined a home by its anticipatory functions. In a description of home-based storage she states “storage implies a capacity to plan, to allocate materials between now and future, [and] to anticipate needs” (1991, p. 295). Unlike *Consumed*, where initially the way things were stored was detrimental to planning—such as the buried emergency kit in Mary’s house—in *Extreme Couponing* families have seemingly planned for everything. While this anticipation is evident in the contents, organization and care of the stockpiles themselves, as I will show later there is also a massive amount of preparation and attention to detail involved in meal-planning and shopping. This notion of planning goes hand-in-hand with an attention to the potential-value of goods. In order to effectively anticipate, one must know what is already available in the household stores. Knowing what is stored in the home allows family meals to be planned, and effective storage-as-display minimizes waste and maximizes potential-value through a visual inventory. Storing like items together is essential to this inventory, allowing a quick glance to determine how many of a particular item is on hand. If items were jumbled together on shelves or in bins, it would be more difficult to determine, for example, how many boxes of pasta were available. Thus the visual efficiency of storage-as-display also translates into a maximization of value.

The stockpile is not only visually represented but is also described by the participant, with the narrator highlighting details such as its total dollar value, which usually runs to the tens of thousands. The viewer is not allowed to inspect the stockpile at their leisure, however. The camera is constantly moving, either panning across the room, closing in or drawing out of a shot. This highlights the diverse and multitudinous nature of the stockpile while also obscuring its actual size. The stockpile is never shown in its

entirety; indeed even the edges of it, where the shelves start and stop are not shown, encouraging viewers to artificially inflate its size in their imaginations. This notion of multiplicity and excess is often reinforced through the narrator tabulating a partial list of the number of items— such as Amber’s 75 bottles of soda, 200 packages of noodles, 280 sticks of deodorant, and 300 boxes of fabric softener—or accenting the time it would take to use them up. Amanda’s grandmother, upon seeing her stockpile declares “I won’t have to buy toilet paper for the rest of my life!”

One key to taming and rationalizing this excessive acquisition and storage is through cleanliness and attention to the life-cycles of products. Participants care for their stockpiles in the same ways they care for other areas of their homes, by dusting and wiping, taking inventory and re-arranging. Lucas (2002) points out that the twentieth century’s focus on hygiene actually increased household waste as more items were classified as un-useable because of possible contamination (p. 7). As Strasser (1999) has noted, the advent of disposable packaging was marketed by its supposed interior cleanliness, the seal which guards against the fingers of other shoppers (pp. 172-173). Care of the stockpile takes this attention to sanitation to a new level, with homemakers ensuring that the exterior of the packaging is clean as well. This frequent interaction with the stored goods also helps to ensure that products are used before their best-before dates. Packages which have passed their date become un-hygienic, their contents threatening to contaminate the stockpile, and as such are trash.

Another way that the stockpile is described echoes the intersection between domestic space and storage-as-display encountered in *Consumed*. The stockpile may have spilled over from liminal spaces such as the garage or pantry into lived spaces such as

bedrooms. After only three months of couponing, Amber's stockpile is "taking up her whole garage as well as an entire closet." In the introduction it was shown that Joni's stockpile took over several rooms. In Episode 1, when Tiffany runs out of room, she stores things under her children's beds. Yet this spillage is mitigated through the hygienic care of goods. Many of the participants describe their stockpiles as like having a store in their home, transcending traditional consumer behaviours by blurring the lines between home and grocery store. While this may on the surface seem to be overconsumption, it is presented more as consuming which is blithely unconcerned by exchange-value, a kind of American Dream of surfeit and excess of choice. Since the home now mimics a store, taking products off the shelf becomes the ultimate in consumer choice, as money is no longer an object. The exchange-value of these goods has already been expended when they were brought out of the grocery store with coupons. For example, when in the introduction Joni's son is 'shopping' from her stockpile he merely takes whatever he needs, whether it is pasta or toilet paper or shampoo. He is consuming without care for the financial cost.

The Self-Assessment Phase. This phase corresponds roughly with what in the other shows I have called the Assessment Phase. This is critical to the before-and-after dichotomy of makeover television, and on the surface *Extreme Couponing* may not seem to fit this mould. Upon deeper inspection, however it does share many of the same narrative features as the transformation shows examined earlier in this work, most particularly a transformation performed by experts and a final reveal of its success. Specifically, each episode of *Extreme Couponing* focuses on a family who have found a

way to impede the financial hardships which now plague many North Americans, particularly in post-financial-meltdown United States, where the programme is situated. This is presented as a creative use of resources which are positioned as available to everyone: coupons distributed to every household in the form of circulars or flyers. Often, a single flyer is treated as worthless waste, yet through their industry in recovering multiple copies of the flyers—sometimes even dumpster-diving for extras—participants are able to collect enough coupons that their exchange-value increases. As I will show later, while a single coupon may not seem to be worthwhile, deploying dozens of the same coupon makes their use quite lucrative. It is through this use that coupons become a technology of the domestic consumption ethic, transforming un-restrained acquisition into resourceful and responsabilized consumer behaviour.

While *Extreme Couponing* did not feature as many explicit presentations of pre-transformation participants as I had anticipated, a pattern is discernible if we tweak our understanding of how the before-and-after of makeover television should be presented. The success of couponing behaviours, even when not explicit, entails a less-successful state which precedes transformation. In other words, in order for problem-solving behaviour to occur, an issue must be present to overcome. While this may not be presented specifically in a before-and-after manner in the show, it is nonetheless present. The adoption of couponing as a way to overcome financial hardship is mentioned by over half—15 of the 24 participants. Some participants talk about the money they have saved by starting to use coupons—again implicitly referencing how things were before. This may also involve mention of a restrictive family budget, particularly when one parent stays out of the paid workforce. Amber, for example, is the primary breadwinner while

her husband is a stay-at-home dad, leaving them a grocery budget of \$50 per week for their family of six. Using coupons, according to the narrator, has saved the family an estimated \$8000 in three months.

Since this phase is different than the other two programmes, I have re-named this part of the narrative the Self-Assessment Phase to highlight the creative problem-solving which is featured in the *Extreme Couponing*. This Self-Assessment Phase does not involve submission to expert scrutiny, since having overcome adversity without intervention the couponers themselves are now lay experts. This phase is one of reflection, during which the participant talks about how their transformation has impacted their life and the lives of their family. This focus on self-transformation is in line with neoliberal strategies of governance in two ways: first is the lauding of responsible self-improvement pointed out by Ouellette and Hay (2008, pp. 12-13), and second is that this self-improvement is conducted through the participant's engagement with commodities (Palmer, 2008; Raisborough, 2011; Miller, 2008). *Extreme Couponing* is thus, at bottom, a transformation story, but one which focuses more on the after than the before. Rather than dwelling on the transformation itself, these expert-participants are passing on their post-transformation knowledge to viewers to encourage economic responsabilization through following their money-saving blueprint. As I will elaborate later, this blueprint, while seductive, is complex enough that it will be outside the reach or ambition of many people. Thus while it remains a powerful example of the pedagogy of responsabilization, it also ensures that the majority remain firmly entrenched within conventional forms of consumption and the resulting debt load that we often incur.

The Teaching Phase. In *Extreme Couponing* this phase contains the majority of what Weber (2009) calls “teaching moments” (p. 22) as the participant prepares for and executes the shopping trip. This is often also a family moment; members are shown helping in various ways under the leadership of the participant, most often with the collection and sorting of coupons. This aid is usually performed in the background while the expert-participant highlights the complexity of the couponing process. Amanda’s grandmother, for example, helps to clip coupons from flyers in preparation for their shopping trip. Amber credits her family’s involvement as the only way that the complex systems of extreme couponing have been successfully adopted in their household. Most often, however, it is taken for granted that the rest of the family is completely on board with this way of life. Rarely are the reactions of other family members included in the narrative; and even when there may be a reluctance to participate in planning and execution, active resistance is never shown.

In order to conform to the domestic consumption ethic, the seemingly un-restrained acquisition of couponers must be tamed, and therefore the complexity of successful couponing is always spotlighted by the participant. Merely walking out of a grocery store with hundreds of dollars’ worth of products, no matter what the personal financial cost, remains squarely within the definition of un-restrained acquisition. However, unlike the kinds of un-restrained acquisition featured in *Hoarders*, *Extreme Couponing*’s rationalized strategies and systems serve to, literally, domesticate this kind of consumption into the dominant ethic. This often involves a description by participants of their extensive preparation processes and organizing structures. Participants may use complex filing systems to track their coupons, may have developed spreadsheets to plan

their shopping trip, or may even have conducted reconnaissance missions to the stores prior to shopping. These detailed plans always involve a matching of sale items to available coupons in order to get the best possible deal. As well, shopping trips are planned to allow for the maximum specific number of items to be included based on available coupons and store policies. Sometimes, as Amanda does, participants will place special orders with the store to ensure that quantities matching the amount of coupons that they have are available. Usually in the episodes there is a focus on the size of the shopping trip, and often it is said to be the participant's biggest trip to date.

The extensive preparation may also include measures to maximize coupon use. Certain stores may place limits on the way that couponers can shop, and whether more than one coupon can be used for a single item or how many coupons can be used per trip are dependent on store policies. Extreme couponers have amassed coupon collections which number in the thousands, organized in portable filing systems or binders that can be brought with them to the store, in case they find an un-advertised deal. These collections typically contain multiple copies of the same coupons, and so shopping trips often include purchases of excessive numbers of the same type of item. The number of items which a register is able to process in a single transaction may also be limited. Amanda learned this during her previous stint on a television special about couponing, where the register's computer crashed due to the number of items and coupons that were scanned. To conform to store policies and the limitations of cash registers many participants must split their total shopping trip into multiple transactions. Amanda has done this in advance of her trip, preparing envelopes containing the specific coupons and the type and number of items to be included with each of her eight transactions,

increasing the specificity of an already complex endeavour. This additional amount and level of planning signals a reaffirmed commitment to couponing.

During the shopping trip, the participant gives some examples of how the coupons will be used. As Amber counts out 100 bottles of soap into her cart, a graphic at the bottom of the screen details the process of how her coupons will be used. The soap is on sale for \$1, and Amber has a 35-cent coupon. A store promotion only available on that day raises the value of her coupons to \$1, so all of the soap is free. While the numbers may seem excessive, Amber rationalizes “why only get one when you can get 100”, an argument very difficult to dispute on ‘its face’. In *Extreme Couponing* goods are often acquired for very low prices or for free, and there are even times when coupons are used to *make* money. Amber, for example finds pain medication which is on sale for \$2.49, and has a coupon for \$6 off every two purchased—resulting in a \$1 credit for every two she ‘buys’, which can then be applied to other items on the bill. While this excess of exchange-value may not increase the potential-value of the product itself, its enablement of continued acquisition enhances the potential-value of the entire storage-as-display stockpile itself.

Leading up to the reveal at the checkout, participants are shown counting out excessive numbers of items into their carts, even indiscriminately dumping entire bins or wiping entire shelves of product. Also at this point in the narrative any pre-ordered goods are given to the participant, perhaps of less visual impact since they are still in their brown cardboard boxes, but often delivered by a store employee on a special hydraulic cart. Amanda, for example, receives 120 bags of cat treats and 400 cans of dog food as a pre-order. Standing in front of the grocery shelves she explains “my rules are

any time you need more than 10 of anything you really wanna call up your store and see if they'll order it for you so you're not wiping the shelves, because wiping the shelves is bad." In addition to the possibility of a store not having enough product for a couponer to take advantage, taking everything off the shelves prohibits any subsequent shoppers from also benefiting from the deal. Done enough times, this will likely annoy the store employees, who have to re-stock the shelves, but also have to deal with any irate shoppers who have found the shelves empty. This may make employees less willing to oblige extreme couponing behaviours in the future. While Amanda clearly has developed a couponing code which she follows, not all participants share her thoughtfulness, gleefully dumping entire bins of product into their carts. This tension between self-sufficiency and community runs through the programme, and as I will demonstrate later often manifests in ways, such as donation, which legitimate both the domestic consumption ethic and familial responsabilization.

The Reveal Phase. The participant then moves toward the checkout, often with multiple carts filled with goods—Amber and her family tow 5 full carts toward the cash, and Amanda has 10, shepherded by her boyfriend and grandmother. Not only do they monopolize the goods in the store, but the process for removing them from the store. Multiple cartloads of complicated transactions processed for hyper-vigilant consumers take a long time to complete. As the cashier rings up the transaction, the participant often reports feeling anxious or nervous as the bill climbs higher. Amber remarks “my heart is just racing right now it’s all like dumdumdumdum. I think I’m gonna just faint right now.” Sometimes this anxiety is due to unexpected changes in the plan, leading to

uncertainty. The importance of accuracy and vigilance when using coupons is again reinforced by the participant, who will often watch the register closely to ensure that everything is rung up correctly.

Just before the reveal there is often a complication, heightening suspense for the viewer. Amanda, for example is missing an envelope of coupons, and Amber's transaction is halted because the cash register will not allow any more items, including her coupons, to be scanned. Both complications threaten the perceived success of the shopping trips. Since coupons must be scanned to be applied to the bill, Amber cannot take advantage of her savings. The complication is usually resolved quite quickly—missing coupons are found, or the store manager intervenes to fix the cash register. Amber's family crowds the cash register, and in the end is saved as the transaction resumes, and the bill continues to fall until the grand total is revealed. In Amanda's case, a lost envelope of coupons is recovered, but not without as scene of significant conflict between her and her partner. In the end, however, the transaction which she did for her grandmother has a total of \$548.67, and her coupons bring the bill down to zero, making her grandmother's goods absolutely free.

As the final totals are revealed, often other customers and store employees will clap and cheer. An onlooker may also make an incredulous comment, seeming to echo the feelings of the viewer, such as Amber's cashier who says "I've never seen anyone buy this much food." Next the scene shifts to the parking lot, where participants always have a vehicle waiting to transport their purchases home. Never are participants shown to use public transport, since the huge "hauls" of the show prohibit trips on the bus or subway. As the participant packs up the car—or more often a van or sport utility

vehicle—the narrator points out some of the highlights of the purchase, which are also displayed in a graphic at the bottom of the screen. These are always excessively high numbers of goods, for example Amanda’s purchase includes 20 bottles of hot sauce, 50 bottles of flavoured water, 20 packages of pasta and 400 cans of dog food. Amber takes home 170 cans of dog food, 370 packages of noodles, 500 sports drinks and 640 packages of candy. Incredibly, although both women have bought excessive amounts of dog food, it is never mentioned if either of them care for a dog. The final bill totals are restated by the narrator as well, along with the percentage of the bill that was free because of coupons. Amanda’s grand total, before coupons, was \$1958.90, yet she paid \$19.62, resulting in a savings of 99%. Amber in turn saved 93%, bringing her bill down to \$187.69 from \$2756.94. The monetary savings act to rationalize the amount of goods that are brought back into the home: since they are both almost free and brand-new, they cannot possibly contravene the domestic consumption ethic. Further, their placement within the home as storage-as-display negates the non-restraint of their acquisition, preserving their potential-value even in the face of their excessive purchasing.

In the dénouement, the participant talks about their sense of accomplishment, particularly in relation to being able to provide for their family. Amanda says she was “super excited that my grandmother finally got to see, y’know, the magic behind it. It took everything in me to not start crying at the grocery store.” Amber advises, “to people that don’t coupon I would definitely say you need to start and start immediately, go out and get some of these great deals that are available for everybody.” This tension between the “magic” of couponing and the idea that “everybody” could do it establishes these participants as embodying extraordinary everyday lives.

4.2 Un-restrained Acquisition and Storage-as-display in Unified Families

On the surface, the participants featured in *Extreme Couponing* may seem like they are indulging in un-restrained acquisition, even if the goods are nearly free. After all, who needs so many bottles of mustard that their storage begins to take over their house? The way that the items are stored however is what preserves their potential-value, enabling their use at a later date through their judicious disposal and thus balancing the domestic consumption ethic. Not everyone, however, can mimic this ethic. Only those who are able to dedicate the time and space toward couponing can achieve these kinds of savings. Those who do not have access to a sizeable vehicle, and are forced to bring their purchases home on the bus or subway cannot enjoy the kinds of savings that the participants can. Additionally one must have extra space available to store the goods gained from couponing, which is much more difficult in a bachelor apartment than in a three-bedroom, detached house.

There are significant differences between couponers and hoarders in the implementation of the domestic consumption ethic. Indeed, some couponers are quick to point this out, obviously aware that their excess could be judged as unacceptable, if not pathological in a way similar to hoarding. In Episode 2, Jessica insists that she is not a hoarder because of the way her stockpile is stored with “all the pretty labels, facing forward”, clearly evocative of the importance of storage-as-display. “Pretty” labels are not dirty or haphazard, and by extension neither are couponers, since according to Forster (2008) it is through organization that we achieve mastery over domestic spaces (p. 105). Hygiene is again important here: in some episodes participants are seen dusting and

organizing their stockpile, and others have developed systems to rotate goods so that they will be used before their expiry dates. In Episode 10, Rebecca links the difference to acquisition and potential value, stating:

People assume that all extreme couponers are hoarders and purchase items unnecessarily because they're free, or because they're going to make money on them. If I can use the overage on that item to purchase items that my family does need, then I *do* need that item. We purchase extra, we're going to donate them, or we're going to give them to families that can use them. Things are not going to waste.

Rebecca's description of need does call attention to a particular point. What is the potential-value of goods that will not be used in the household, such as the cat treats which cat-less Missy 'buys' with coupons in Episode 4 only so she can get a store credit? Bringing goods home merely for the sake of acquiring them seems to be the height of over-indulgent consumption, and should be regarded as un-restrained acquisition in active contempt of the domestic consumption ethic. Potential-value would be lost if too many things, or too many 'wrong' things, like candy, are kept. However the answer to this problem comes at the end of Rebecca's quote. Donation is a way to both maintain and manifest potential-value through spreading it among several families. Donation justifies this un-restrained acquisition by passing on potential-value to others who *can* use these goods.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Mauss (2002) defined a gift as a composition of three actions: giving, receiving and reciprocating. At first glance, donation may seem to lie outside of this conception since the spatial-temporal social distance between the giver and receiver prohibits reciprocation. Donation is often anonymous, and the receipt of donated goods may take place at a later time, facilitated by

a mediating organization such as the Salvation Army. However, while donating does not utilize a direct connection between gift-giver and receiver (Rice, 2007, p. 14) the reciprocal impulse may still remain, to be acted upon at a later time. Thus reciprocation does not necessarily happen immediately or directly in response to an initial gift. As Joni states in the introduction to this chapter, she gains her satisfaction from helping those in need as she was helped, a directly reciprocal action held over from a time when she was forced to accept charity for her family.

In *Extreme Couponing* donation performs a double-function: it allows the participant to distribute value, but importantly also allows for continued acquisition. Indeed, Kevin Fisher (2005) uses the example of gambling to point out that excess “expenditure”, or in this case acquisition, can be justified so long as it is channelled “back into pro-social accumulation”, for example raising money for schools through lotteries (p. 15). He sees this as a social release-valve of sorts, suggesting that “regulated movements of expenditure thus function doubly (and duplicitously) to indulge the pleasures of excess, and to ward off the emergence of its unregulated forms” (p. 15). Thus by indulging in extreme shopping which is sanctioned through publicly-available coupons, social structures are maintained rather than transgressed. Further, the structures of shopping within the system of consumer capitalism—through grocery stores rather than farmer’s markets, for example—are still reinforced and normalized even though this use of coupons contravenes the way manufacturers and advertisers intended them to be used.

Conclusion

Extreme Couponing showcases the un-restrained acquisition of an excessive number of goods which is then tamed through effective strategies of storage-as-display. The subsequent loss of domestic space required for these extreme stockpiles is offset by the high potential-value of the items through their hygienic maintenance. It is clear in the programme that this altering of the domestic consumption ethic is not easy, and often involves rigorous planning as well as a commitment by the entire family. This presentation of extensive planning and hard work as essential to couponing, and personal, success manifests neoliberal values of self-work and flexibility. It is this need for comprehensive preparation which prompts Amber to declare the couponing learning curve as “intimidating.”

The expertise of the participants themselves is a defining feature of the programme. This lay knowledge is a mixture of established and creative methods for the collection, organization and use of coupons. Amber is a self-taught couponer who learned by looking up couponing tips online, responsabilizing herself and then recruiting her family. Now Amber has “the whole family hard at work, cutting and sorting coupons in preparation for their largest shopping trip yet.” This familial bliss is contrasted with Amanda’s recruitment of her husband to help with her massive shopping excursion. As the uncontested expert, Amanda orders him around, speaking sharply and is even outright rude at times. Later in the episode, in a show of relations of accountability, Amanda’s husband questions her deviance from the shopping plan as she adds several bags of chips, on sale and including coupons on their packaging, to their cart. Amanda turns this into a teaching moment for viewers, saying “always look out for items that are on sale that have

coupons stuck to them.” Rather than undermine Amanda’s expertise however, this questioning seems to cement it, establishing the superiority of her knowledge and experience. Further, this incident also highlights her flexibility and ability to adapt as a neoliberal subject.

Overall however the exclusion or minimization of the perspectives of family members effectively silences them while giving the impression of their complicity in couponing behaviours, making it unclear how relations of accountability operate. Several participants characterize couponing as a consumption lifestyle which, to be truly effective, cannot be performed only casually, requiring a full immersion in consumer capitalist systems of exchange. The preparation necessary to achieve success in this lifestyle means that ad hoc shopping trips or spontaneous purchases would be nearly impossible. Since alternative economies rarely, if ever, use or accept coupons participants have effectively refused to participate in any but the most dominant of shopping experiences. By their refusal to pay full price for anything and to use coupons wherever possible, participants, and their families, have become completely invested in dominant systems of consumer capitalism.

5 Conclusion: Home Economics

To conclude this work, I will discuss all three programmes as a cluster of conceptually-similar manifestations of our cultural experiences. This will enable me to elaborate on the theoretical elements which I have presented as well as to draw attention to the ways in which several shared themes run through these programmes. It will quickly become apparent in this chapter that there are thematic spectrums which span these programmes. To begin, I will present a brief summary of the theoretical notions which I have presented and elaborated on in this work. Next I will discuss the ethic of home ownership and economic familial responsabilization, which will lead into an exploration of complications surrounding value, and discourses of addiction. To conclude, I will describe some of the thematic continua present in the programmes.

5.1 Concepts, Revisited

Techniques of governance, according to Foucault (2000), consist partly of a checking of the self against a moral code (p. 368). While many theories of governance concentrate on the individual subject, I have suggested in this work that this can be extended to include the responsabilization of whole families. Through systems of individual, reciprocal surveillance, all members of a family unit are encouraged to monitor each other. These relations of accountability also ensure that as one monitors, one is also the subject of scrutiny. This dual observation results in a powerful form of responsabilization which is enforced and reinforced through family structures and practices such as shared meals or shared shopping excursions. These technologies of

accountability offer repeated, habitual opportunities not only to engage in relations of accountability but also to socialize children and wayward adults into familial responsabilizing practices.

As Foucault (2000) pointed out, however, such ethical checking must be done in relation to a moral code. In these programmes I have argued that part of this morality is the domestic consumption ethic, a recipe for acceptable consumer practices which is composed of restrained acquisition, storage-as-display, and judicious disposal. As I have shown, restrained acquisition itself is rarely portrayed in these programmes; however, the taming of un-restrained acquisition is prominent. In *Hoarders*, the urge to acquire and keep is interrupted by the intervention of family and experts; however, un-restrained acquisition can also be offset through the domestic consumption ethic itself. Excessive amounts of hygienic storage-as-display and occasional donation balance excessive acquisition in *Extreme Couponing* and the process of divestment through re-acquisition in the warehouse of *Consumed* gives participants a second chance to conform to the domestic consumption ethic. Storage-as-display is a way to control goods in the home, ensuring their differentiation and enabling them to operate in an anticipatory manner. This, in turn, solidifies the function of the house as a home—an inhabited, anticipating familial space. Judicious disposal seems to depend on the implementation of storage-as-display; however, through Mary's experience in *Consumed* it also became clear that too much storage can be a problem as well. In *Extreme Couponing*, as well, there are times when divestment is mobilized to stave off problematic amounts of storage-as-display. And in *Hoarders*, large amounts of disposal are necessary in order to accomplish storage-as-display at all.

The domestic consumption ethic is highly dependent on the concept of potential-value. Potential-value goes beyond use-, exchange- or sign-value to incorporate how an item will be viewed in a future period. The inter-dependent nature of the stages of the domestic consumption ethic are both determined by and determine potential-value. This can be most clearly seen at the point of storage-as-display however, is also a determinant in what makes acquisition restrained and disposal judicious. The way objects are stored contributes to their potential-value; however, it is their potential-value which makes them acceptable for storage in the first place. For example, in *Hoarders* Betty sees potential-value in goods that others have thrown away, such as a cracked, two-sided makeup mirror. While the whole side of the mirror may still hold potential-value for Betty, the fact that she has two such mirrors, and that she stores them both in the backyard rather than the bathroom, diminishes their value. In contrast, participants who are resistant to discarding in *Consumed* are encouraged to donate items, passing on their potential-value to other families, rather than keeping them in less-than-ideal storage which causes their value to lapse. In *Extreme Couponing*, participants sometimes shop specifically for charity, allowing them to indulge in excessive acquisition without overwhelming their systems of storage-as-display and endangering the potential-value of their stockpiles.

5.2 Home Ownership and Economic Responsibilization

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the domestic consumption ethic is unequivocally tied up with issues surrounding familial spaces. In *Hoarders*, the state of the home is often cause for intervention by state authorities. In *Consumed*, the ways goods are stored in the home is equated with family relationships. And in *Extreme*

Couponing, the creative management of domestic finances leads to stockpiles taking over space in the home—but also enables the fiscal stability required to maintain a property.

Up to this point I have been discussing the domestic consumption ethic as a process of three stages. However, at its core this ethic is a household one, and is thus related to the maintenance of a property, whether owned or rented. This intersects with the cultural importance we attach to home ownership in North America,³ in particular after the recent financial crisis when so many Americans were forced to sell or give up their homes. Maintaining a home has become even more important since markets have become more volatile and the value of an investment is no longer guaranteed.

While the role of consumption in the spatial configuration and care of the home is central to *Consumed*, the consequences of neglect through non-conformity to the domestic consumption ethic plays a large role in *Hoarders*. In *Hoarders* the consequences of deviant consumption behaviours revolve around the loss of the home through the legalized intervention of authorities such as landlords or bylaw agents. Yet in both shows relations of accountability are central to the care of the home, implying that a home is the responsibility of the entire family. For example, in Episode 3 of *Hoarders*, “Betty and Charles have been evicted from four rental properties in the last ten years. With the help of their children they finally bought their own home. Now authorities have declared it uninhabitable”. In this case not only have the participants ruined the home by flouting the domestic consumption ethic, they have also ignored the relations of accountability through which their responsabilized children provided them with a home in the first place.

³ See for example Weber (2009), p. 39; Ouellette & Hay (2008), p. 44; and Philips (2005), p. 228.

In *Extreme Couponing*, the role of family property is slightly different. Owning a home with ample storage space is critical to engaging in the excess acquisition that characterises extreme couponers. Apartment rentals would not provide the square footage necessary to accumulate a sizeable stockpile of goods. Furthermore, the size of the shopping trips encouraged in the programme make owning a vehicle—and the larger the better—a necessity. Property ownership and frugality in this case exist in a circular relationship: owning a large home and vehicle enable couponing, and couponing ensures the maintenance of family properties.

The domestic consumption ethic also ensures and promotes a particular kind of lifestyle. Acquisition is not placed at the beginning of this ethic arbitrarily; it is acquisition which maintains capitalist markets through continued production and consumption. Acquisition is enabled by the intersection of potential-value with judicious discarding; part of the enactment of judicious discarding is the desire to conform to a particular lifestyle, which is often based on consumer habits. Featherstone (1991) suggests that there is a contemporary “need to form life into an aesthetically-pleasing whole” through consumption (p. 67). Since fashions change, lifestyle is also dependent upon planned obsolescence, and its spurring of divestment. As Paterson (2006) points out, “for anything to appear shiny, appealing and new ... our constant *upgrading* of consumer goods requires a corresponding *downgrade*” p. (230). This may be part of the reason why the un-restrained acquisition of new items in *Extreme Couponing* is not pathologized, yet the scavenging of used goods in *Hoarders* is.

Lifestyle also plays a role in what Shufeldt-Esch (2008) calls “cocooning” in the home (p. 166). The ability to construct the home as a private, sheltered space based on

comfort and freedom from care is portrayed in these programmes as a direct result of the domestic consumption ethic. This underlying message of protecting not only the family, but the home itself from outside forces is evidence of an increasing call for citizens to economically responsabilize. Surprisingly however, while care of the home is a focus in the programmes, the financial consequences of un-restrained acquisition are rarely presented. Considering the problematic nature of un-restrained acquisition as a contributor to overconsumption, one would expect it to be discussed in a financialized way. While fiscal expenditure (or lack thereof) is focussed on in *Extreme Couponing*, it is rarely, if ever mentioned in the other two programmes. Certainly un-restrained acquisition must have placed a large burden of debt on some of the participants, and yet the possible recovery of expenditure through yard sales or consignment is almost absent. Only three of the episodes, two from *Consumed* and one from *Hoarders*, featured a participant attempting to sell some possessions rather than donate or discard them—and there were either no offers or unreasonable ones.

Relations of accountability help to right any imbalance in the domestic consumption ethic. Thus the economic responsabilization of the family means that relations of accountability also run along economic lines. The disapproval of a child may curb the excessive spending of the parent; in turn, the impetus for disapproval may come from consumption mores taught to the child by an adult, and if everyone looks out for the family then the chances of family ‘success’ are increased. However, this caretaking responsabilization does not extend beyond the family and the space they inhabit. It seems that the responsabilization of the family as a unit through relations of accountability prohibits, or at the very least trumps, any concern with the effects of the consumption

cycle on the wider world. Each one of the programmes examined here ignores the environmental effects of overconsumption. Common domestic pursuits such as re-using, recycling and yard sales are completely sidelined in favour of the less complicated act of sheer disposal.

The participants in *Hoarders* and *Consumed* however still exhibit some discomfort with discarding objects that they think still hold value. As described in Chapter Two, even Betty's used vacuum cleaner holds a type of potential-value—she merely needs to fix, clean and sell it. While Betty knows what she wants to do, other participants may not want to throw goods away because of a more nebulous sense of potential-value. In an effort to not be wasteful, or to maximize their investment in goods, some participants are reluctant to discard things even though they may not know *how* they can be useful. Strasser (1999) points out that much of the handcraft knowledge that was still common even at the end of the nineteenth century is no longer valued or taught (p. 10). Further, many of our systems for reuse are different: most of us do not have domestic animals such as pigs or chickens to feed our food scraps, and ragmen no longer collect cloth to make into paper (Strasser, 1999, pp. 12-13). So while the do-it-yourself ethic is making a comeback, as evidenced by the many home-improvement and décor makeover programmes which create treasure from trash, the knowledge and systems for 'waste not, want not' have yet to become common again.

Given the popularity of handcraft and refurbishment programmes such as *Martha Stewart*, *Junk Brothers* or *Decorating Cents*, it is difficult to say why systems for reuse, garage sales, and do-it-yourself are sidelined and even discouraged in the programmes I have analyzed. It may be that since these programmes deal specifically with morally-

questionable overconsumption that D-I-Y is discouraged because it will exacerbate participants' deviation from the domestic consumption ethic and hamper their participation in capitalism. The subversion of obsolescence through D-I-Y and reuse would place participants outside of, even in opposition to, systems of consumer capitalism. This may also be why extreme couponers, although they are committed to paying as little as possible, are never portrayed as using alternative frugal systems such as freecycling.

Thus a tension remains between acquisition and discarding and the seemingly irrational act of getting rid of things which still have perceived value, in particular use- or exchange-value. If fiscal caretaking requires getting the most for one's money, then throwing away a useful item should be economically irresponsible. However, when one considers that the wider economy is in part driven by spending, symbolic obsolescence becomes important to maintaining a healthy market. Yet even without the fiscal burden of spending, a tension remains. The un-restrained acquisition of 'free' goods in *Extreme Couponing* seems to contradict cultural ideas about moderation and need, in particular when participants collect goods for which they have little use. Donation often gets around these quandaries, loosening tensions by allowing potential-value to be extracted by others. However there are some contradictions which donation cannot solve. How, for example does having 200 bottles of pop or 56 bags of chips equate to saving money? Such items which are low in nutritional value seemingly belie claims of 'grocery' savings when very little fresh food is purchased. Discourses surrounding obesity and healthy eating are completely ignored in these episodes of *Extreme Couponing*, yet occupy a

primary place on our cultural radar—not least because of the focus on the body in many, many other makeover television programmes.

Indeed, one would expect some discussion of obesity, as according to Jayne Raisborough (2011), self-control and “order” are often prominent themes in lifestyle television (p. 65). In addition, lifestyle television often focuses on particular kinds of failure including “bad luck” and “discourses of addiction” (Raisborough, 2011, p. 130). The catalysts for the initial failure in *Consumed* often follow the bad-luck theme, including injury, illness and job loss. *Hoarders* most often showcases mental illness as the cause of the state of affairs. *Extreme Couponing* may also exhibit before-moments which involve job loss, but also includes language which is evocative of addiction as participants describe the feelings they experience when shopping. The addiction metaphors used in *Extreme Couponing* amount to an equation of un-restrained acquisition with addiction and, since other programs such as *Hoarders* focus on overconsumption as mental illness, this also echoes a problematic cultural trend to conflate addiction and mental illness. According to Raisborough (2011) addiction operates as a cultural, rather than clinical, frame where *discourses* of addiction perform a particular cultural function, not addiction itself (p. 135). Although mental illnesses and addictions may be treated in different ways, when this conflation is exacerbated by the ubiquity of transformation stories, mental illness becomes a problem of willpower. Thus those who struggle with mental illnesses come to be regarded as addicts who are willfully destroying what they have, or just not trying hard enough to overcome their problems.

Conclusion: Continua of Consumption

During the course of my analysis, it became clear that there were several intersecting, thematic continua running through these programmes. First, troublesome overconsumption habits necessitate a fix in the form of divestment. Participant feelings surrounding divestment ranged from trauma in *Hoarders* to catharsis in *Consumed* and charity in *Extreme Couponing*. This spectrum mirrors the ways that “ambiguity is reduced” (Douglas, 1966, p. 39) by situating particular behaviours of overconsumption along a scale of pathological to emulate-able. This labelling is also influenced by a continuum of modes of storage: unhygienic and pathological, to partly unhygienic or disorganized but spatially problematic, to hygienic and organized and therefore spatially efficient. Related to this are morals regarding the care of the family property, including the home, and through this care maintaining fiscal solvency through economic responsabilization.

In order for participants to move along these spectra, expert knowledge must be employed. The different types of expert can also be placed on a continuum: from the medicalized experts in *Hoarders*, to the moral expert Jill in *Consumed*, to the lay expert-participants of *Extreme Couponing*. These kinds of expertise reflect and respond to different levels of pathologization, but also various states of completeness of familial responsabilization. This works in conjunction with a continuum of relations of accountability and familial ‘health’ that ranges families from faulty because of a pathological relationship with goods, to troublesome but rectifiable interactions between family and goods, to united families with control over goods. Finally, this intersects with a continuum of transgression: the defiance of the legal by not caring for home or children

as the law stipulates, the lapse of morals by not acting as a unified and responsabilized family, and the non-traditional use of capitalist systems that further solidifies investment in them.

Any critique of consumer capitalism itself however is absent from these programmes. Rather than examine how historical and current economic structures contribute to our attitudes regarding overconsumption, these programmes shift the focus to how families respond to moral pressures as they interact with consumerism. While the moral transformations presented in these programmes seem to be universally accessible, the choices available to people are far from equal. Redden (2008) states that in makeover television there is a

contemporary sense that people can do things well by choosing well. The very narrative form is predicated on pathologization of inadequate abilities to make choices. What we see is people who apparently couldn't choose properly before becoming able to do so. (p. 485)

Questions of access to the 'proper' choices are never addressed in the programmes which I have analyzed. Thus it is not only capitalism and dominant morals which are taken for granted, but social inequalities are also ignored through this focus on the family unit. This deflection is important to justifying and obscuring these systems; as Valverde (1994) suggests morality plays an important role in maintaining the logic of capitalism itself. She writes "since it is the essence of capital to expand indefinitely, the perception of 'excess' can only be made from outside the logic of capital" (Valverde, 1994, p. 217). Thus the moral critique of families acts not only to turn our attention away from the economic roots of overconsumption but also solidifies the illusory rationality of consumer markets. Further, it encourages an embrace of the domestic consumption ethic as not only an ideal way to interact with goods, but also as a method for building family unity.

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