

MULTIPLE BIRTH FAMILIES, RELIGION, AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY:  
PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN REALITY TELEVISION

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The School of Communication and Multimedia Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

August 2010

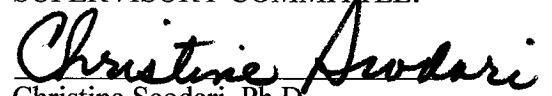
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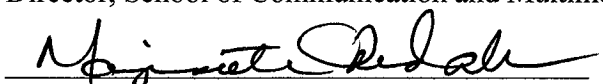
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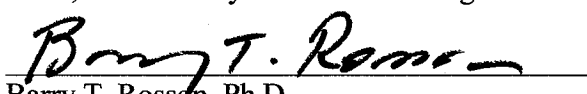
  
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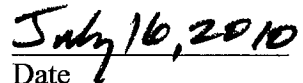
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express her sincere thanks to her thesis chair, Dr. Christine Scodari, for her support and encouragement throughout the writing of this thesis. Thank you to K.G, S.P, and M.P for your moral support, advice and patience throughout this research process.

## ABSTRACT

Author: Emily M. Cittadino

Title: Multiple Birth Families, Religion, and Cultural Hegemony: Patriarchal Constructions in Reality Television

Institution: Florida Atlantic University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Christine Scodari

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2010

Reality television programming chronicling the daily workings of multiple birth families within American culture has gained notoriety in recent years. Such programs, especially Discovery Health and *TLC's 17, 18 Kids and Counting* and *TLC's Jon and Kate Plus Eight*, film, edit and broadcast the “everyday” life of these families. This research study focuses attention on hegemonic ideologies surrounding family values, motherhood, gender roles and religious faith, illuminated through textual and audience analysis. Working from an interdisciplinary approach combining feminist media and cultural studies, this study finds that hegemonic notions of family values, gender representations, religious faith and conceptions of motherhood are evident to varying degrees in the television texts and accepted by fans who negotiate their meanings online.

## DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my family, friends and colleagues who have supported this research project and its efforts since the beginning. For J.P. and G.P. for you, and for a future filled with equality and opportunity. Sincere thanks to Kate Gosselin and Michelle Duggar, without whom this study would have never existed.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Andrejevic (2003) argues that reality based entertainment is as old as human society itself, and “runs the gamut from ‘people watching’ to the Roman circus” (p. 65). The advent of television provided audiences with visual images of entertainment, news and sports. Reality TV stretches the boundaries of entertainment; since the inception of this genre, almost every aspect of “real life” has been portrayed. Captivating stories of weddings, sweet sixteen parties, weight loss battles, as well as glimpses into differing cultures, have provided the audience with a multitude of options (Essany, 2008; Bignell, 2005; Kilborn, 2003; Hill, 2005). One of the common threads in these programs is the human story and, in particular, the American family (Tincknell, 2005; Friedman, 2002). In this high profit arena, what seems to be a current trend is the depiction of not only the “typical” American family, but the atypical as well (Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Tincknell, 2005). With the growth of programs such as these, American viewers are provided glimpses into families that may be dissimilar to their own.

This study focuses on reality TV programs which highlight families that exaggerate the hegemonic norms of American society. Multiple birth reality TV shows provide a voyeuristic peephole into a lifestyle and culture. Directly, this study looks at two such programs which depict multiple birth families in contemporary America while attempting to identify the underlying ideological framework. The uses of reproductive

technologies are a main character in these programs along with the religious agendas set forth by the programs and the discourses they generate.

### **Justification**

I am interested in looking at the ways multiple birth reality TV shows are used to construct and depict the images and ideas Western societies hold about families and, more specifically, mothers. There is little doubt that in this day and age of mediated excess, we as a society are deeply entwined with the “lives” of others. We hold celebrities to a higher standard than most, as their actions, words, and motivations are simultaneously upheld and scrutinized in the public eye. That being said, I think that it is very important for us to look at the images and ideas presented.

When reviewing previous research I must first point out that as a result of the newness of this topic, little has been written in academic circles. Popular culture has perpetuated media coverage of and attention to multiple birth families. For example, while walking past the newsstand in the local supermarket, images and textual messages offered about these families are plentiful. Much scholarship has been written and will continue to be written about the way concepts of family are negotiated and depicted in and through media representations (Tincknell, 2005; Lull, 1990; Morley, 1986; Ruoff, 2002). In addition, multiple theories and working ideas about motherhood and mothering in contemporary society continue to be cultivated (Hays, 1996; Trebilcot, 1984; Miller, 2005; DiQuinzio, 1999; Davis-Floyd, 2003).

Based upon my assessment of previous academic work on families, it can be said that most focused on political families such as that of Tony Blair (Chambers, 2001) or

constructed sitcom families such as that of *Roseanne* (Ticknell, 2005). While reality TV is growing at an exponential rate, saturating the market with a multitude of options, it is also captivating the minds and lives of the Americans who consume this programming (Tincknell, 2005). This study examines this type of reality TV programming which depicts “real” multiple birth families.

Scholars theorize about film, fiction, truth, and real life, but not as much about the fiction of real life. The fiction about reality and what implications this “reality” has upon society warrant further analysis. Determining how audiences think about and, perhaps, internalize these ideas about family is also crucial.

### **Issues to be Addressed**

This research project utilizes a threefold approach. Firstly, the study is grounded in feminist media and cultural studies. Secondly, close textual analysis is used. Thirdly, the audience is analyzed. This approach is designed to holistically answer the following primary research question: In what ways are multiple birth reality television shows working to sustain or maintain culturally hegemonic ideals of mothering, family, gender roles and religious faith?

The specific media texts addressed in this study are Discovery Health’s subsidiary network The Learning Channel’s *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* (2005-2009) and *(17, 18)19 Kids and Counting* (2005-current). Both programs focus on larger than life, multiple-birth families and their everyday experiences in terms of the parents, their children, and their communities. The depictions of these families are vitally important in this study, as well as the online reactions of audiences that consume these messages. This study’s

information is valuable in understanding the role played by multiple birth reality TV programs in the construction and maintenance of ideologies of motherhood, faith, family, gender roles, and social hierarchy. This study answers the following secondary research questions: (1) To what extent do such shows as *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* and *17, 18 Kids and Counting* serve to further hegemonic ideals of “family values” and place importance and weight upon reproductive rights and gender? (2) In what ways do multiple birth reality TV shows continue the discourse of “good” and “bad” mothers? (3) To what extent do Kate Gosselin and Michelle Duggar fetishized as social archetypes of motherhood within multiple birth reality television? (4) How does the audience interpret these programs in terms of motherhood, gender, religion, and family?

For the purpose of this study, multiple birth reality shows are defined as those programs which depict American families that demonstrate exaggerated models of the hegemonic norm to “be fruitful and multiply.” These families may or may not have used medical reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization. They may also be practitioners of religious faiths that encourage repetitive childbearing. Shows which capitalize upon and feature family structures described as “supersized,” yet ordinary, will be taken into consideration. In other words, these shows that embody, whether purposely or inadvertently, pronatalist ideologies and practices. The participants volunteer and consent to mediated depictions of their “real life” day-to-day experiences in American society.

As previously mentioned, due to the complexity of issues to be addressed, this research requires several different approaches, namely cultural studies, textual, meta-textual, and audience analysis, along with feminist criticism. Further, this investigator

unearths numerous studies and theoretical works which examine patriarchal dominance over reproduction, reproductive technologies, and hegemonic conceptions of motherhood in western society and their link to religious beliefs.

### **Literature Review**

Multiple works from several fields such as cultural studies, sociology, communication and medical studies are combined in this literature review to comprehensively discuss the topics of hegemony, feminist critique (especially of motherhood, religion and family, reality television, media studies, cultural analysis, and audience analysis.

**Motherhood in Feminist Theory.** Feminist theory addresses a variety of social, political and global issues, and contributes to discourses surrounding motherhood and mothering. In order to discuss feminist theoretical literature surrounding motherhood and mothering, I will limit this study to Western, multicultural contexts due to the nature of this research project.

Within feminist theory, ideas surrounding the concept of motherhood are abundant and significant. As suggested by Arendell (1999), there is “the presence of a preeminent cultural ideology of motherhood that is powerful, pervasive, and persistent” (p. 2). Second wave feminism and trends in academic scholarship regarding motherhood are pivotal. Chodorow (1978) writes that within Western, industrial capitalist societies like the United States, the nuclear family holds two characteristics which are crucial to the social organization and individual development. Firstly, the nuclear family is the location for women who have primary responsibility of child-rearing. Secondly, this space

is often described as the male-dominated, father absent family, because it is seen as a central part of social organization and development of individuals (Chodorow, 1978, p. 181). Being a mother and being mothered are both “imbued with tremendous social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, and personal significance” since the nuclear family acts as an arm of patriarchy in the progression of gender roles and traditions (p. 181). The site of the nuclear family and the mother has generated a tremendous amount of discourse within feminist theory.

Conflicts in terms of the hegemonic ideals of motherhood persist and often serve to operate within the overarching cultural discourse. Woman/Mother is seen as the submissive, domestic worker charged with rearing the children, keeping the house and servicing her husband (Arendell, 2000). DiQuinzio (1999) writes: “Some feminists have argued that mothering is the source of women’s limitations or the cause of women’s oppression, because it is the experience in which women most suffer under the tyranny of nature, biology, and/or male control” (p. ix). Other feminists have argued that mothering is a vital source for women to find agency, identity and joyful accomplishments as a “basis of women’s value as members of society, and impetus for women’s political participation” (p. ix).

Attempting to place the issue of motherhood and mothering within feminist theory, DiQuinzio (1999) notes that feminism has established the impossibility “to theorize mothering adequately in terms of an individualist theory of subjectivity” (p. xii). A further attempt must be made to understand motherhood and mothering in terms of individualism, subjectivity and agency.

In her text, *Making Sense of Motherhood: A Narrative Approach*, Miller (2005) writes that the experiences of becoming and being mothers are linked within Western society to “‘race,’ social class, age and socio-cultural location,” thereby making the results diverse and fragmented (p. 46). Miller stresses the importance of this fragmentation on mothers’ expectations and experiences in western society, as becoming a mother “changes everything” (p. 49).

Hegemonic motherhood is described as a “patriarchal construction: it ties women’s identities to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of others” (Arendell, 1999, p. 4). As noted above, feminist ideas and discourses encompassing motherhood are plentiful and remain points of convergence around which further discourses can be created. Tucker (2004) observes that the dominant ideology of motherhood can be defined as:

[T]he belief that the quality of maternal sensitivity and attachment, and *only that maternal quality*, is directly and integrally related to the ideal growth and development of children, and that undesirable outcomes are inevitable for children whose mothers deviate from socially prescribed norms of mothering. (p. 1)

Therefore, what lies as most important within this dominant ideology of motherhood is the growth and development of the children, which hinders the actions of the mothers themselves, further restricting them to hegemonic gender roles and placing limits on agency.

Hays (1996) writes in her foundational text, *The Cultural Contractions of Motherhood*, that dominant motherhood ideology in the United States is one of *intensive mothering*. This ideology, as articulated by Hays, suggests a shift in the socio-cultural value base of American society and operates as follows. The first marker of intensive



mothering is the reallocation of childcare as primary responsibility of the mother who is considered to be the preferred caretaker of children. Secondly, the methodologies recommended to mothers from authors such as Spock, (1946), Brazelton, (1969), and Leach (1985) suggest that expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive child rearing is best. Thirdly, intensive mothering suggests that the treatment of the child must be “outside of market valuation: children are sacred, innocent, and pure, their price is immeasurable” (Hays, 1996, p. 54). The framework of intensive mothering as outlined above sees a shift in the understanding, expectations and cultural constraints placed upon motherhood. A mother must be selfless, responsible to her children, seek child-experts’ advice, view her children as priceless and irreplaceable, and consider her labor on their behalf outside of market valuation.

Arendell (1999) writes that the *good* mother ideology is one which “presupposes the traditional model of motherhood, with its roots in the transition to an industrial capitalist economy and the consequent separation of productive paid labor from the home” (Arendell, 1999, p. 3). Scholars such as Chodorow and Contratto (1982), Ladd-Taylor (1994), and Stacey (1996) all submit to this concept. Intensive mothering ideology is one which assumes and reinforced the traditional gender based division of labor and attempts to cement patriarchal, gendered norms in contemporary society (Fineman, 1995; Hartsock, 1998). Conceptualizing this cultural construction of the *good* mother as heterosexual, married and monogamous, white and native born, economically self-sufficient and unemployed outside of the home continues to foster patriarchal dominance and order (Arendell, 2000; Gross, 1998; Hays, 1996). Everything a *good* mother is, a *bad* mother is not; a bad mother is self-sufficient, homosexual, unmarried, nonwhite or native

born, educated, articulate, in control of her own body and mind, and has a strong sense of agency in terms of her reproductive ability.

Western society aids in the linking of womanhood to mothering in individual lives and expectations. As Miller (2005) maintains, “the biological fact of giving birth within Western cultures simultaneously leads to a redefinition of an individual’s identity, an identity which is inextricably linked to family and motherhood – implying that a woman’s fate is tied to her biological role in reproduction” (p. 54). An understanding of this intertwinement of the biological woman and the cultural ideology of mother are grouped together by hegemonic views of western culture.

Motherhood is a role which continues to situate women in the patriarchal role of subordinate, lacking agency and the economic status and experience that a man collectively lives. Hegemonic motherhood sustains the subordination to and “under the force of hegemonic masculinity” (Arendell, 1999, p. 4). These ideologies, like all ideologies, are fluid in nature, and have the possibility to shift and change over time. Illustrations of what a “good” mother should do—stay at home with the children, devote herself to her husband, housework, and home—shift as society shifts. With public and political changes along with economic demands, concepts of motherhood do as well (Miller, 2005, p. 55).

Feminist theory requires a strong understanding of essentialist, universalizing conceptions of women. To reduce all women as biological mothers is a faulty notion, for it fails to consider, among other things, alternatives to the heteronormative script. Essentialist constructions of mothering as biologically determined are produced “in relation to patriarchy, that other feminists have argued turn mothering into such an

alienating and oppressive experience” (Rich, 1977; Oakley, 1979 as quoted by Miller, 2005, p. 56). In other words, essential motherhood “holds that all women want to be and should be mothers, so that women who are not or do not want to be mothers are deviant” (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 11). This reduction reinforces binary ways of thinking regarding women’s bodies and biological roles.

The multi-layered approach within feminist theory regarding motherhood is highly contested. Some feminist theorists argue that motherhood is an institution which serves to universalize and confine women within the bonds of patriarchy. Other feminist theorists, as briefly mentioned above, argue that the act of motherhood is biologically pre-determined and allows women agency and autonomy in this socially constructed role.

**Technological Fetishization of Motherhood.** Cooper (1995) writes in her article, “Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” that the gaze can be manifested as “patriarchal totalitarianism, into the most private of all spheres, the inner spaces of the human body” (Cooper, 1995, p. 52). Moreover, the fertile woman “conceals and denies the secret of male incapacity: ideologically constructed as one of the ‘sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices’ for Omni fertile sperm” like the “Madonna herself” (p. 53). In other words, the pregnant woman’s body acts to frame her as the Madonna while the man has the power of the Lord in the infertile flesh Cooper maintains that Margaret Atwood’s feminist novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, (Atwood, 1986) calls attention to the fact that the practice and ritual of childbirth transforms “intimate private acts into public rituals where the fertility and sexuality of women are turned into performance and spectacle” (Cooper, 1995, p. 56). Further, Cooper writes that the film version of the book cannot avoid reproducing the visual implications of the gaze, which

place the spectator as involuntary subject, where the power of the gaze “accrues to any watcher of movies sits with peculiar unease upon the optics of the viewer” even in narratives which seek to challenge such a gaze (p. 57). Cooper argues that the book has the ability to challenge the gaze while the film cannot help but reproduce its effects. This concept will be applied in this research project through textual analysis of the reality television programs’ depictions of pregnancy and the female body.

**Subjectivity, Ideology, Hegemony and Agency.** The project of cultural studies focuses on subjectivity, ideology, hegemony and agency in the effort to understand and critically examine cultural practices. Subjectivity and identity became a central area of concern in the field in the 1990s. The notion that how we describe ourselves to each other is vital in cultural practices for it allows self –expression and identity. Barker (2008) helps us to understand that cultural studies explores how we come to be, the kind of people we are, how we are produced as subjects, and, how we identify with (or emotionally invest in) descriptions of ourselves as male or female, black or white, young or old, among other aspects of identity (Barker, 2008, p. 11). Subjectivity and identity are closely connected and understood, therefore, based upon Barker’s definition of subjectivity as “the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person that is, how we are constituted as subjects (biologically and culturally) and how we experience ourselves (including what is indescribable)” (p. 215). Subjectivity can be understood as occurring in real life and real time on the individual level.

Ideology as a marker important to cultural studies also brings one to develop a working definition that operates for the purposes of this study. Athusser (1969) writes

that ideology is one of the three primary instances or levels of a social formation which can be understood as a “system within its own logic and rigor (of representations, images, myths, ideas or concepts)” (quoted by Barker, 2008, p. 63). Gramsci (1971) observes that ideology is best understood in terms of “ideas, meanings and practices which, while they purport to be universal truths, are maps of meaning that sustain powerful social groups” (quoted by Barker, 2008 p. 66).

Ideology can be best understood as something that cannot be separated from the practical activities of life for it is a material phenomenon rooted in the day to day conditions. Ideologies provide people with rulers of social practice to operate themselves. Ideologies, for the purposes of this study, is defined as those practices which maneuver themselves in real world time and places which then aid it the, creation, maintenance and execution of the greater overarching cultural images and ideas.

Hegemony, as argued by Gramsci (1971), “implies a situation where a ‘historic bloc’ of ruling class factions exercises social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes” (as quoted by Barker, 2008, p. 66). The overarching social hegemony dictates what the ruling class enacts as social authority over secondary classes. Dow (1996) writes that Gramsci found the “bourgeois domination of the thought, the common sense, the life-ways and everyday assumptions of the working class” to be an explanation of the failure of the working class movement (Dow, 1996, p. 17). Moreover, as a feminist, Dow asserts that hegemony allows for the understanding and analysis of why women have historically been the most powerful enemies of feminism (pp. 17-18). The dominant hegemonic discourse of a society allows for agenda setting and value

ranking of individuals. Thus, hegemonies within in societal discourse allow for those in power to exercise control and domination over those who are powerless.

The concept of agency within both cultural studies and feminist cultural studies will be vital for the researcher to understand throughout this study. Agency has been most commonly associated with the notions of freedom, free will, action, creativity, originality and the very possibility to change through the actions of free agents (Barker, 2008, p. 234). This concept of agency is socially produced and has the ability to make a pragmatic difference.

**Feminist Cultural Studies.** As an academic approach, cultural studies emerged in the 1950s from Great Britain to fill gaps in the study of culture at that time (Johnson, 1986-1987). Cultural studies sought to examine these gaps in terms of media by placing further value on the audience and everyday life. Cultural studies can be understood as an “intellectual and political tradition, in its relations to the academic disciplines, in terms of theoretical paradigms, or by its characteristic objects of study” (Johnson, 1986-1987, pp. 41-42). In attempting to understand everyday lives, it is very important to identify and dissect the institutions of production, the production itself, as well as the audiences consuming it.

Feminist cultural studies grew out of cultural studies and established a need for contextualizing gendered issues in society. Schwichtenberg (1989) writes that the approach traditionally focused on subjectivity, ideology and culture. Feminist studies were needed to understand the small corner of the field that was forced to battle over the meager, marginal resources provided by the academy. In so doing, a new space is created

which focus solely on feminist culture and how it relates in terms of power, hegemony and ideology within the greater cultural sphere (Schwichtenberg, 1989, p. 203). Feminist cultural studies reveal potential to resist cultural norms, and female subjectivity can be seen as opening the “question of female sexuality and its possible alternative forms of expression” (p. 204). Calling into consideration the work done by McRobbie and Radway in the 1980s, Schwichtenberg (1989) notes the importance of such study. This approach takes a closer look at mediated cultural representations of “femininity” that may inform a female unconsciousness. Schwichtenberg writes that feminist film theory has contributed to this investigation in examining female subjectivity and sexual differences among women. Critical approaches such as reading against the grain, close textual analysis, and engendering are encouraged by feminist cultural theorists to aid in the development of alternative discourses and ideologies.

As Barker (2008) notes, while “feminist thinking permeates cultural studies, not all forms of feminism are to be thought of as cultural studies” (Barker, 2008, p. 280). This distinction is important in understanding the similar areas of concern between cultural studies and feminism by drawing attention to:

[T]he aspirations of feminism and cultural studies to connect with social and political movements outside of the academy; a critical stance vis-à-vis more established disciplines such as sociology and English literature; a mutual suspicion of and challenge to the established ideas of ‘certain knowledge’s; and a wish to produce ‘knowledge’ of and by ‘marginalized’ and oppressed groups, with the avowed intention of making a political intervention. (p. 281)

In other words, cultural studies and feminism have a shared interest in interdisciplinary issues of power, representation, popular culture, subjectivities, identities and consumption.

The male gaze is a concept that began in film studies but has gained much notoriety and importance within feminist cultural studies. Before one has the ability to gaze at another, they must first be able to look. John Berger (1972) suggests such a train of thought in his text *Ways of Seeing*. Berger explains that “patriarchal society entails that a woman must be constructed as an object for the ‘look’ of the male spectator, or the male voyeur” (quoted by Walters, 1995, p. 51). Imbalances between female and male power reveal themselves by the positioning of passive and active objects. As a result of the male look and the surveyed female, objectification is laced with power, access and control. The above concepts outlined by Berger built the foundational work for feminist theories of “the gaze” as well as Marxist rethinking of popular culture and ideology (Walters, 1995, p. 52).

Laura Mulvey (1975) sought to understand why women had been placed in the passive / objectified role within film and discover why these cultural representations enable the dominance of the “male gaze.” Psychoanalytical theory was appropriated as a “political weapon” which demonstrates the “way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6). Drawing from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Mulvey means to locate the male gaze as a process of classic Hollywood narrative cinema and in the psychological phenomena of scopophilia, voyeurism, and fetishism. Scopophilia, or the love of looking, refers to the act of looking which itself is a source of pleasure, Mulvey notes that when in reverse, there is pleasure in being looked at (p. 8). Voyeurism can be understood as “a way of taking sexual pleasure by looking at rather than being close to a particular object of desire” (Walters, 1995, p. 54). Thus, facilitating sexual pleasure in seeing without being seen, while exuding power and control over the



image, much like a Peeping Tom (Mulvey, 1975, p. 9). Not only is this pleasure reflected in Hollywood, but also in the audience who is consuming the mediated images, messages and ideas on screen. Fetishism is the “endowment of some object or body part with sexual meaning” (Walters, 1995, p. 54). Mulvey (1975) draws upon Freud’s essay on fetishism, which suggests that an “erotic image of a woman can trigger the memory of the childhood process whereby the boy observes that the mother does not have a penis, thus producing a sense of horror (Walters, 1995, p. 54). Mulvey (1975) argues that fetishism derives from the disavowal and denial of that “castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (pp. 13-14).

The darkened space of the movie theater is thought to set into motion a “set of psychic responses that encourage both a voyeuristic / scopophilic attitude” (Walters, 1995, p. 56). The isolation of the spectators’ within the movie theatre by the darkness contrasted with the images on screen act, as Mulvey (1975) asserts to “promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 9). The darkened space thus creates “woman as a spectacle for male desire through the gaze of the camera,” which acts as a phallic substitute, “the gaze of the men within the narrative and the gaze of the male spectator” who is thought to be controlled by his fear of castration and consequently fetishizes the female body (Walters, 1995, p. 56). Mulvey (1975) not only assumes that the spectator is male, but also asserts that the voyeuristic male spectator is “intimately involved in helping to produce woman as object” (Walters, 1995, p. 58). Pleasure in looking has been divided between active/male and passive/female, as Mulvey (1975) notes. The male gaze then projects its “phantasy onto the female figure which is styled

accordingly” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11). The looks of the camera physically and literally gaze upon women’s bodies to create consumable, media productions for male pleasure.

Audience members are presented with the male gaze and objectification of women, and often find these images normative and commonplace. In other words, the male gaze has been deeply steeped in media representations of women to such an extreme that they go unnoticed.

Mulvey’s (1975) psychoanalytical understanding of the male gaze has generated a considerable amount of criticism and concern from scholars. Kaplan (1983) questions the way in which Mulvey’s (1975) theory can be applied to television because viewing does not take usually take place in a dark room but, rather, the viewer is often interrupted by commercials, other persons and the ability to change the channel as desired (Kaplan, 1983, p. 230). Other scholars, such as Ellis (1982), argue that the gaze is not appropriate for television analysis because the viewer is not in the same voyeuristic position as the cinema viewer “For broadcast TV, the regime of viewing is rather one of complicity with TV’s own look at the passing pageant of life” (Ellis, 1982, p. 160). The basis of psychoanalytical theory and the male gaze lies within childhood experiences and relies on biological determinism, which is contradicted by post-structuralism which asserts that gender identity is socially constructed, not innate. For the purposes of this research project, the male gaze is assumed to be a cultural construction, as consistent with the researcher’s stance rooted in feminist poststructuralism.

**Television and Reality TV.** Television functions to mediate reality in such a way that it aids in our understanding of society. John Fiske and John Hartley (1978) suggest that “Television is a human construct, and the job that it does is the result of human

choice, cultural decisions and social pressures” (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 17). Reality is both reflected within and shaped by television. Joyrich (1996) notes the television has transformed the “social, political and economic organization of our society . . . and has begun to alter out very ways of seeing and knowing” (Joyrich, 1996, p. 22). The question of what takes place when the televised “reality” we consume conflicts with individuals’ actual reality can be answered by audience analysis.

The broad genre of television I address in this study is that of reality TV. Hill (2005) points out that there is no one singular definition of reality TV, but that there are many “competing definitions of what has come to be called the reality genre” because “the reality genre is made of a number of distinctive and historically based television genres, such as lifestyle, or documentary” (Hill, 2005, p. 55). The term “Reality TV” is often used to characterize a range of popular factual programming. Simon (2005) frames reality TV as being in “opposition to the dominant entertainment model of American entertainment, which has always been based on scripts and stars” (Simon, 2005, pp. 179-180). Bignell (2004a) writes a competing, problematic definition of reality TV, which suggests the manifestation of “programs where the unscripted behavior of ‘ordinary people’ is the focus of interest” (Bignell 2004a, p. 313). This definition is challenging, for it could be interpreted in a multitude of ways, as well as creates a debate as to who is an “ordinary” person. Kilborn (1994) suggests that the term reality can be used as a catch-all phrase, as it can include:

[S]lice-of-life observational modes of documentary film making, fictional drama rooted in real-life situations’, and also infotainment . . . events in the lives of individuals or groups, the attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatised reconstruction and the incorporation

of this material.. into an attractively packaged television programme.  
(Kilborn, 1994, p. 423)

Reality TV attempts to “capture seemingly improvisational events as they are happening, situations that are unfolding in front of the camera to which the producers and participants theoretically do not know the outcome” (Simon, 2005, p. 179). Various styles and techniques are associated with this genre, such as “non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, seeing events unfold as they are happening in front of the camera” (p. 41).

Examples of this genre can be found throughout the history of television. Hill (2005) discerns four distinct waves of such programming in recent years. The first was based upon the success of “crime and emergency services” or “infotainment,” which traveled from America to Europe (and beyond) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second wave of reality programming built upon the success of “popular observational documentaries” or “docusoaps” and lifestyle programming which involved home and garden makeovers and traveled from Britain to Europe (and beyond) in the mid-to-late 1990s. The third wave focused on “social experiments” which placed ordinary people in “controlled environments over an extended period of time” or “reality game shows” which traveled from Northern Europe to Britain, America and the rest of the world during the 2000s. The fourth and current wave of reality TV is described as a “free-for-all, with America leading the way” with “crime and relationship reality programming” (Hill, 2005, p. 24). For the moment, Britain and Australia are moving ahead with lifestyle and social experiment reality shows and Northern Europe is working to develop variations of the reality game show (p. 24).

**Gender Formations.** To begin this discussion, a working definition and understanding of gender is significant. Challenges to the link between biological sex, gender norms and sexuality have been made over the past thirty years by feminist and other researchers (Swenson, 2009). Through “postmodern conceptualizations” the “flexibility and freedom of categories like ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’” have separated biological sex from gender norms (Swenson, 2009, p.38). As previously mentioned, poststructuralism rejects biological determinism, which suggests that there is an “essential core ‘natural’ to us” (Alcoff, 1988, p. 415). In other words, we as persons are constructed by our individual experiences and subjectivity grounded in social discourse which is beyond individual control (p. 416).

Judith Butler (2006) argues that gender is a culturally constructed: “[T]here is not to be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (Butler, 2006, p. 357). The production of gender within socialization is determined by trial and error. Through the act of repetition, subjectivity and identity are determined. Butler points out that the “subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition” (p. 359). The repetitious performance of passing and failing at gender determines one’s subjectivity and agency. This results in fluidity of gender norms and biological sex which have the ability to “proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulatable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binaries of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness” (p. 361).

Weedon (1997) describes gender as a “socially produced” and “historically changing aspect of identity that is shaped by cultural and institutional discourse within a society,” which allows for the creation of deeply held ideologies about feminine and masculine behavior (quoted by Swenson, 2009, p. 38). This process begins at an early age: “As children we learn what girls and boys should be and later, what to what women and men should be” from social institutions, such as “the family, schools, colleges, teenage fashion, pop culture, the church and worlds of work and leisure” (Weedon, 1997, p. 3, as quoted by Swenson, 2009, p. 38). Sociologist theorist Acker (1992) identifies that social structures that differentiate between women and men are locations in which over the course of time gender is assigned (Acker, 1992, p. 567). Gendered institutions, places where gender is prevalent in the “processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distribution of power” are found in various sectors of social life (p. 567). Most societal institutions have historically been developed by men, are presently dominated by men and are interpreted from men’s standpoint in contemporary times while defining themselves with the absence of women. The family is the only institution, Acker argues, in which women have held a central, although subordinating defining role. In our society, the divide between these institutions lies in a separation between “reproduction” and “production” which have been interpreted in many ways (p. 567). Acker uses these terms to refer to the division of biological reproduction and production of material goods in capitalist societies. Gendered processes decide and produce hierarchies based on gender which control, segregate, exclude and construct hegemonies have different practices (p. 568). Some are overtly conscious and seek to exclude women or minorities or, if

including them, place them in gender segregated roles. Some have supposedly little to do with gender.

*Gender Hegemonies.* Ridgeway and Correll (2000) write that the gender system in society uses cultural beliefs to find cues used to classify people as male or female based upon behaviors and traits. Once this classification has taken place, the expectation is for them to perform as gendered beings (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000, p. 110). Gender beliefs or the dominant hegemonic form of gender are institutionalized in the United States through the assumptions underlying governmental politics, in media representations and cultural spaces in society (p. 113). Ridgeway and Correll write that “the descriptions of ‘men’ and ‘women’ in these beliefs, while presented as universal, are in fact about white middle-class heterosexual men and women” (p. 113). These socially enforced beliefs are enforced for all persons regardless of whether or not they identify with alternative gender beliefs themselves, or do not fit into the white, middle-class, heterosexual boxes created by hegemonies and “must know and respond to dominant gender beliefs” (p. 113). Therefore, expectations of others are the most powerful in shaping ones sense of self. It is vital that people are conscious that others will treat “them according to the society’s hegemonic gender beliefs” (p. 113). This reality is one which makes the individual suppress her/his own behaviors (p. 113). Contemporary North American gender beliefs evaluate men as more competent at tasks, including ones which requires “masculine” behaviors, and as generally more competent at most than things than are women (p.113). The overarching notion is that the gender system relies on cultural presumptions of men’s greater “over all competence that is contained widely held gender beliefs” (p. 119).

In a later article written by Ridgeway and Correll (2004), hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender and their effects in “social relational contexts” comprise the central components which support and change the gender system (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 511). These widely held cultural beliefs act as rules or guidelines for societal structures of difference and equality in which we find gender. Gender rules, unlike other social differences, are carried through all aspects of daily life, including the home, because “people are more likely to have relative and share a household with adults or children of the opposite sex” (p. 512). Division of labor within the household based upon sex segregation of jobs or found within gendered differences in status and authority are unwavering in the gender system (p. 512). Contemporary gender stereotyping that describes women as being collective in nature and men as producers and products of social system in which they are viewed to be influential (p. 513). Hegemonic gender beliefs are often found in structures that have private and public spaces, such as the nuclear family (p. 517). Repeated reinforcements become the default beliefs of individuals who do not have precise gender beliefs formed. In other words, the nuclear family acts as a location for the reinforcement and establishment of hegemonic gendered practices in children who may be uncertain about their own beliefs (p. 517). These gender beliefs, practices or roles shape behavior, traits and characteristics that exist to separate men from women.

***Gender and TV.*** The female audience has been, as Joyrich (1996) argues, “feminized,” and this is not a natural occurrence but a socially constituted one which is “beneficial to the dominant socio-economic structures of the United States in general and the TV industry specifically” (Joyrich, 1996, p. 39). This medium, which is seen as



“feminine,” is directly tied to consumerism. Television texts are consumed themselves, while the audience is encouraged to consume the products and lifestyles advertised. Consequently, “the “feminization” of the TV viewer relates to women’s role as primary consumer in our society as much (or more so) as it is derived from the particular dynamics of television spectatorship,” reinforcing gendered ideologies present within society (p. 40). Women as spectators has been a historically and “culturally sanctioned position for female views,” which is limited even though “alterative constructions of pleasure are certainly possible” (p. 62).

Representations of women in reality TV are manifested in a multitude of ways. The dating program *Blind Date*, operated to subjugate women’s bodies to spheres of sexualized fantasy (DeRose, Fursich, & Haskins, 2003). Makeover television programs such as *Extreme Makeover*, *The Biggest Loser*, *The Swan*, and *I want a Famous Face* transform the body by means of cosmetic surgery or strict self-discipline (Heller, 2007, p. 2).

Springer (2007) calls attention to the two dimensional representation of women of color on reality TV. Negative representations of minorities on reality TV reinforce stereotypical images of the “diva” and the “angry black women” as illustrated in Donald Trump’s reality series *The Apprentice*. Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth became the “most infamous black woman on television” by epitomizing “the angry black woman, the evil black bitch, and every other variation on that particular racist and sexist theme” (Springer, 2007, pp. 262 - 263). After Manigault-Stallworth was “fired” by Trump, “she was (and continues to be) vilified as difficult, lazy, obstructive, manipulative, and

unnecessarily hostile to her fellow contestants” (p. 263). Springer notes that Manigault-Stallworth:

[C]onfounded reality TV’s visual codes for women in general and for black women specifically. She’s beautiful, but beautiful women are supposed to be dumb. For a man, a take-no-prisoners attitude in business would usually just be the thing he needs to succeed in the cutthroat corporate world, but a black woman with attitude has no place in Trump’s or any other white-dominated institution. Bother her supposed attitude and her uncompromising nature canceled out any black lady or modern mammy roles she might have assumed. (p. 263)

Reality TV creates gendered dramatic representations which allow the viewer the ability to “measure himself or herself against the person seen on the screen and experience a closeness or distance from that person” (Bignell, 2005, p. 100). The discourses surrounding gender can be understood as:

[D]isciplinary practices of enacting and reenacting of gender norms regulate the body until its gestures, postures and movements are recognizably feminine or masculine. Discourse gains power through its ability to repeat or reiterate an idea until it seems natural and normal (Swenson, 2009, p. 39)

The role of reality TV in creation of gendered discourse is briefly illustrated above, and has the ability to gain power through repetition within this televised format.

**Families and Culture.** To begin by historicizing the role of the family in society, Anna Arroba (1996) writes that the category of family is not one which is universal; there have always been families. Familial origin studies have primarily been studied from a Eurocentric and historical perspective which places emphasis on the “‘natural’, hierarchically-ordered human organization, as if people naturally and automatically join together under the protection of their father, and nurturance of their mother” (Arroba, 1996, pp. 8-9). Gerda Lerner (1986) writes in her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, that the patriarchal system did not occur with one single event but, rather, as a process

developing over a period of nearly 2500 years (Lerner, 1986, p. 8). With this social construct came the establishment of the patriarchal family, which both “expressed and constantly generated social rules and values” (Arroba, 1996, p. 9) such as female subordination and male dominance within the family became institutionalized and codified in law (Lerner, 1986, p. 9). Multiple scholars from history, anthropology, theology and archeology have all concluded that “patriarchy replaced a system of family organization based on the care of mothers for children, and on the leadership of women, in most communities” (Arroba, 1996, p. 9). The subordination of women in family groups as well as the “reality of man’s control over women’s reproductive capacity underpins our ideas of the male-headed family” (p. 10) and frames patriarchal dominance in the family through various forms. Maria Mies (1986) “maintains that capitalism created the modern notion of the nuclear family first among the propertied classes, and later in the working class” by situating the family as private territory in contrast to the public sphere of economic and political activity (Miles, 1986, as quoted by Arroba, 1996, p. 11). The westernized model of the family, that of “Christian, nuclear, middle-class, with an employed father and housewife, has been a “prescriptive concept,” and remains central in many governmental policies and welfare programs (Arroba, 1996, p. 11). In summation of Arroba’s article, the family is “embedded in society, and mirrors social, political, economic and cultural changes” (p. 11) and operates as the “principal pillar of patriarchy” in contemporary society.

Family is classically defined as a “group of individuals descended from a common ancestry” on the other hand, family circles are “close group relations of a household” (Brooks, 2005, p. 9). Both of these definitions provide similarities in placing

individuals in groups, setting themselves apart of the individual. Shaping what a family “is or should be, how it is to be constituted, and who has the power to determine this” has become a highly debated issue within American culture (Joyrich, 1996, p. 99).

The white nuclear family existence is flourishing as an idealistic “symbol, discourse and powerful myth within the collective imagination” (Chambers, 2001, p. 1) The nuclear family acts as a “regulatory force that impacts on our lives at a very personal level,” by structuring our “emotions, modes of official knowledge, bodies, identities and definitions of public and private cultural space” (p. 1). Within western nations, the familial ideology is mobilized inside “government attempts to control people’s lives through state welfare policies that echo the strategies of the early twentieth century” (p. 142). The reinforcement of family values is coded with nuclear values. The rhetoric utilized by politicians to win votes on the public stage anchors debates invested with “meanings about nation, nationhood, nationality and race” (p. 5). The direct link between nation and family reflects a profound interest in maintaining this mythos.

Stephanie Coontz (1992) writes that conservative pockets of society urging a re-birth of ‘traditional family values’ are clouded with romanticized notions of the American family (Coontz, 1992, p. 10). She points out that throughout American history, the family unit has peaked and flowed in terms of values and morality (p. 10). An idealized image of a traditional family as suggested by Coontz could potentially be found within the Victorian family of the 1830s and 1840s (p. 10). Divisions of labor both in and out of the home were shifting as women’s roles were redefined “in terms of domesticity rather than production” and “men were labeled ‘breadwinners’, children were said to need time to play, and gentle maternal guidance supplanted the patriarchal authoritarianism of the

past” (pp. 10-11). Social struggles of the time such as poverty, slavery and the changing work force of the country carried a shift within the home, as domestic labors; servants and slaves were hired freeing mothers time to be reallocated to childrearing (p. 11). Nostalgic imagery of a perfect home with a stay at home mother and employed father permeates the societal imagination as traditional and historic. Yet, as Coontz argues, it “denies the diversity of family life, both past and present, and leads to false generalizations about the past as well as widely exaggerated claims about the present and the future” (p. 14).

***Families and Television.*** Television researchers have long sought to understand the private social realities of family use at home (See Lull, 1980; Hoover, Clark & Alters, 2003). Representations of families on television have become a dominant “theme and the typical mode of address, and thus, television’s construction of family dynamics as well as its place within them are significant for any analysis of our society’s ‘domestic policies’” (Joyrich, 1996, p. 101). In our culture, television operates as a member of the family as well as a tool used to define thoughts of domestic organization and household authority (p. 101). Cultural studies views representations of the family as “cultural constructions and not simply as direct reflections of the real world,” understanding that variations of meaning are dependent upon “narratives, groups of images and discourses” (Chambers, 2001, p. 25).

Depictions of American families on television began in the 1940s with programs such as: *Mama*, *One Man’s Family*, *The Life of Riley* and *The Goldbergs*. As society progressed, so did the shows. By the 1950s, *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*

provided audiences with idealized versions of the suburban, white middle class experience (Brooks, 2005, p. 3). The cultural upheaval of the 1960s combined with major changes in the family unit prompted programs such as *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family* to showcase divorced parents and single mothers (p. 4). With the advent of cable in the 1980s, programs such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest* and *Knots Landing* “presented a world with high fashion, finance, and lower moral fiber” (p. 5). Maternal advancements were in high fashion as well, illustrated by *The Cosby Show*, *Growing Pains* and *Family Ties*, which portrayed mothers in conventional roles as well as super heroine personas (p. 5). Representations of American families reached new heights in the 1990s with shows such as *The Sopranos*, *Grace Under Fire*, *Full House* and *The Golden Girls*, which provided the audience with a plethora of families to find a sense of belonging (p. 6).

With the new millennium, reality television families re-entered the scene. This trend in the U.S. started with the 1973 series, *An American Family*, which was shown weekly on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). This candidly shot documentary chronicled seven months in the lives of the Loud family, including the divorce proceedings of the parents (Pat and Bill) as well as the “New York lifestyle of their gay son” (Ruoff, 2002, p. xi). Twelve episodes long, shown with no commercials, prizes or added extras, the PBS documentary portrayed American white, middle class life. *An American family* “had no host, no interviews, and no voice-over narration” (p. xi). The presence of camera in the home blurred the lines between “public and private, reality and spectacle, serial narrative and nonfiction, a documentary and fiction, film and television” (p. xi). This documentary paved a new path for nonfiction programming in society,

asking audiences to “think seriously about family, marital relations, sexuality, and affluence” (p. xii). The series transformed representations of family life on American TV by introducing a “new authenticity and diversity to fiction and nonfiction programs” (p. xii).

Contemporary illustrations of the American family were found in *The Osbournes*, which presented itself as a reality TV sitcom, sharing a “cynical and dysfunctional view of modern family life; a self-conscious denial of the optimism and mutual appreciation with fifties sitcoms” (Pieto and Otter, p. 2).

Primetime reality TV focuses itself on the diagnosis and repair of lifestyle problems within the family and domestic sphere. This area of media concern emerged simultaneously with the American government’s official promotion of the two parent heterosexual family as a strategy to empower low income families (Ouellette and Hay, 2008, p. 92). Former president, George W. Bush is noted for stating: “Stable families should be the central goal of the American welfare policy” (p. 92). The promotion of stable, functioning families by reality TV is accomplished by mediated “regimens, skills, and rules related to household organization, cleanliness, time management and parenting” (p. 92). Programs such as *Wife Swap* and *Supernanny* are used as resources for “saving” the modern family, and are tied to the Bush administration’s “moralization of governing through the promotion of traditional family values and faith-based social authorities” (p. 93). As cultural conceptions of family shift and change as society does, so do the programs set forth by televised media.

**Religious Faith.** Sociologists contend that religion is an integrative force within society (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 810). Durkheim ([1897] 1951) postulates that

religion encourages a set of shared values, interactions and social bonds which act to protect individuals from instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values (Durkheim, [1897] 1951).

***Religion, Society and Family.*** The doctrine and messages from Judeo-Christian religious institutions, along with “formal social support systems and family activities” and “informal social networks formed in religious circles” act as venues for socialization for many family related values and behaviors (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 810). Values and beliefs focused upon family related issues differ based upon religious theologies and levels of religious participation and commitment (D’Antonio, Newman, and Wright, 1982). The impact of religion upon familial relationships, and the relationship between a mother and her child is an area of concern for this research project. Pearce and Axinn (1998) write that shared Judeo-Christian beliefs within the familial structure should lead to more cohesive relationships because “these religions draw people together and explicitly promote strong family ties” (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 810). Religious participation is associated with “a strong bond between as husband and wife” while maintaining unity in marriage and other family relationships (p. 810). Pearce and Axinn study investigates the relationship between family religious faith and the quality of mother-child relationships (p. 811). Religious institutions use three mechanisms to strengthen relationships between family members, firstly “the idea that positive relationships among family members are desirable” as encouraged by the Judeo-Christian doctrine and the Bible (p. 811). Secondly, the formal support offered from religious institutions for families promote “interaction and positive relationships among family members” (p. 812) activities such as bible study, workshops, and retreats provide families



with time and space to discuss religious teachings, opening lines of communication between parents and children (p. 812). The third mechanism involves religion's role in the creation of "closure in social ties by linking friends and family members in the same social group," allowing for a shared set of social ties with other members of their religious faith (p. 812). Coleman (1988) argues that this type of closure within social networks allows for strength in the parent-child relationship as well the familial relationships (Coleman, 1988). Parents and children involved in closed religious social networks where emphasis is placed upon "good" parents and children are "more likely to gain affirmation from peers on the quality of the parent-child relationship, therefore increasing an individual's confidence in his or her role as a 'good' parent or a 'good' child" (Ellison and George, 1994 as quoted by Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 812). The concept of an individual's religiosity, or the "extent and nature of their participation in institutions of religion" is a "multidimensional phenomenon with both private and public modes" (p. 812). The amount of importance that individuals put on their religious faith is another dimension of religiosity.

Pearce and Axinn (1998) suggest that pro-family messages that emphasize positive parent-child relationships are omnipresent in the Judeo-Christian doctrine, and that individuals who greatly value religion are inclined to use these messages to guide their social relationships (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 813).

Focusing on sentimental aspects of the mother-child relationship, Pearce and Axinn (1998) explore determinates of "affection, sentiment, enjoyment, and understanding" (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 813).with five hypotheses tying these dimensions of religiosity to mother-child relationships. Hypotheses 1 states that

“mothers who attend religious services frequently have significantly more positive relationships with their sons and daughters” (p. 813) because of the promotion of positive familial relationships. Hypothesis 2 suggests that “mothers who place a high importance on religion have significantly more positive relationships with their children” (p. 813) independent from attendance at religious services, religion remains very important for the Mother. Hypothesis 3 suggests that “mothers who experience increasing religiosity over time have more positive relationships with their sons and daughters than do mothers who experience decreasing religiosity” (p. 813) as a result of increased exposure to religious institutions mechanisms which seek to encourage positive family relationships. The fourth hypothesis that “Families with multiple members who have high religiosity are characterized by more positive mother-child relationships” (p. 813) as a result of pro-family religious messages and associations of multiple family members participation in religious activities is likely to increase positive relations. The last hypothesis posits that “mother-child dyads characterized by high congruence in religiosity have more positive mother-child relationships” (p. 813) because religiosity establishes agreed upon values between family members and are enhanced when the mother and child share the same religious faith. The study’s findings support all five of Pearce and Axinn’s hypotheses (pp. 818-824). The results suggest that “religiosity has a much stronger impact on parenting and intergenerational relationships than does religious affiliation in the United States today” (p. 824). Differences in religious affiliation were found to have little impact upon the quality of mother-child relationships from either point of view. Exposure to religious themes such as “tolerance, patience, and unconditional love” via attendance at religious services or social interactions provides parents and children with the tools

needed to improve their relationships (p. 824). Religious activities and teachings are internalized within individual's lives and relationships, finding that when mothers and children share religiosity, their relationships are stronger than those whose religious faith base differs (p. 826). In sum, the affective qualities of the mother-child relationships have strong consequences for other dimensions of their relationship and long term well being (p. 826).

***Feminist Views on Religion.*** Feminist viewpoints on religious faith and hegemonic ideas of motherhood address the problem of gender essentialism. Abraham (2009) writes “the problem of essentialism has been identified as the locus of various hegemonic and ideological controls of women” while noting that “some feminists writing in the study of theology and religion strategically retrieve modes of essentialism to combat the ideological representations of masculine superiority” (Abraham, 2009, p. 156). Reliance on biological sexualities requires essentialism to view gender identity as a sacramental potential and “women have a theologically legitimate way to speak of themselves and infused with the divine” (p. 156). Catholic theology relies upon binary understandings of male/female in order to achieve hegemonically inherent domination/subordination relationships (p. 157).

Fiorenza's (2005) article on nationalism argues that nationalist discourses utilize religion and women as identity and boundary markers through liberal and conservative political discourses (Fiorenza, 2005, p. 112). Nationalist religious movements are, as argued by Fiorenza, political movements that use cultural and religious traditions as mechanisms to guard their borders. The use of gendered symbols to control the well

being of “wo/men” and the “heterosexual patriarchal family, appeals to religious scriptures and laws, specific cultural codes of dress and behavior” which become central to the “maintenance of traditional values and the construction of national identity” (p. 112). In other words, identity is rhetorically constructed and articulated by hegemonic constructions and control of wo/men. Noting that critical feminist scholarship has revealed that contemporary “religion has been conceptualized as belonging to the private, feminine, emotional, aesthetic sphere over and against which the public, rational, culturally authoritative, masculine sphere of progress, rationality, subjectivity, and modernity has been defined” (p. 113). Postmodernity acknowledges that religion in the form of fundamentalism has achieved a central location on the public stage and is used in conjunction with nationalism to legitimate war and sexual control over wo/men (p. 113).

Fiorenza (2005) defines *kyriarchal* to denote “emperor, lord, slave-master, father, elite male domination” as a category to articulate the “intersecting structures of domination: gender, race, class, and imperialism/colonialism” (Fiorenza, 2005, p. 111). Analysis of kyriarchal rhetorical strategies of the pro-life moment in the United States by Mason (2002) argues that the white heterosexual Christian male hero defines the pro-life ideology (Mason, 2002, p. 190). In other words, the New Right’s kyriarchal rhetoric has influenced the construction of public discourse focused on wo/man’s rights, physical bodies and families in such a way that links anti-abortion and pro-family discourse in American society (Fiorenza, 2005, p. 117).

Right-wing and nationalist discourses that seek to emphasize essentialist, hegemonic views of femininity, womanhood, and motherhood are, as argued by Abraham (2009) found in Mother’s day celebrations (Abraham, 2009, p. 158). The origins of

Mother's day in America communicate the "congruence of nationalism, militarism, capitalism, Christian fundamentalism and idealized femininity" (p. 159). Although the holiday is linked with the American suffrage movement, it is contemporarily mobilized "in the service of U.S. nationalism" (p. 159). Historically, Mother's Day was organized to promote peace from war and has since been distorted into a "commercialized, secularized, sentimentalized, and romanticized celebration" in conjunction with nationalist and militarist programs found in contemporary society (p. 159). Upon association with patriotic ideals, the holiday began to work within the "oppressive sex/gender kyriarchal formation of present – day U.S. nationalism" (p. 159). Essentialist models of femininity are easily co-opted by the Right wing for nationalist goals and values. Catholic feminist theology's attempt to reclaim motherhood will have to, as argued by Abraham, examine more than biological experiences and center attention on motherhood's intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality (p. 161).

***Pronatalist Ideology.*** Generally, pronatalist ideology "reflects the social, political, and moral values, attitudes, outlooks, and beliefs that shape society's interpretation of women's and men's social roles regarding parenthood" (Parry, 2005, p. 338). Pronatalist ideology says that a woman's social value is linked to her ability to produce biological children (Morell, 2000, p. 315), perpetuating the belief that biological motherhood is "the most valued path toward parenthood for women" (Parry, 2005, p. 337). "New pronatalism" began to grow within American and western societies three decades ago with second wave feminism, which had criticized motherhood as a site of patriarchal control in women's lives (May, 1995). Appearing in popular culture, images and discourses concerned with babies, children and motherhood saturated the market, and

reinforced to women that they are valued most for their ability to conceive and bear children as a cultural rite of passage into “true womanhood” (Morell, 2000). Religious movements emphasized hegemonic gender roles and superiority of the husband’s leadership and the wife’s role as mother and follower in marriage. This carries a fair amount of racially biased content, attacking middle and upper middle class white women who had chosen to remain childless or postpone childbearing while scrutinizing women of color that are single parents (May, 1995).

Jennings (2010) notes that pronatalist ideology “infuses medical practice and saturates the marketing of infertility services aimed at white, middle class, married women” while keeping mothering as a central figure in the identity of normative families (Jennings, 2010, p. 217). Pronatalist ideologies tend to intentionally surround childless women in most cultures and settings, challenging their decision not to go down the path of motherhood (Morell, 2000, p. 318). Parry (2005) studied how women with infertility experience are affected by pronatalist hegemonies. Her findings indicate that the majority of participants were aware, as women, that “social status and worth was linked to their ability to achieve biological motherhood” (Parry, 2005, p. 341). Noting that for many of the women studied, pronatalist ideology was cultivated within society in two ways, firstly perceived insensitive comments and questions from others related to their infertility complications. Secondly, many women received unwelcome advice about methodologies for conception rooted in hegemonic notions (p. 341). Parry’s findings suggest that for the women battling infertility and pronatalism inundated themselves in work, leisure and support groups that demonstrated their “self-worth outside of motherhood and gained support, which enabled them to bugger the impact of being women with infertility in a

protnatalist ideology” (p. 345). Parry highlights leisure choices as a possible method of resistance to the pronatalist hegemonies in society (p. 346).

Extending upon pronatalist ideology, the anti-contraception movement is identified as the ‘Quiverfull’ belief system. Katheryn Joyce (2009) writes that this belief system teaches that women should accept every child as an “unconditional blessing and that family planning is immoral” (Joyce, 2009, p. x). Fundamentalist Christianity embraces an old ideal of womanhood which Joyce describes as:

The ‘biblical’ woman wears modest, feminine dress and avoids not only sex but also dating before marriage. She doesn’t speak in church or try to have authority over men. She doesn’t work outside the home, but within it she is its tireless center: homeschooling her children, keeping house, cooking bulk meals, and helping her husband run a home business or ministry. She checks in with her husband as she moves through her day to see if she is fulfilling his priorities for her. When he comes home, she is a submissive wife who bolsters him in his role as spiritually and earthly leader of the family. She understands it’s her job to keep him sexually satisfied at all times and that it’s her calling as woman to let those relations result in as many children as God wants to bless her with. She raises families of eight, ten, and twelve children, and she teaches her daughters to do the same. She’s not the throwback to the fifties summoned in media-stoked ‘mommy wars’; she is a return to something far older. (p. ix)

As Joyce (2005) demonstrates, the Quiverfull women follows a standard of ‘biblical womanhood’ that is being taught through the Christian patriarchy movement. Taking their name from Psalm 127: “Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born into one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate” (p. 134).

In sum, the Quiverfull movement does not allow for any form of birth control, encourages parents to have as many children as possible, to home school their families and attend fundamentalist churches all while following biblical guidelines of patriarchy.

*Religion, Hegemony, Infertility and Motherhood.* The relationship between medical discourses to facilitate infertile women to utilize reproductive technologies as a means to establish a ‘normative’ family has generated a large body of work within feminist scholarship (Jennings, 2010). The role of religious faith in reproductive technologies is absent from this body of scholarship, Jennings article explores how infertile women draw upon religion to make use of these technologies as a means to establish families. Feminist scholarship exposes that dominant medical discourse encourages women to utilize reproductive technologies as a way to partake in hegemonic family customs (Jennings, 2010, p. 216). Social institutions like religion, the family and medicine support the formation of normative families, while at times promoting wide-ranging ideas on the correct path for infertile couples. Families act as conduits for hegemonic customs and ideas surrounding motherhood. Jennings’s study explores how women’s experiences with traditional families affected their response to infertility and instances where women drew upon religious faith to respond to their diagnosis (p. 216). Religious discourses reinforce a yearning to engage in traditional family customs even when the women used reproductive technologies. Feminist scholarship on infertility and reproductive technology argues that “patriarchal control of women’s reproductive bodies achieves the traditional heteronormative, child-centered family form – a form that secures male privilege” (pp. 216-217).

Reproductive technologies are marketed as avenues for reproductive choice; feminists argue that these technologies narrow choice by discouraging alternatives like child-free living and adoption (See: Bartholet, 1992, 1993; Inhorn and Van Balen, 2002; Becker, 2000). Studies that focus on intuitional responses to infertility have been



criticized for overlooking female agency and depicting women's reproductive experiences as determined by dominant medical practices (see Donchin, 1996; Thompson, 2002). As a result, micro-level studies located in social psychology or post-structuralism bring feminist perspectives to the discussion by examining women's responses to infertility "and the role that women play in reproducing and/or resisting dominant constructions of maternal desire and infertility" (Jennings, 2010, p. 217).

Micro-level studies present a reevaluation of dominant reproductive practices as well as appealing to a desire to restore hegemonic social order by using reproductive technologies. Franklin's (1998) micro-level approach of choice highlights the interplay between dominant medical practices and the "production and/or reproduction of maternal desire among a group of women undergoing in vitro fertilization (IVF)" (quoted by Jennings, 2010, p. 217). Franklin (1998) reveals that reproductive technologies tend to stir up a woman's desire for children after being diagnosed with infertility. These technologies make it challenging for women to accept their infertility in the first place; compelling them to "try" which ultimately produced a deeper sense of desperateness for a child than existed prior to treatment (quoted by Jennings, 2010, p. 112)

This 'crisis' of infertility forces women to reconsider the use of reproductive technologies and when treatments fail a barrier is foraged between themselves and a successful performance of gender. Becker (2000) writes that treatment failures forced women and men to reflect upon "cultural ideas of womanhood and manhood" (Becker, 2000, p. 238). Overall, Becker found that for some women, as well as men, the 'crisis' of infertility can result in a reassessment of hegemonic gender and reproductive norms.

Religious opposition to reproductive technologies locates a danger to gender equality because these technologies allow women to delay childbearing for the pursuit of educational and career goals (Jennings, 2010, p. 218). Jennings' ethnography is centered on data collected through participant observations at support group meetings for RESOLVE, a national consumer advocacy group whose mission is to provide educational and emotional support to infertile couples (p. 219). The study's findings draw attention to early socialization experiences which formed women's desire to participate in hegemonic institutions such as marriage and motherhood and that infertility interrupted the 'life plan' of the women studied (p. 222). Religious faith was found to make several of the participants in the study feel out of place as a result of their infertility. Social pressures and involvement in religious activities reinforced the participants desire to become mothers (pp. 244-255). Other participants relied on faith and prayer for emotional support while undergoing medical treatment (p. 226). When treatment fails, some women turned to adoption while striving to estimate the family they would have had if they had not been diagnosed infertile. Jennings' found that race and class shaped how the women imagined their future family, most wanted to only adopt a healthy white infant (p. 231). As a result of the economic costs of fertility treatments, mostly privileged women and couples are able to pursue this possibility (p. 233). Religion shapes women's experiences of and responses to infertility suggesting that the complexities of faith affect the decision making process. Jennings' found that most of the participants relied upon religious faith as well as reproductive technologies to achieve their motherhood goals (p. 234). Adoption, which exists as a religiously sanctioned alternative to reproductive technologies was only turned to by the women in the study after treatments failed.

Hegemonic constructions of pregnancy, motherhood and the birth as the foundation of the mother-infant bond remained central to women's decision to attempt infertility treatments before seeking an adopted child (p. 234).

***Religion and Television.*** Representations of religion in television have sparked much debate within academic and religious circles. Joan Brown Campbell, head of the National Council of Churches, thinks that more dialogue needs to exist between television media and organized religion (Campbell, 1997). Donald Wildmon, the Christian leader of the conservative American Family Association, contends that religion is rarely portrayed on television and that when it is it is often presented as a negative and destructive force (Wildmon, 1997).

Academics such as Miles' (1997) argue that religious faith should be depicted more on primetime fiction television as part of the characters' everyday lives. By doing so, television will gain the ability to represent American religion as diverse, complex and in need of critical examination. Miles notes that "Christian" has become synonymous with the Christian right in American society (Miles, 1997, p. 42). Moreover, she notes that Christianity "receives most of the prime time cultural space devoted to religion," possibly because the "Christian right has been the most active of any religious group in protesting television's representation of religion" and because of the "numerical dominance of conservative Christianity" (p. 43).

Sociologist Michael Suman (1997) points out that "American discomfort with too much religion in the public square is rooted in historical realities" such as the pluralistic nature of the religious landscape and the religious intolerance and bigotry throughout

history (Suman, 1997, p. 70). As a result of this troubled past, the limited extent to which religion has entered fiction television has been a wise decision.

Allen (1998) maintains that religious themed, primetime television of the late 1990s didn't adequately represent religious diversity in American culture. Portrayals of "feel good Christianity on broadcast TV and conservative Christianity on cable" are illustrations of Christian dominance in the American media (Allen, 1998, p. 3). The appearance of American society as a mostly Christian nation based upon recurrent messages that the majority of persons on television are Christian's acts to marginalize and ignore other forms of worship (Engstrom and Semic, 2003, p. 147). The construction and existence of mediated messages by the producers of American media adhere to hegemonic guidelines as a means to enforce dominant ideologies (p. 147).

Media scholars examine the treatment of religion in prime time programming in general (Johnson, 2000), on particular shows such as Moore's (1996) analysis of religious themes in an episode of CBS's *Picket Fences*, as well as on audience analysis of religious images in MTV music videos (McKee & Pardun, 1999) (Engstrom and Semic, 2003, p. 146).

Engstrom and Semic's (2003) study of the portrayal of religion in reality TV focused on TLC's *A Wedding Story* found religious depictions most often reflect the religious profile of the United States (Engstrom and Semic, 2003, p. 157). Representation of non-Christian religious institutions were found to be lacking, suggesting that reality TV has the power to educate its audience: "[W]hether or not viewers may hold any religious beliefs or want to see religious portrayals in television programming, this particular medium holds the ability to educate audience about different religions

practiced in reality” (p. 159). When media outlets fail to address religious issues or particular religions, audience members are presented with generic treatments of faith which pose very little threat or controversy to specific religious beliefs (p. 146). Cultural hegemonies surrounding weddings perpetuate a patriarchal social system which endorses conspicuous consumption (p. 149). The study’s findings support Miles’ (1997) assertion that when prime-time TV devotes time and attention to religion, conservative Christianity is portrayed as the dominant religious hegemony (Miles, 1997).

## **Research Procedures and Methodology**

### **Overall Framework**

This study uses an interdisciplinary approach grounded in feminist media and cultural studies to critique reality TV. As noted above in the literature review, this research draws upon several disciplines, theories, and frameworks, in order to fully determine the social and cultural meanings of multiple birth reality television shows. This interdisciplinary approach also requires a multi-methodological approach.

Feminist techniques influence the gathering of data for analysis. This is accomplished by adopting a perspective consistent with a critical approach. In other words, this study is in tune to perceive hegemonic messages of motherhood, family, gender roles and religious faiths within the media texts, discourses, and audience interpretations. This point of view has been generated by many hours of reading texts concerned with feminist motherhood, multiple birth families, reality television, current event articles and journal articles and publications directly dealing with feminist critiques of television, its audiences, and American families.

As encouraged by the theories and concepts outlined in the literature review, the researcher seeks to understand and answer the research questions posed for this study. I have been guided by the practices and techniques of scholars of media analysis (Andrejevic, 2003; Staiger, 2005; Swenson, 2009, Bondebjerg 1996), as well as those who lean towards a more inclusive method—a combination of textual, meta-textual and virtual audience ethnography (see Hine, 2000; Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002; Hagan and Wasko 2000; Moores, 1993; Cruz & Lewis, 1994). Guided by Walters (1995) who urges intertextual, contextual critics to redefine what we mean by “‘audience’ and what we mean by ‘empirical research’” by continuing to push the boundaries of study while “always maintaining a firm commitment to asking fundamentally *feminist* questions of cultural processes” (Walters, 1995, emphasis original, p. 159). Thus, as Walters suggests, extending the field of cultural studies to included meta-texts, intertexts and audiences is of the essence in the growth and progression of scholarship. Douglas Kellner (2003) attempts to justify multiperspectival work within critical/cultural studies of media. He writes that a threefold approach to the task of analysis is recommended. First is to discuss the production and political economy of the text. Second is an engagement with and analysis of the text. Third is focusing on the consumption of and reception of media audiences (p. 12). For the purposes of this research project, a multiperspectival approach, hybridic in nature, emphasizes textual and audience analysis

**Foundations of Textual Analyses.** The first section of this research project is concerned with the media product itself—an analysis which involves examining the discourses, visual imagery, and narrative components of the texts. This is a qualitative analysis, paying close attention to detailed, descriptive data (see, for examples, Swenson,

2009; Bondebjerg 1996; Glascock and Ruggiero, 2004). Completing a close textual reading of these programs, I frame these texts as narratives, understating a narrative to be an ordered, sequential account that claims to be a record of events which is presented in a media format (Barker, 2008, p. 35). Textual analysis is predicated upon the viewing, note taking and interpretations of the television episodes from both of these series. It is important to understand that a level of serialization takes place in both programs. This is to be followed by a succinct meta-textual analysis that will place importance on books, articles, and television programming stemming from the original texts themselves.

Specific theories and ideas presented in the literature review, such as motherhood in feminist theory (DiQuinzio, 1990), and the theoretical framework of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), are used to complete the textual analysis. The functions of reality TV are borrowed from scholars such as Andrejevic (1992), Hill (2005) and Joyrich (1996) in order to encompass a holistic understanding of the programs themselves. Notions of hegemony, ideology, agency and subjectivity as considered by Gramsci (1971), Hall (1980), and Althusser (1969) emphasized the use of media institutions to encourage dominant belief systems. This analysis aims to seek and understanding of whether or not multiple birth reality television shows are produced from a context of gendered hegemony, and how the target audience negotiates these messages. Use of the theory of the gaze is also important in this study in terms of Cooper's (1995) analysis of visual fetishization of motherhood and medical technology. The researcher is aware of the inconsistencies between post-structuralism, which stresses the importance of cultural constructions, and psychoanalytical thought, which places importance upon biological determinism. In particular, Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze is rooted

in infantile experiences suggests that gender is an inherent trait. On the other hand, post-structuralist theorists such as Butler (1996) argue that cultural constructions and discourses contribute to gender identity (Butler, 1996). In order to ease these tensions, the researcher has chosen to accept the male gaze by qualifying that gender is a socially constructed aspect of subjectivity.

By looking at producer commentary, gendered ideologies and hegemonic notions of the shows' creators are called into question. By examining narratives, interactions and statements, along with visual imagery, these two television programs are critically analyzed in order to answer the primary and two of the secondary research questions.

These programs were viewed on DVDs produced by The Learning Company. Two seasons of *17, 18 Kids and Counting* (seasons 1 and 2) and *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* (seasons 3 and 4) were chosen by the researcher for analyses. A total of 104 episodes were collected, 32 of *17, 18 Kids and Counting* and 72 of *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*. The majority of these episodes were included in the analysis, and each episode was viewed by the researcher several times with and without subtitles. During the first and second viewings, relevant episodes which dealt with hegemonic viewpoints or resistive viewpoints focusing on mothering, gender and religious faith were detected and their specific dialogue was transcribed word for word.

**Foundations of Audience Analysis.** While the first section of this research project deals with media texts themselves, it alone is not enough. As Barrett (1985) cautions,

We must avoid making the text itself our only basis for analysis... To restrict our analysis solely to the text itself is to turn the object of analysis into its own means



of explanation... To reduce the problem solely to the texts a form of reductionism and unprofitable as reducing it to the mechanical expression of economic relations. (Barrett, 1985, p. 75)

This study refrains from reductionism and expands analysis outside of the text and to the audience. Audience analysis theories help to fortify the study's multi-layered approach.

To begin, I draw upon methods and concepts used in cultural and media studies.

Emphasis on the audience is important to understanding, as are utilizing the teachings of cultural studies, which urge researchers to understand how media texts are manifested in day to day life (Joyrich, 1996; Schwichtenberg, 1989; Walters, 1995; Johnson, 1986-1987). Attempting to articulate in a definitive fashion what an audience is and is not will be a primary concern. Walters (1995) explains the following: "*Audience* refers, typically, to the actual people who sit and watch – who consume – a media production" (Walters, 1995, p. 89). Thus, as Walters suggests, audience is a group of persons who consume a media product. With the growth and expansion of new technologies—specifically internet message boards and blogs, the audience goes online. Barker (2008) suggests that active audience study requires us consider the following: "Rather than regard audiences as reproducing textual subject positions and meanings, we need to consider what concrete people in specific locations actually do with texts" (Barker, 2008, p. 313).

Moving beyond the text to the audience, virtual ethnography is applied as a research technique and methodology (see Hine, 2000). The websites used are be varied their content and their approach. To begin, the researcher examined TLC generated blogs by Michelle Duggar and Kate Gosselin which operate as sponsored web-spaces for audience participation. Posting boards such as GosselinsWithoutPity.net, and, DuggarsWithoutPity.net, are also used to establish additional audience viewpoints and

commentary. As well as relevant articles discussing themes present within the research question. The researcher found audience responses and commentary which is laid out in relation to the episodes selected in the following chapters. It should be noted that the researcher did not actively participate on any of the above-mentioned posting boards; rather she acted as an observer of texts generated by audience members. The researcher was guided by feminist poststructuralist theory in analysis of the audience. Weedon's (1997) assertion that gender is socially constructed and historically changing aspect of identity and fashioned by cultural and institutional discourses within society aid the researcher in deciphering gendered ideologies and constraints (Weedon, 1997).

For the purposes of audience analysis, this research project utilizes Stuart Hall's ([1980] /2001) encoding/decoding theory. Hall views the process of television encoding as "an articulation of the linked but distinct moments in a circuit of meaning" and notes that each one of the moments in this circuit of meaning has a specific role to play which is vital for the circuit to work as well as for the next moment to occur (Barker, 2008, p. 327). Meaning is embedded at each level of the circuit of television that Hall writes about, but may not be taken into account at the next level. In other words, the meaning produced at one level does not guarantee the consumption of that meaning at another. Broadcasting structures yield encoded messages in the form of a meaningful discourse, Hall writes that before a message "can have an 'effect', satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (Hall, [1980] /2001, p. 168). He goes on to suggest that the set of decoded meanings "'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences" (p. 168).

Television messages carry a multitude of meanings, which do not possess, as Hall argues, an inherent sense of equity.

Hall ([1980] /2001) suggests that the codes and signs used by broadcast producers are the “means by which power and ideology are made to signify in particular discourses” that refer signs to “maps of meaning” and “maps of social reality” which contain a gauntlet of social meanings, practices, usages, power and interest “written in” to them (pp. 171-172). Hall writes that “television producers who find their message ‘failing to get across’ are frequently concerned to straighten out the kinks in the communication chain, thus facilitating the ‘effectiveness’ of their communication” (p. 173). Such producers rely on audience interpretation, and when they fail to articulate the meaning that they (the broadcasters) intended, the viewers are not themselves operating with in the “dominant” or “preferred” code (p. 173).

Hall ([1980] /2001) breaks down this theory by suggesting that any given media text can potentially warrant three audience interpretations and reactions: the *dominant-preferred position*, a *negotiated code*, and an *oppositional code*. The *dominant-preferred position* is when the “viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded”—in other words, the dominant code (p. 174). In this essay, we refer to the dominant code as hegemonic, understanding that hegemony can be contested (p. 174). Hall presents as the necessary attributes of this positioning:

- (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and (b) that it

carries with it the stamp of legitimacy – it appears coterminous with what is ‘natural’, inevitable’, ‘taken for granted’ about the social order.” (p. 175)

In other words, the viewer accepts the dominant hegemony set forth by the broadcast producers.

A *negotiated code* is one which contains a mixture of “adaptive and oppositional elements” for it “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule” (Hall, [1980] /2001, p. 175). Negotiated codes operate with what Hall calls “particular or situated logic: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relations to the discourse and logics of power” (p. 175). In other words, a negotiated code acknowledges the authority of the hegemony in abstract conditions, but forges its own rules and understandings given a particular circumstance.

The third code Hall ([1980] /2001) writes of is oppositional. An *oppositional code* takes place when it is possible for a “viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way” by detotalizing the message in the “preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework or reference” (p. 175). In other words, an oppositional code takes place when the viewer understands the encoded preferred reading of a media text and actively seeks to decode it in contrary, resistant ways. Hall writes that at this juncture is “one of the most significant political moments,” because the point when events which are “normally signified and decoded a negotiated way begin to be given an

oppositional reading” struggles in discourse as well as the “politics of signification” are joined (pp. 175-176).

The researcher seeks to clarify Hall’s ([1980] /2001) theory by drawing upon the work done by Scodari (2004), who posits that qualifiers must be applied when analyzing a media text’s audience using Hall’s theory (p. 42). For the purposes of this study, the researcher, when utilizing Hall’s ([1980] /2001) framework, will seek to qualify these readings as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. For example, when a text is analyzed by the researcher to be countering a particular hegemony, an oppositional reading by the audience is that which opposes the text but not the hegemony.

### **Preview of Subsequent Chapters**

The remainder of this text is broken down into two separate chapters. Chapter 2 is an analysis of media texts and audience interpretations. In this chapter, the researcher analyzes episodes and web postings which pertain to the primary and secondary research questions. This chapter develops and explores themes of motherhood, gender, family and faith.

The third and final chapter of this text is a space for the researcher to pose and answer the primary and secondary research questions, provide the reader with potential avenues for further research, and highlight the social implications of this study’s findings

## II. TEXTUAL AND AUDIENCE ANALYSES

### **Text Description**

The texts in question in this research project, *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* and *17, 18 Kids and Counting*, are examples of a new trend in reality TV programming that allows the viewer a window into the world of multiple birth families. Consisting of various scenarios, from daily family life to meal time to grocery shopping to field trips, they provide a peek into the world of multiple birth families in American society while establishing and reproducing dominant ideologies for the viewing audience. This research focuses on these texts' representations of hegemonic ideals of mothering, family, traditional gender roles and religious faith.

The study is led by an overarching framework operating within an interdisciplinary context and utilizing feminist media and cultural studies as an approach to critique multiple birth reality TV. Media analysts such as Andrejevic (2004), Swenson (2009), Bondebjerg (1996), and Walters (1995) have aided the researcher in her methodological practices and techniques such as close textual readings of texts and analysis of audience negotiations. The researcher was guided by Walters (1995) in understanding that poststructuralist discourse is cautious of general claims about women and representation across different media formats as a means to avoid constructing an oppressive totalizing theory (Walters, 1995, p. 152). In other words, the researcher aims

to avoid perpetuating dominant narratives in this analysis and seeks to interpolate connections between cultural analysis and the overarching social framework. This chapter has two primary areas of concern in relationship to these media products. Firstly, analysis the media text itself, closely examining overarching discourses, visual imagery, and narrative components focused on hegemonic representations of motherhood, gender, religious faith and family values. This chapter is also concerned with how the audience interprets the media texts' representations of motherhood, gender, religious faith and family values.

Situated within the genre of reality TV, the two programs in question are different in makeup but correspondent in theme. Both air on cable networks that are subsidiaries of The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel (TLC; *17, 18 Kids and Counting* and, *Jon and Kate plus Ei8ht*) and Discovery Health (*17, 18 Kids and Counting*).

With new episodes airing on Tuesday nights at 9:00 p.m. on TLC (and varied times on Discovery Health), *17, and 18 Kids and Counting* presents the day to day workings of a larger than life family in American society. The program provides the viewer with a peephole into the Duggar family's lifestyle, complete with definitions and descriptions of the familial ideologies and practices that frame the program. The episodes are shown as sequential in time and each one centers on a particular theme related to the family's everyday lives and experiences. Each episode is thirty minutes in length including commercial content and takes place at the Duggar home in Fayetteville, Arkansas, around the community, and in various locations close to "Middle America." Each program begins with an introduction led by Michelle Duggar explaining the

structure of her family as well their ideological beliefs, customs and practices. Each episode opens with the following dialogue:

This is the story of my family. That's me. I'm Michelle. There's Jim Bob, my wonderful husband, and our children Josh, Jana, John David, Jill, Jessa, Jinger, Joseph, Josiah, Joy Anna, Jedidiah, Jeremiah, Jason, James, Justin, Jackson, Johanna, and Jennifer. If you lost count, that's 17 in all. And, I delivered every one of them. There's also one more on the way [baby # 18]. We are not a typical family, and it's not just because of enormous size. We have very conservative values. Our children watch very little television and we closely monitor their access to the internet, among other things. As for school, that happens around the dining room table. To make ends meet, we own several commercial properties that we rent out. Even though we're nine times the size of an average family, we somehow make it all work.

Preceding this introduction, each episode presents viewers with a montage of the family's activities and happenings that will be the focus of the thirty minute episode. Viewers are provided with a multitude of images of the family, both as individuals as well as en masse. The show itself revolves around individual interviews of family members as group interviews in which they relay their ideologies.

In contrast, TLC's *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* has aired solely on TLC, with new episodes on Monday nights at 9:00 PM, and revolves around a smaller multiple birth family, following them through themed instances of daily life. Based in Redding, Pennsylvania, the program provides viewers with a glimpse into a life of a family with two sets of multiples. The show tells of the story of the family's daily work as well as vacations, media appearances, and holiday gatherings. From the start, the Gosselins never fully applied the mythos of the white nuclear family as described by Coontz (1992) and Chambers (2001). In one episode (Season 4, Episode 4, Korean Dinner) Jon and Kate describe their multicultural heritage (Jon is of Asian background, while Kate is white), while Kate expresses her desire to look more Korean, like her children. Each 30-minute



episode from season 3 and 4 begins with a montage of images from previous episodes as well as a preview of upcoming scenes. This is then followed by images of the family with the following voiceover narration:

Kate Gosselin: It all started with the two of us.

Jon Gosselin: Then we had out beautiful twin girls

KG: Cara & Madelyn.

JG: We were so thrilled we decided to try for one more.

KG: And ended up with six. Today I could very well loose my mind. And although the stress of having two sets of multiples doesn't always bring out the best in us, we're a family.

JG: And we're in this together. It might be a crazy life.

KG: But it's our life.

Following this introduction, verbal text appears on the screen, often accompanied by a child reciting the title of the episode. The episodes show Jon and Kate sitting together in an interview chair telling stories of their family.

### **Textual Analysis**

A qualitative textual analysis was conducted in order to give a comprehensive assessment of hegemonic trends present within the texts via overall narrative, dialogue, and visual and other textual imagery. While viewing the programs, the researcher transcribed scenes in which dialogue contained commentary on motherhood, gender roles and ideologies, family values and religion and spirituality. The scenes collected ranged from one sentence statements to short conversations between family members and production staff. A total of 104 episodes were screened and categorized for the purpose of this study.

## **Audience Analysis**

Virtual ethnography as outlined by Hine (2000) was conducted as a means to discover what the audience does with these media texts. The researcher discovered a plethora of fan sites, posting boards, forums, blogs and articles discussing the Duggar and/or Gosselin families. For the past year, the researcher has refrained from actively participating in any of the web spaces devoted to the media texts. The audience commentary used for this research project was collected during May, 2010. The researcher also examined TLC generated blogs by Michelle Duggar and Kate Gosselin, which operate as network sponsored web spaces. Audience generated posting boards such as GosselinsWithoutPity.net and DuggarsWithoutpity.net were chosen by the researcher to provide additional audience viewpoints and commentary. Commentary was analyzed which directly pertained to the seasons and episodes analyzed in the textual analysis; in other words, this content had been posted primarily during 2008 and 2009.

In order to analyze the audience commentary discovered through virtual ethnography, Hall's ([1980] /2001) encoding/decoding theory is used. This framework suggests that media producers encode dominant hegemonic notions within the media product. The audience is then able to decode meanings and messages present within a media text. As previously discussed, three positions can result—the *dominant-preferred position*, a *negotiated code*, and an *oppositional code*.

### **17, 18, Kids and Counting *Sample Site***

The researcher chose to examine seasons 1 of *17 Kids and Counting* and season 2 of *18 Kids and Counting* for two reasons. Firstly, these two seasons are recent to DVD and, secondly, episodes from these seasons are currently being aired on TLC in reruns. In

total, 32 episodes of the program were viewed by the researcher for this project; 10 from season 1 and 22 from season 2 were viewed multiple times. Predominant themes of motherhood, gender roles, family and religion were carried through the dialogue, visual imagery as well as the overarching narrative of the program. A majority of the episodes also include verbal content presented in a small white box (SWB) at the bottom of the screen, which tells viewers information about the family.

### ***Jon and Kate Plus Eight Sample Site***

The researcher chose two seasons of *Jon and Kate plus Eight* for study, season 3 and 4. They were chosen because of their release on DVD as well as the thematic nature of the episodes. A total of 72 episodes were screened for this study, 31 from season three and 41 from season four. Each episode was viewed multiple times by the researcher, who sought illustrations of motherhood, gender roles, family, and religious faith. A majority of the episodes addressed daily workings, trips and personalities of the children rather than expressions of the parents.

### **Motherhood**

In the previous chapter, motherhood in feminist theory was discussed in detail. Drawing upon work done by several theorists such as Arendell (1999, 2000), Hays (1996), Miller (2005) and DiQuinzio (1999) the researcher is aided in a comprehensive understanding of motherhood and feminist underpinnings. Hegemonic motherhood, as understood by Arendell (1999) acts as a patriarchal construction tying women's identities to their roles as child raisers and nurtures of others by continuing to control and regulate women's lives (Arendell, 1999, p. 4). The ideology of intensive mothering written of by Hays (1996) and Arendell (1999) defines women and promotes standards "by which they

are judged, both as mothers and not-mothers, in a gender stratified society” (Arendell, 1999, p. 4). Hays (1996) asserts that intensive mothering is the dominant ideology in the United States. This ideology has three markers. Firstly, childcare is the primary responsibility of the mother who is considered to be the preferred caretaker of the children. Secondly, the methodologies and advice recommended to mothers by child experts suggest that expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive child rearing is best. Thirdly, this ideology suggests that each child is to be viewed as a sacred individual who is innocent and pure (Hays, 1996, p. 54). Miller, (2005) notes that within western society, the biological act of giving birth leads to the redefinition of an individual’s identity, linking her to family and motherhood; in other words, a women’s biological fate is that of reproduction (Miller, 2005). The following section analyzes segments of the media texts and audience commentary the researcher located pertaining to motherhood.

***17, 18 Kids and Counting: Motherhood.*** Hegemonic notions of motherhood were detected and appear within the text in a variety of ways. Of the 32 episodes transcribed, 6 contain themes of motherhood. As an example, here Michelle discusses her motherhood philosophies concerning the upkeep of the house:

I think keeping a house clean is difficult but it is very different when you have many more people and especially if they are little people. I think probably for the first three months of my pregnancy, I might be a little more tired and nauseous. So I might not do as much cleaning. But, I think toward the end I make up for it ‘cause I get that nesting instinct that kids, and everybody, everything has to be clean, everything has to be in order before the baby comes. I think my expectations have changed over the years; I used to think I needed my house to look like the cover of a magazine. Well, that is not realistic. You can’t live there and enjoy being there and expect it to look like that that. Yes we want it to be clean and neat and uncluttered as much as possible but, we live there. And we

enjoy living there and so when you live there you mess it up and you don't have to turn around and clean it up. (Season 1, Episode 10, and "Duggar's Learn to Drive")

At other times, Michelle discusses her views on discipline and approaches to carrying out these practices:

Obedience and self control are two character qualities that are really important. I do not use time outs as discipline. I think time out is for uh, curbing the discipline. I don't have to do as much discipline when having them practice self control by sittin' still and being quiet or whatever. And so that keeps down all the discipline. (Season 1, Episode 10, "Duggar's Learn to Drive")

Contradictory to the above statement, in a later episode Michelle is shown taking care of the youngest baby who is sick. Meanwhile, the younger children are under the care and the supervision of the older children and Grandma Duggar. The younger children are shown climbing on windowsills and roughhousing while singing church hymns (Season 2, Episode 11, "Duggars on Ice"). It can be suggested at this juncture that Michelle's actions carry out Hays' (1996) idea that intensive mothering insists that the mother is the preferred primary caretaker of children.

Audience analysis discovered commentary relating to Michelle's role as mother. Preferred readings, which accept the hegemonies present within the media text, are plentiful. Many audience members were found endorsing Michelle's mothering ideologies and techniques. For example, a preferred reading is given by AmyinGa:

Michelle is such an awesome mother. While I do not have any children (and could never imagine having even a fourth of what she has!), I hope I can be as loving and as patient of a mother as she is one day. (AmyinGa, 2009)

At various points throughout both seasons Michelle discusses her views on pregnancy. Before going into labor with baby number 18, The Duggars take a field trip to the hospital where Michelle is set to deliver. The audience is told that Michelle has had

two prior C-sections and that the chosen OB-GYN is willing to perform a vaginal birth after a Cesarean (VBAC). Michelle has previously had 12 VBACs under the care and supervision of multiple doctors. Scenes take place with Jim Bob and Michelle at a Bradley birthing class where shared ideologies and philosophies on nutrition, exercise, labor and birth are discussed. While in labor, Michelle says that she may be coming to the end of her childbearing years (Season 2, Episode 8, "Bringing Home Baby Duggar"). Miller (2005) writes that women's role as mother is inextricably linked to family and her fate is tied to her biological role in reproduction (Miller, 2005, p. 54). In the scene, Michelle reinforces this idea and asserts that her role as mother and child bearer is essential in her family's construction. Intensive mothering suggests that a mother must be selfless, and that she must view her children as sacred, innocent, and pure knowing that their lives are extremely valuable. Here, Michelle is found to be fulfilling this marker of intensive mothering. In other words, the idea that a women's biological essence determines her role within the family is as Miller suggests, the dominant ideology which is powerfully "rooted in assumptions of biological determinism and the inevitability of women's destiny to become mothers" (p. 55).

Negotiated readings of Michelle's 18<sup>th</sup> pregnancy and delivery were found on DuggarsWithoutPity.net. One audience member wrote:

I just have to say, I really respect Michelle and everything she's done. She made a commitment and stuck to it, through thick and thin. But this woman has been raising children for 20 years now. And now shes had another baby. So that means at LEAST another 18 years of raising children. It makes me tired just thinking about it. She is truly made of stronger stuff than me. (Shawna, 2/26/09)

Shawna's interpretations of Michelle's role as mother suggest the acknowledgement of the hegemonies present within the media text and challenges them based on the questionable nature of the medical effects of multiple birth.

After the delivery of baby number 18, Jordyn-Grace, Michelle shares some of her baby philosophies with the audience. She asserts that her role as mother is primarily concerned with the care of the infant, not herself which, in turn, makes her self-sacrificing (Arendell, 2000). To begin, here are her views on breastfeeding:

I kind of just nurse my babies all of the time. If she starts to wake up, I usually feed her. I just figure she's probably hungry. Babies usually sleep and then they eat, and that's my philosophy. I don't overfeed her. But I fell like I'm cherishing the moments I have with her because I realize she's not gonna be nursing for very long. She'll be past that and on to toddling and I won't be able to hold her anymore or hold her down anyways. (Season 2, Episode 9, "Light, Camera, Duggar")

At various times throughout the seasons, Michelle continues to be filmed using her nursing pillow while in the midst of family activities. In one episode, Michelle attends a public school with a few of her older children and the baby, and describes her as "mama's buddy" who has to be at her side at all times. Later on in the episode, while reading to kindergarten students, Michelle is shown using the nursing pillow (Season 2, Episode 17, "Duggar School Daze"). The ideology of intensive mothering assumes and reinforces the traditional gender-based divisions of labor. In the above scene, Michelle is extending her emotional and physical labor to her infant while viewing this behavior as her motherly responsibility.

Audience commentaries on Michelle's TLC blog discuss more recent topics and news from the Duggar family. In December of 2009, Michelle delivered her 19<sup>th</sup> child, a micro-preemie weighing 1 pound 6 ounces via emergency C-section, according to an

article published immediately after the birth (for additional details, see Fisher and Cox, 2009). Shortly thereafter, audience members began interpreting this event in opposition to the reality show's hegemonic messages of motherhood. Blame was placed on Michelle for the infant's health condition as well as the number of children conceived and delivered. An example of an oppositional reading can be found in Mel's posting: "This is all her fault. She should have stopped having babies 12 kids ago. She is a psycho" (Mel, 2009).

In the first episode of season 1, members of the production staff are heard asking the children's opinions and views about their mother:

Production staff member:

What makes your mom such a good mom?

Jessa:

I think experience makes my mom a good mom.

Josiah:

Most people when they discipline their kids are more like angry. But mom, she's real calm and she disciplines us that way. So I like it.

Josh:

She is so compassionate, very loving, giving--those kinds of things that just really make you appreciate her. (Season 1, Episode 1, "Big Family Meets Big Apple")

This interchange shows the children's views of their mother and reiterates Michelle's mothering philosophies. Overall, the philosophies, views and practices of motherhood are seen in a multitude of ways, all of which illustrate Hays (1996) framework of intensive mothering. Specifically, it is the idea that a mother must be emotionally absorbed into her children's lives and be willing to invest a large amount of time and labor to ensure their well-being.



Drawing upon the ideological notions of motherhood outlined and discussed above, the research has determined that Michelle exemplifies hegemonic trends. In particular, intensive mothering ideologies are discovered within the text when Michelle asserts that her children are best taken care of by their mother. Hegemonies surrounding motherhood in western society view women as submissive domestic workers responsible for the rearing of their children while keeping the house and servicing their husbands' needs (Arendell, 2000). In the above analysis, Michelle is seen executing each of these characteristics of hegemonic motherhood. Fineman (1995) and Hartsock (1998) note that intensive mothering ideology assumes and reinforces traditional gendered divisions of labor within the home in an attempt to secure the patriarchal hegemonic norms found within society. In this media text, multiple examples have been found to support and reinforce patriarchy and gendered divisions of labor. Upon analysis, the researcher has found that depictions of motherhood coincide with an overarching cultural discourse of intensive, hegemonic mothering ideologies and practices. Audience analysis has determined that audience interpretations of motherhood and of Michelle as mother are generally preferred readings, but there are a considerable amount of negotiated and oppositional readings as well. The audience seems to appreciate Michelle's mothering style while, in some cases, opposing her multiple pregnancies.

***Jon and Kate Plus Eight: Motherhood.*** The highest number of episodes containing messages about motherhood, a total of 20, was discovered in this text. In season 3, Kate discusses the implications of having two sets of multiples and how it affects her as a mother. She remarks in one episode that she tries her best to only take on the problems of the day in order to prioritize the most important tasks, duties and events

taking place (Season 4, Episode 30, “All Smiles”). Intensive mothering ideology assumes that Kate must be selfless and responsible to her children’s emotional well-being at all times. However, in the above scene, Kate is found to be concerned with her own emotional well-being by her decision to only focus on one problem at a time.

An audience member’s comment on Kate’s TLC blog relates to the above analysis. This commentary is found to be oppositional, meaning that the audience member rejects the show’s hegemonies around motherhood. No, no, no writes:

Please, please, please get off TV and try to raise your children. They need a mother that cares for them and puts their needs first. You don't get to come first anymore. You gave that up when you had children and then drove their father away. (No, no, no, 2010)

During the Valentine’s Day episode, Kate discusses the activities and events planned for the holiday, explaining that she would organize the day just the same regardless of the number of children in the family, as she does not wish to alter the lives of all of her children due to their numbers (Season 3, Episode 15, “Valentines Day”). Kate further explains some of her mothering philosophies when discussing the discipline of the children. She remarks that there are “no textbooks written on how to raise twins and sextuplets” and that she is doing the best that she can for her family (Season3, Episode 28, “Discipline”). The markers of intensive mothering suggest that advice should be drawn from childrearing experts (Hays, 1996). It is found that such advice is not sought out by Kate herself. Miller (2005) notes that within contemporary society mothers are urged to seek advice from experts and expert bodies of knowledge concerning childrearing and pregnancy and that with mothering experience, competence forms and leads to the formation of mother as expert (Miller, 2005, p. 113). In other words, as a

result of the void in expert advice on how to raise two sets of multiples, Kate has become an expert in her own right based upon her experience as mother.

Finding that discipline is a must in the household, she says: “We’re terribly outnumbered and if we don’t be careful they will take over and try to rule. And that’s not gonna happen” (Season3, Episode 28, “Discipline”). Hegemonic motherhood directly links the mother’s behavior to that of her children as nurturer and disciplinarian (Arendell, 1999). In other words, Kate attempts to lead her children by example, teaching them that they must become responsible for their own actions as a mandate of her role as mother.

Discussions of Kate’s disciplinary technique were found in the audience data. An Anonymous post illustrates a preferred reading of the media text. The comment, written by a self identified pre-school teacher, applauds Kate for her discipline techniques and practices (Anonymous 11/14/2008).

In addition to her philosophies on discipline, Kate also discusses some of the frameworks from which she operates on a day to day basis. When a family trip is planned after being invited to a ski resort in Utah, Kate comments that she desires to have as many experiences as possible regardless of the toll that it takes on her as an individual (Season 3, Episode 10, “Plane Ride to Utah”). The idea that she will partake in activities that may be taxing on her for the sake of the children suggests that as a mother, her duty is to sacrifice in as many ways as possible for the children. One of the markers of intensive mothering ideology asserts that a mother must be selfless and view her children as priceless, irreplaceable individuals to which she is ultimately responsible (Hays, 1996). This marker is illustrated by Kate’s insistence that her children should be granted as

many experiences as possible in order to enrich their lives and individuality. Continuing with this viewpoint, Kate takes the children to an art studio and children's museum where they are granted the liberty to get dirty, play and create. In a later interview, Kate makes the following comment:

We've always been committed to culturing them. I feel like it's from before we had kids. I remember purposing in my mind. I read something somewhere that by culturing your kids, it absolutely has an effect on their IQ – by exposing them to, you know, everything in the world around you. (Season 4, Episode 39, "Family Outing").

The desire to culture her children can be read as a philosophy of motherhood. Kate expresses her desire to provide as many outlets as possible to the world in which the children are growing. Intensive motherhood suggests that the amount of labor invested in childrearing is outside the realm of market valuation, and we see Kate exemplifying this concept.

Throughout both seasons, Kate is shown as an exhausted, overworked mother who does everything that she can to aid in the development of her children's lives. Hegemonic motherhood mandates that the process of childrearing is one which requires an immense amount of emotional energy and physical labor (Arendell, 2000). In one episode, Kate says directly to the camera crew: "I'm gonna lose my mind here shortly; I'll warn y'all before it happens" (Season 4, Episode 38, "Trip to the Vet"). This statement can be read in more than one way. Firstly, as mother, Kate is not and does not claim to be the ideal; rather, she sees her flaws and does not wish to have them come to fruition. Secondly, the audience can read this statement to the camera crew as a cry for help directed toward a fellow adult. After all, the camera crew's presence has become a staple in the Gosselin home. Lastly, overarching hegemonic ideals view mothers as

submissive domestic workers who mother without complaint. Kate attempts to shatter this myth while asserting her own point of view (Arendell, 2000).

Western society interconnects the act of womanhood to the act of mothering by biological facets of reproduction. Miller (2005) notes that “giving birth within western cultures simultaneously leads to a redefinition of an individual’s identity,” which directly ties a woman’s fate to her biological capabilities (Miller, 2005, p. 54).

The duties and responsibilities that Kate faces as a mother of eight young children are displayed throughout both seasons. From dialogue concerning her daily tasks, to the expectations placed upon her by herself and children, Kate as mother is shown. When describing her daily routine in an episode dedicated to the family’s life, Kate breaks down her duties: “My day is make a meal, serve a meal, clean up a meal, clean up everything. Wipe this one; change that one, deal with this one. Bodily fluids. Make a meal, serve a meal, clean up a meal, clean up the aftermath. Poop, diapers, diapers, poop” (Season 3, Episode 2, “Day in the Life”). This dialogue is carried through another episode in the next season when she describes her day as making, serving and cleaning up after meals (Season 4, Episode 10, “Viewer FAQ”). The overarching theme that as mother, Kate must feed her children, clean up after them while delivering care and attention contribute to this idea that intensive mothering is best (Hays, 1996).

Accentuating the ideology that a mother’s role demands her devotion to the care of others while sacrificing her self interests, every action is centered on the children’s needs and wants (Arendell, 2000). In many episodes, Kate is shown fanatically cleaning up the children and the house. Hegemonic motherhood ideals imply that domestic labor and upkeep of the house are of the utmost importance (Arendell, 2000). At one point, she

comments that clean up takes place in every hour of every day, and is something that she describes as a “thorn in my side” (Season 4, Episode 29, “Soup and Surprise”).

Other levels of motherhood responsibility are found when the Gosselins have a family game night. Jon encourages Kate to participate and play with her children, to which Kate is very adamant that she is unable to play any games with any children until the work around the house is done (Season 3, Episode 26, “Games Gosselins Play”). This can be read as Kate’s strong need to keep the home perfect and clean at all times while placing her direct involvement with the children on hold, thereby carrying out the duties and responsibilities she has set as mother. This idea that as mother, she must always be engaged in domestic labor, is once again illustrated throughout season four.

While the parents are in Hawaii to renew their vows, the children are seen in a state of disorder. Kate interjects by telling them to sit down. In a later interview, she remarks: “I parent any other time, why would I stop in the middle of my vow renewal?” (Season 4, Episode 23, “For Better or Worse”). This suggests that as indicated by intensive mothering, her work is never done and is not something that can be contained within the walls of a house, for she is mother at all times of the day, every day of the week.

Kate is shown in multiple episodes playing with her children and showing them affection as well as discipline (Season 4, Episode(s) 1, 3, 4, “Boys’ Day Out”, “Sextuplets turn 4”, “Korean Dinner”). These images of Kate as mother-of-all-trades leave the viewer with the impression that although she yells at her children, she also nurtures them and balances both behaviors. In one episode, Jon and Kate grant their twin daughters’ (Mady and Cara’s) request to be “mommy for a day.” Kate describes their

duties as very close to her own, suggesting that the twins were to feed the sextuplets breakfast and do a craft project with them. Halfway through the day, the twins are unable to handle the pressures and challenges that come along with being “mommy for a day.” At one point, Kate resumes her role after Mady throws a temper tantrum, to which Kate responds: “No, that’s not how Mommy’s act” (Season 4, Episode 27, “Twins are Mommy for a day”). This interchange suggests that there are very strong ideas of how a mother should and should not act. Ideologies regarding behavior are implicitly illustrated and linked to hegemonic motherhood. She should not get upset, overwhelmed or frenzied; she must always put her children first and take care of the task at hand (Arendell, 1999).

In many episodes, Kate does not directly address herself in dialogue as mother of eight; rather, her clothing constitutes textual imagery alluding to this role. In two episodes, she is seen wearing a shirt which reads “mom<sup>8</sup>” (Season 3, Episode 10, “Plane Ride to Utah”, Season 4, Episode 29, “Soup and Surprise”). In another, she wears a shirt during the interview portion which reads “Grateful Mom” (Season 3, Episode 27, “Memorial Day Picnic – extended episode”). In yet another, the words on Kate’s shirt in the interview say “Happy Mom” (Season 3, Episode 29, “Jon’s Hair Raising Experience—Extended Episode”). This may seem like an insignificant portion of the programs viewed, but the researcher suggests that these textual components are critical, for it is not known if Kate decided to wear the shirts upon her own free will, or if they were in fact product placements from clothing companies. It should be noted that the official TLC store is currently selling the “mom<sup>8</sup>” shirts (Jon & Kate Plus 8 Merchandise). It is known that the textual images presented reinforce the idea that Kate is mother at all times of everyday and that this is a role she is very proud of.

In both seasons, the researcher found dialogue from Kate who illustrates her anxieties and goals for her children, expressing a hope and desire for her children to be close their entire lives, while being conscious of the dangers they will ultimately face as they grow older (Season 3, Episode 27, “Memorial Day Picnic – Extended Episode”). Motherhood ideology is enmeshed with idealized notions of the family and the mother’s biological link to the family unit (Arendell, 2000). This suggests that she is aware of the challenges her children will face in their adult lives, and her desire to keep them together as a family unit. The sextuplets’ fourth birthday also contains dialogue from Kate expressing her feelings about them growing older. She says: “I feel very sad that they’re 4. ‘Cause 3 you can still call them a baby, but 4, they don’t even want to be called a baby anymore” (Season 4, Episode 3, “Sextuplets turn 4”). This dialogue suggests that as a mother, Kate realizes that her role in the children’s lives is changing rapidly, that before long they will be young adults, and that she will never have another baby to take care of—something that saddens her deeply.

It should be noted that at points throughout both seasons, Kate discusses her faults as a mother. In one episode in particular, while on family vacation, the girls are brought to a hair braiding shop. Kate wants each of them to get their hair done so that she does not have to deal with trying to keep up with each of them. Unknown to her, this process is a very painful one. After promising her children various comfort items, candy, hermit crabs, etc. each of the girls is shown in extreme pain, crying and complaining to leave the shop. Afterwards in an interview, Kate discusses the trip and notes that she was not aware of how painful of an experience this was going to be for her children, saying: “I felt like



I should have gotten the worst mommy of the world award that day” (Season 4, Episode 12, “July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebrations, Extended Version”).

In analysis, the researcher detects a level of self reflexivity from Kate on her role as mother. She is able to admit her flaws and missteps and, while not doing so frequently, an attempt is made. In sum, representations and ideas of motherhood were found in many episodes. An overarching theme of intensive mothering was articulated through images, ideas, dialogue. In particular, depictions of Kate as primary caretaker of the children and home are found in both seasons. As well as her identity, this is directly linked to her biological role as mother and was found by the researcher in multiple episodes. Representations of hegemonic motherhood ideals were found illustrated in the media text. The demand that the children must come first and that their emotional well being and concerns are best intercepted by the mother as primary caretaker are illustrated by Kate (Hays, 1996). Kate also illustrates that based upon her familiarity as a mother of two sets of multiples, she has become an expert on the needs of her children. Compared to Michelle Duggar, Kate enforces a different set of motherhood ideologies, ones which place importance on not only the children, but also mothers. Kate frequently discusses the challenges she faces as a mother of eight children, discussing some of the ways she copes with the stress and approaches her role as mother. Michelle Duggar is rarely found engaging in this form of discourse.

### **Technological Fetishization of Motherhood**

Pamela Cooper (1995) argues in her article, “Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” that the gaze manifests itself in media texts as patriarchal in nature. The medical gaze on the human body and, more

specifically, the pregnant female body, is done with “invasive technological expertise” that seeks to control the most private of all spheres, “the inner spaces of the human body” (Cooper, 1995, p. 52). The way in which the camera gazes upon the female’s pregnant body acts in such a way as to ideologically construct her as a vessel for the male omnifertile sperm (p. 53). Cooper notes that medical surveillance lies within the “encoding of the interior of the female body as the place where male secrets hide,” thus suggesting that the doctor can gaze upon the pregnant body with a “conscience clear of both fear and erotic longing” (p. 53). Thereby, the gaze acts to place the pregnant female body not only on display for medical surveillance from the physician, but also from the viewer. Cooper states that in the book *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the practice and ritual of reproduction and childbirth changes from a private act into a public spectacle where the fertility and sexuality of the women is put on display for public performance (p. 56). In other words, the constant monitoring and gazing upon the pregnant female body reveals gendered inequality and dehumanization of the body through social rituals and “representations which inscribe it – through and through, inside and out – as public property” (p. 56). The film adaptation of the text is not able to avoid and critique the medical gaze upon the pregnant female body. Cooper notes that the audience is placed in a position where they become complacent in the “inherent voyeurism of movie-watching” (p. 57). Thus, the audience gives involuntary consent as a result of the “specularizing apparatus of the camera, of the subject position of the spectator.” The gaze becomes transferred to the viewers of the film (p. 57). In sum, the audience is unable to resist the medical gaze of the film and the subject position in which they are placed. For purposes of the textual analyses, the medical gaze will be focused on in terms of visual

imagery and dialogue. In the sections below, an analysis of the voyeuristic medical gaze of Michelle Duggar and Kate Gosselin's pregnant bodies is taken up by the researcher.

***17, 18 Kids and Counting: Technological Fetishization of Motherhood.*** By examining additional storytelling elements, such as subtitles, the researcher found an instance in which Michelle's pregnancies are presented in the media text as alternative to the discourse generated by the Duggars themselves. While Michelle is in labor for her 18<sup>th</sup> baby, onscreen text appears and states: "Over the course of Michelle's pregnancies, she's had about 7600 contractions" (Season 2, Episode 8, "Bringing Home Baby Duggar"). I would suggest that this text is used to aid the viewers in understanding intricate technical details of Michelle's pregnancies as well as providing an outrageous number to further accentuate the point that with multiple birth families comes a large amount of female labor. In addition, this text operates as an extension of the medical gaze on the pregnant body by utilizing verbal and visual imagery. As noted by Cooper (1995), the audience assumes the voyeuristic role in relation to the pregnant female body. It should be noted at this juncture that the audience was found to be engaged in Michelle's pregnant body and to have active concerns over her health and the child's health, as well as what the family will name the newest addition.

While Michelle was in labor with her 18<sup>th</sup> child, medical challenges presented themselves. Due to the baby's positioning, a C-section was ordered by the OB-GYN (Season 2, Episode 8, "Brining Home Baby Duggar"). In preparation for the surgery, Michelle is shown to the audience draped in sheets to conceal her pregnant body; at no time are viewers privy to naked images of her impregnated stomach. Michelle's modesty

while pregnant remains a constant theme throughout the media text. Although her physical body remains covered by modest dress, she is still made into a spectacle as a result of the discourse surrounding her pregnancies. Cooper (1995) suggests that the private, intimate practice of birth has been transformed into public rituals where the “fertility and the sexuality of women are turned into performance and spectacle” (Cooper, 1995, p. 56). In the above mentioned episode, this is fully illustrated. While little attention is paid to Michelle’s sexuality, a great deal of time and attention is focused upon her pregnant status throughout the program. Michelle’s body becomes dehumanized to an extent by the medical gaze inherent within the show and its focus upon her fertility. At times, Michelle is fetishized in terms of her ability and desire to bear children rather by her own identity and subjectivity.



**Figure 2- 1 Michele Duggar Pregnant with 18th Child**

In Figure 2-1, Michelle Duggar is shown pregnant with her 18<sup>th</sup> child. Using Cooper’s (1995) theory of the medical gaze and technological fetishization of the pregnant body, it can be determined that Michelle’s body is on public display. The camera’s gaze upon Michelle constructs her as a vessel for male sperm while “encoding

the interior of the female body as the place where male secrets hide” (Cooper, 1995, p. 53). Michelle is covered in modest dress; the researcher was unable to find any images with her naked pregnant stomach shown. In fact, this is the only image the researcher was able to obtain showing Michelle standing while pregnant, the rest all gazed upon her body from the neck up, or while laying in a hospital bed surrounded by her children making her pregnant body as a moving image and character within the show itself. The medical gaze in this imagery places the audience in a voyeuristic subject position, transferring the gaze of the camera to the viewer. In other words, the medical gaze allows for the viewers to become subjects in the public spectacle of Michelle’s pregnancies and births.

***Jon and Kate Plus Eight: Technological Fetishization of Motherhood.*** One episode centers on a trip to Hershey Medical Center to revisit where the sextuplets were born, which allows Kate to recount her stay in the hospital. While images of the medical complex are shown on the screen, Kate tells the audience that she was at home on bed rest at seven weeks and in the hospital at twenty weeks, spending ten weeks there until the delivery (Season 4, Episode 13, “Kate’s Labor Day”). While visiting a delivery room, Kate recalls the births:

I think that was the moment that it hit me, being a nurse – labor and delivery nurse. Looking over, watching the meds that they were drawing up, reminded me, “Oh my goodness, that’s for hemorrhaging.” And I was afraid at that point of just what other things they were gonna do to me. I mean, I had IVs everywhere and all this stuff. But when I saw them drawing up these meds. That was really when I realized this could be really bad. (Season 4, Episode 13, “Kate’s Labor Day”)

During this, the camera pans around the operating room, showing these medical technologies and the spaces in which Kate underwent a C-section. Cooper (1995) aids in an understanding of the medical gaze which transforms the intimate practice of birth to a public performance. Throughout the episode, the audience is not provided with imagery of Kate herself on the operating table, but they are provided with imagery of the sextuplets during their stay in the NICU. A public spectacle is created not of the birth itself, but the fetishization of birth and its surrounding medical technologies is evident in the events immediately following.

This episode highlights some of the history of Kate's pregnancy and complications with the sextuplets, as well as her fears and anxieties of carrying six babies at once. In the opening credits of each episode from both seasons, images of Kate's pregnant body are shown at different stages of gestation culminating in a short video of her physically moving her pregnant belly from one side of her hospital bed to the other. The audience is provided with an image of Kate as a spectacle of her and her husband's fertility. As Cooper (1995) suggests, she is framed as the Madonna while the patriarch has the power of the Lord over her flesh (Cooper, 1995, p. 53). The use of visual imagery and dialogue contribute to an overarching notion that Kate, as supermom to eight children, knew very early on the dangers involved and did the best that she could to ensure their health.

Dialogue concerning reproduction and pregnancy are also brought into the program when Kate discusses the reality and dangers of being pregnant with sextuplets. She states that when she was pregnant, she knew that it was not an automatic given that one day she would see all six babies born alive; rather, it was a strong possibility that

some would not survive or be healthy. Continuing this idea, Kate remarks that every year on the sextuplets' birthday she is reminded of how miraculous it is that they were all born without complications and have been able to live a normal life (Season 4, Episode 9, "Embarrassing and Favorite Moments"). The audience is brought into the medical gaze through the verbal content and imagery in the episode, framing them in a voyeuristic subject position (Cooper, 1995).



**Figure 2-2 Kate Gosselin pregnant with sextuplets**

The visual imagery of Kate's pregnant physique with sextuplets seen in Figure 2-2 is contained amongst other imagery within the media text's opening montage. Using Cooper's (1995) theory of the medical fetishization of the pregnant physique, the researcher asserts the following. This gaze is inherent within this imagery ideologically constructing her as a vessel for male, omnifertile sperm. Kate's body is situated in a space which allows for the medical gaze, not only from the physician but also from the viewer. The public spectacle of Kate's pregnancy put her on display for public performance, thus dehumanizing her body and granting the audience a sense of authority. The above image shows Kate's pregnant body under the voyeuristic gaze of the audience,

who is thus placed into an involuntary position of spectator unable to refuse a subject position. The technological fetishization of Kate's pregnant stomach as shown in Figure 2-2 leaves the audience with a sense of authority over her body and pregnancy, while removing her sense of self entirely. She is not viewed as a person, but as a vessel for reproduction.

In terms of the technological fetishization of motherhood in both media texts, the researcher has found that there is some difference in presentation. Michelle Duggar is viewed by the audience during her 18<sup>th</sup> pregnancy as well as its delivery. The activities surrounding this ritual, from doctors' visits to the operating room, are filled with visual imagery obstructing views of her pregnant body. The use of dialogue and imagery allude to the Duggar philosophy that inherent shame comes with viewing a pregnant woman's body; it is shameful and must be avoided. Her body and her pregnancy are constructed by discourse in such a way that highlights the medical, technological gaze, which not only dehumanizes her but also fetishizes her pregnant body through the conspicuous absence of its image. The whole story revolves around it, yet it is not seen.

Audience analysis found oppositional readings to the dominant hegemonies surrounding Michelle's pregnancies. Discussions of the state of Michelle's physical body were found in small numbers; yet, the overall reaction discovered by the researcher was one of intense disgust and criticism. One viewer, Misty, wrote after the delivery of baby # 19:

Just because you can pop out children the way a little kid pops his birthday balloons after the party, doesn't mean [mean] you should. And while on the topic of balloons, her breasts must look like a balloon that's fallen behind the couch after the party and found two weeks later. All this stress on her vagina has



probably torn it up through the years. It probably hangs so long, you could fly an air craft through it. (Misty, 2009)

Michelle's body is not only dehumanized by Misty's comment, but is also consumed by the viewer to such an extent that intense shame and disgust run throughout the commentary.

On the other hand, Kate Gosselin is not actively pregnant during the filming of the seasons examined. Rather, the program recounts her time in the hospital as well as her experience of carrying sextuplets. The audience is shown visual imagery of not only her pregnant body, but also of the children's bodies. In other words, Kate is put on display in the past tense, while she discusses the processes she went through as mother of multiples. A great deal of discussion took place on posting boards immediately following the Gosselin's visit to the NICU. There was much speculation and gossip regarding whether or not Kate was pregnant with another child, but overall the audience was found hypothesizing and denouncing the potential of more children for the Gosselins. Viewers searched to interpret the message of this episode. One commenter wrote:

In this whole episode I think Kate was trying to play up the "magical uterus" angle by hyping up the difficulty and the odds against the healthy births and how her kids were all so normal whereas singleton babies were dying left and right on either side of her. (Anonymous 9/4/2008)

The sentiment expressed here suggests that Kate's biological capabilities have been put on display for audience criticism. Both women's bodies are placed as objects of the gaze not only for the doctors but also for the audience. The audience recognizes the gaze as hegemonic and dominant when reading the media text.

## **Family (Values)**

Drawing upon the theories, concepts and frameworks laid out in chapter one concerning families and family values from theorists such as Arroba (1996), Lerner (1986), Coontz (1992), Chambers (2001), Buss & Herman (2003) and Ouellette and Hay (2008), the researcher has acquired historical as well as contemporary understanding of traditional familial ideologies. Arroba (1996) writes that familial origin studies have focused themselves on the idea that the “natural family structure” as one in which people join together under the “protection of their father, and nurturance of their mother” (Arroba, 1996, p. 8-9) and that such studies are heavily focused on Eurocentric, hierarchically ordered patriarchal ideologies. The establishment of the patriarchal family is discussed by Lerner (1986) as a system which enforces social rules and values based upon gendered divisions such as female subordination and male dominance (Lerner, 1986).

With the establishment of patriarchy, the system of family organization based on the care of mothers for children was replaced by subordination of women in family groups while concurrently placing the male head of house as controller over women’s reproductive capacity (Arroba, 1996, p. 10). In other words, the principal pillar of patriarchy in society can be located within the nuclear family unit (p. 11). Arroba also notes that the western model of the family is one which holds Christian values at the center of many governmental policies and welfare programs (p. 11). The mythos of the white nuclear family exists, as Chambers (2001) suggests, as a regulatory force idealized within the collective imaginary. In cultural studies, representations of the family are

found to be constructed through idealized imagery rather than direct reflections of the real world (Chambers, 2001, p. 25).

Coontz (1992) argues that romanticized notions of “traditional family values” cited by conservative figures results from grave misinformation about American familial history. Traditional family values and morals have shifted and changed since the colonial period, along with societal expectations and practices (Coontz, 1992, p. 11). The concept that a static set of American family values has ever existed, or will exist, rejects historical social and family realities leading to “false generalizations about the past as well as widely exaggerated claims about the present and the future” (p. 14). This section also draws upon the concept of family values which, as Ouellette and Hay (2008) note, reemerged in popular culture as a result of a direct promotion by the American government of the two parent, heteronormative family as a strategy to encourage low income families to attain the mythos of the white nuclear family (Ouellette and Hay, 2008, p. 92). The section concerns itself with the patriarchal pillars in place in the family structures of both media texts along with the overarching familial ideology in place within American culture suggesting the white nuclear family exists as a regulatory force. Traditional Christian values coded as family values as written of by Buss & Herman (2003) are also analyzed as they surface within the media texts. The following section examines both media texts in such terms.

***17, 18 Kids and Counting: Family (Values).*** The researcher discovered eight episodes that provided content related to hegemonic familial ideologies, values and structures. Considering that the premise of this media text is to chronicle the daily life of a multiple birth family, it is important to draw upon Chambers (2001) discussion about

familial discourse. Discourses act in such a way as to construct and regulate imagery and knowledge about the family (Chambers, 2001, p. 25). Bearing in mind that the family has, as suggested by Chambers, “no fixed meaning and takes on meanings as an object of knowledge within discourses” this structure can be viewed as unstable in nature while incessantly being reshaped within societal contexts (p. 26). Representations of the Duggar family seek to redefine and illustrate their familial ideologies through the use of discourse.

To begin, Jim Bob discusses some of the practices carried out by the larger-than-life family. While in New York City on a family trip in order to be on the *Today* show, the brood ventures in and around the city, from Central Park to Times Square, all the while utilizing the Duggar buddy system. Jim Bob explains that the origins were out of necessity when Michelle and he were unable to keep up with all of the children, thus calling upon the “older ones” to take on the “responsibility of the younger ones,” which “teaches responsibility” and makes life easier (Season 1, Episode 1, “Big Family Meets Big Apple”). Arroba (1996) writes that through familial origins study, “natural” hierarchy is found beginning with the father and trickling down to the children (Arroba, 1996). The hierarchy of the Duggar family is seen in this system, as Jim Bob acts as the leader of the group while Michelle and the children fall into place behind him.

Through audience analysis, the researcher found oppositional readings to the Duggar’s buddy system. One commenter in particular wrote:

I feel bad for their kids in a way. I really don't agree with their "buddy" system. While kids need responsibility, I would not turn my daughters into surrogate parents. I won't have more than 2 kids, I want to be able to provide them both with the time and attention they need from me. (Anonymous 3/19/09).

This interpretation of not only the buddy system, but also of the family's hierarchal structure which places the older daughters as laborers, shows as complete rejection of the hegemonies presented within the text.

While visiting New York City, the family is approached by many onlookers who marvel at their numbers, revel in their fame and ask them to pose for pictures. In an interview, Michelle hypothesizes as to why the public has such an interest in her family, saying:

Probably the reason that people are fascinated with our family is because of the size and the number of children, which is I think adds curiosity, too. How do you do that? What's it like having that many people around the table and how many loads of laundry? How much food? Just those curiosity questions. (Season 1, Episode 2, "Duggars Do New York")

This statement made by Michelle suggests that she enjoys the public's attention directed at her family, for she feels they are fascinated with the size and practices the familial unit. The Duggars illustrate the westernized model of the family as written of by Arroba, (1996) which is "Christian, nuclear, middle-class, with an employed father and housewife mother" (Arroba, 1996, p. 11). Although the family's size is significantly larger than the average American family, illustrations of Christian nuclear values are illustrated within the media text. The pattern of discourse statements about the family's size acts to create rules about the way in which the Duggars should be viewed by the audience. The researcher found an overwhelming amount of audience commentary and interpretations which would be considered a preferred reading. Sentiments from "the Duggars really are a good example of how family should be" (Pam, 2009) to "I love that they are a truly happy family with great morals" (Jacelynn, 2009), reverberate familial hegemonies

encoded by the Duggars and the media apparatus and are decoded and accepted by these audience members.

The Duggar family's practice of homeschooling the children is highlighted in multiple episodes. One in particular compares and contrasts the Duggar system with the public school system. In this episode, scenes of homeschooling are present, in which Michelle and the older children take the responsibility of teaching and disciplining the younger children. Michelle states that the family pays taxes for the public school system and that she is not anti-public school. Moreover, homeschooling was a decision made by her and Jim Bob many years earlier because they wanted their family to be close and to allow their older children the opportunity to teach the younger ones (Season 2, Episode 17, "Duggar School Daze"). A traditional Christian family value, as discussed by Buss & Herman (2003), suggests that an aspect of conservative social policy is homeschooling (Herman, 2003, p. 37). In a later episode, Michelle discusses her homeschooling curriculum as one which is rooted in Christian beliefs and value systems (Season 2, Episode 19, "Big Family in Big Sandy").

Commentary is made by Jim Bob and Michelle about the importance of media literacy. Michelle comments that good family films are needed to bring families together for leisure time. Comments made by Jim Bob follow:

There's a lot of Hollywood films that display horror or sexual content and all that. That might do well in the box office, just because people want to go see stuff like that. But it's kind of like drugs, alcohol, and stuff like that – pornography. That might make money for companies, but yet it's still not good for individuals. And it destroys people's souls. It destroys families. Just because something makes money doesn't mean it's good for the general public. (Season 2, Episode 9, "Lights, Camera, Duggar")

This further suggests that the Duggar family seeks Christian-oriented media which display the “family values” they practice. Michelle follows up Jim Bob’s sentiment by suggesting that the family’s goal is to encourage the children to view appropriate media content. She reinforces her point by saying: “And so we’re not against films and movies and even TV, for that matter. It’s just what’s on it; you’ve got to be careful you put out the right kind of stuff” (Season 2, Episode 9, “Lights, Camera, Duggar”). This echoes that the Duggars are not completely anti-media but, rather, that they only support media which enforce their ideology of family values and practices. Arroba (1996) asserts that patriarchal dominance within the family takes many forms; man as head of family operates to subordinate the women as well as reinforce his dominance (Arroba, 1996, p. 9). This discourse provides the audience member with a reminder that Jim Bob functions as the head of the family.

While Michelle attends a family reunion, she expands upon the importance of staying connected with family. She suggests that her children need to be connected with members beyond the immediate family and establish relationships with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, because they are the most important things in life. Michelle feels as though her children should become close with their extended family as a means to further perpetuate Duggar familial values (Season 1, Episode 9, “Big Family Reunion”). Although Michelle abandoned her extended family network upon marrying Jim Bob, thus allowing for the couple to establish their own set of family values she, in retrospect, desires kinship with her extended family. Coontz (1992) argues that the modern industrial society of the 1950s required young families to abandon extended kin networks in order to cultivate emotional nurturance and childrearing techniques (Coontz,

1992, p. 27). As a result of this rejection, extended family networks disappeared from daily lives and happenings, allowing for the cultivation of identity and self image in familial and parental roles (p. 27). Young families were granted the ability to construct their individualized values and expectations without the opinions and criticisms of their elders (p. 27). The researcher found discourses within the media text related to Coontz's concept of extended family withdrawal based upon the desire to construct a new set of values and expectations in combination with the sentiments expressed by Michelle.

It should be noted that not all of the discourse found within the media text can be looked upon as positively reinforcing the Duggars' reproductive tendencies. In one episode, Grandpa Duggar (Jim Bob's father) speaks directly to the camera and states his distaste for the large family size:

To start with, I didn't like it and I thought in the beginning, I thought this was no good. And the more I got into it, just like Michelle's father, he didn't like it start with either but he adapted to it like I did I guess. But I don't want any more; this should be it. (Season 1, Episode 5, "When Big Families Collide")

This commentary suggests that not all members of the Duggars' extended family are active supporters of their ideologies. The researcher found this sentiment tinged with resentment towards the practice of having such a large family. Grandpa Duggar is not only critical of the family's size, but also of their values and beliefs. During the second season, Jim Bob discusses his upbringing during an episode focused upon his father's death and funeral (Season 2, Episode 13, "Duggars Say Goodbye"). He recounts that based upon the way in which he was raised, and the mistakes he watched his father make, he decided to develop his family differently. In other words, Jim Bob consciously



removed his family from his life before marriage in order to establish alternative values and practices.

Overall, the Duggar family is found to be very close through all of the episodes. They are shown holding family meetings to discuss matters that relate to the group, from family trips, deaths, and engagements to naming the newest baby. They operate as a larger-than-life family unit. Based upon the theories and concepts outlined above, the researcher has found that Christian family values, as well as specific Duggar values, are frequent within the discourse of the media text. The westernized model of the Christian nuclear family is exemplified (Arroba, 1996). The discourse created by this program acts to shape audience's opinions and views of how a family should act. By displaying the inner workings of their daily lives, from homeschooling to family meetings, a persuasive message is sent to the audience that the Duggar family method is one which works well and has great results. In general, audience analysis found that a great deal of comments on posting boards support the Duggars' set of family values. It was found that a small amount of viewers are highly critical of the family's rules, culture and way of life.

***Jon and Kate Plus Eight: Family (Values).*** Ideologies surrounding family were found in 23 of the episodes screened by the researcher. Manifested in a variety of approaches as well as in content, familial philosophies were observed in the focus and attention of Jon and Kate. Cultural studies theorists maintain that representations of families are culturally constructed rather than mirrored images of reality (Chambers, 2001, p. 25). Representations of the Gosselin family as presented within the media text provide the viewer with a multitude of imagery and discourses recounting the family's happenings. Describing the family as a "well oiled machine," Kate suggests that they

work well together; from daily schedules to family trips, each person is aware of their responsibilities and what is needed to thrive as a group (Season 3, Episode 4, “Kate Hires a Nanny”).

In one episode, Jon comments that he is trying to focus as much of his time and attention on the children as possible while avoiding the concerns and struggles present in the outside world (Season 4, Episode 15, “Sight and Sound”). In the same episode, Kate expresses a sentiment that being together as a family is fleeting as the children grow, and there is an increased sense of urgency to make memories together (Season 4, Episode 15, “Sight and Sound”). Overarching familial ideologies are presented to the viewer by both Jon and Kate, emphasizing the locations in which they place importance.

Dialogue was gathered in relationship to Jon and Kate’s views on parenting and family. In one episode, Kate recalls her behavior and the way she reacted to the children’s poor performance, stating: “I’m sure there are plenty of parents out there that are perfect but we’re not any of them” (Season 3, Episode 3, “Twins turn 7!”). This suggests a level of awareness held by Jon and Kate of their role as parents, and that they might not always succeed in the most effective way possible, but that they are trying to make it all the way through. The acknowledgement is that for family unit there are very real obstacles and challenges ahead as the children grow. Kate remarks that the family’s goal is to have as much fun together as possible by wanting to do “normal family things and have fun doing them” (Season 3, Episode 27, “Memorial Day Picnic – extended episode”). The question of what the “normal” things are to the Gosselin family leads the researcher to view nuclear, hegemonic values and activities as the overarching goal.

Despite the large size of the Gosselin family, a concerted effort is made to keep life for the eight children as normal as possible. During the filming of their reality TV show, the children have been raised with a camera crew present. In a behind-the-scenes episode, Kate remarks that the production staff's presence at the home is normal, so much so that they are considered members of the family (Season 3, Episode 31, "Behind the Scenes of Jon and Kate plus Eight"). This normalization exemplifies the idea that representations of the family on television are supported by Jon and Kate as well as embraced by the children.

Audience analysis found multiple comments which can be read as oppositional readings of the Gosselins' family values. Rejecting the hegemonies set forth in the media text which presents the family as normal, one commentator questions how anyone could perceive the family as normal considering the fact that so much attention and time is focused upon the family's media appearances, photo shoots and ties to celebrity (Goldensglitter, 2008). Challenges to the family's values and experiences also were noticed through audience analysis, as many postings question the amount of vacations and trips shown on the program (See Anonymous 11/3/08).

Throughout both seasons, Jon and Kate mention the fact that their family is outgrowing their current house and that they are actively searching for someplace new to live. Multiple episodes show the family visiting potential properties as well as entertaining ideas and components desired in a new, larger home. Towards the end of season 4, Jon and Kate announce to the children that they will be moving into a larger house. Through the process of moving, Kate makes the following remarks on family: "We've learned, now that we've lived in two houses and we're going onto our 3<sup>rd</sup>, that

the house does not make the family. The family makes the family. It's not about where you live it's about the memories you make where you live" (Season 4, Episode 33, "The Big Move"). The heart of the Gosselin family is exemplified by its supposed inner workings, daily lives and personalities of its members, rather than the physical spaces in which it occupies.

The Gosselin family takes several trips together over the course of the episodes in season 4. Multiple episodes show the family invited to stay at a resort in Hawaii as well as Jon and Kate's vow renewal ceremony. Originally airing in the fall of 2008, in this episode Kate discusses the importance of the event as well as her preconceptions:

Once upon a time, I thought old people renewed their vows and that was just like an old stuffy thing to do. And it was kind of boring and annoying. That's how I used to think about it. But now that we have eight kids that are with us and as a part of our family, it makes us realize that renewing our vows in front of them was an important thing. 'Cause not all moms and dads stay together. And we've told them a million times, but it was nice to be able to show them that we'll always be together. (Season 4, Episode 20, "Hawaii, Here We Come")

This dialogue reinforces concepts of family and marriage which are articulated in the Gosselin home. The idea that a vow renewal is crucial for the children to see their parent's marital commitment to one another illustrates Jon and Kate's desire to carry on family values.

In June of 2009, Jon and Kate Gosselin announced to their viewing audience that their 10 year marriage would be coming to an end (Bellafante, 2009). Despite the couple's previous claims to their children and to the viewing audience that they would stay married forever, infidelity and marital conflict resulted in the dissolution of their marriage. With their public separation announcement, the couple also announced the end

of their joint reality program. In December of 2009, their divorce was finalized in a Pennsylvania court (Piazza, 2009).

Audience analysis of the vow renewal episodes in light of the Gosselin's divorce yielded various reactions. When the episodes originally aired, some of the audience commentary found on GosselinsWithoutPity.net discussed issues with the vow renewal itself, as well as with the exaggeration of the family's depiction. One commentator asked the question: "Why oh why do they feel the need to go places no one else can afford EVERY episode yet still pretend they're an average American family?" (Anonymous, 11/10/08). Other commenters wrote messages which directly challenge Kate's need to renew her vows for the children. In particular, one wrote of the dangers:

I think it is really dangerous for Kate to tell her kids that they are "getting married again" because not all parents do and this will show them that they will stay together forever. I think it is insane to even talk to a 4 year old about how some parents don't stay married. No one plans their divorce on their wedding day and renewing your vows does not guarantee you a long and happy marriage. What happens when Jon and Kate finally do divorce? (Anonymous 11/17/2008)

This sentiment echoed with several other online commentators, all of which can be read as oppositional readings to the media text based upon Hall's ([1980]/2001) theory of encoding/decoding. The audience was not accepting the hegemonies surrounding the Gosselins' family values as presented within the media text; rather, they were aware of the marital troubles Jon and Kate were having and the effect it would have on the children's lives.

After the divorce finalization, TLC launched a blog entitled "Kate's Take" in March, 2010 (Gosselin, 2010). Audience commentary does not solely relate to the reality TV show *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*. Often, participants comment on Kate's postings as

well as news generated about the family. Commentary surrounding the Gosselins' vow renewal wasn't prevalent. One audience member did post the following statement:

[I]t's really too bad about you and Jon. I'm sure that they would LOVE to have both their parents get along on their birthday!!! I pray everyday that you two will get back together and forget the past and pick up where you left off. Imagine if you would have stayed together....the perfect family. Then, the show would have never broken up! I just watch the episode were you guys are one big happy family renewing your vows...sad actually. Just one year after you said "I do" again your marriage fell apart .... (Jill, 2010)

This posting can be read as supporting a hegemonic - negotiated code because Jill's sentiment reflects hegemonic conceptions of a happily married couple and family unit. Consider that this posting was created well after the public divorce of the Gosselins and that upon reviewing the episodes centered on the couple's marriage, Jill was still supportive of the family.

The Gosselin family takes many trips together, as previously mentioned, from ski trips to Utah, to vow renewals in Hawaii, along with visiting many other places. The ideological framework behind these ventures is discussed by Kate. Commenting on the events and activities of the family, she notes that while growing up she was not privy to family trips and new experiences. As a result, it is her desire to give all eight of her children new experiences and views on the world. She notes the fact that their reality TV show has provided the family with many opportunities for which she is grateful (Season 4, Episode 39, "Family Outing").

Family activities for the Gosselins do not only exist as all expenses paid trips set up by the production company, but several instances are seen in which the family joins in an activity together while at home. They are shown baking and decorating cookies and a gingerbread house while preparing to carol for their friends and family around the

holidays (Season 3, Episode 9, “Gosselin Family Christmas”). In another episode, Jon and Kate decorate the house and plan fun activities for Valentines Day as a way to remind the family to love one another (Season 3, Episode 15, “Valentines Day”).

Jon makes the comment while taking a trip to see *Thomas the Tank Engine* that “this is a family, and we do family things” (Season 4, Episode 6, “All Aboard”), which reinforces the idea that families work, play, eat, sleep and travel together, and that above all, they must find ways to stay connected as a unit despite external influences.

As important as family trips, ideologies and practices are to the Gosselins, so are family rules. In one episode, Jon and Kate discuss their family mission statement and establish to their children as well as the viewing audience some of their family values.

Briefly, the camera pans over the beginning of the sign which reads:

We the people of the Gosselin family dedicate ourselves to telling others about God’s love. We establish these two basic principles: 1) Love and Honor God and others; 2) Be thankful for our blessings (Season 3, Episode 24, “Household Chores”)

While the full text of the document is not shown via the camera’s gaze, the ten Gosselins sit together and go over the family’s mission statement as well as rules. The family’s mission statement does not only express themes of family, but also those of religious faith. Jon and Kate discuss their hopes and expectations with their children as well as remind them that they need to work together as a family (Season 3, Episode 24, “Household Chores”).

Overarching analyses of representations of family as present within this media text suggest that the Gosselins do not view their family in a singular way. In other words, they suggest that all of the individualized components of their daily lives are strung

together to construct their family's ideologies. The show began with an idealized nuclear family, but by the end of the series, representations changed drastically. The audience also noted in overwhelming numbers oppositional readings to the discourses presented to enforce family values. The researcher did not find any discussant who was accepting a preferred reading from the media text; rather, most audience members stood in stark opposition to and rejection of the hegemonies.

### **Gender (Roles)**

Feminist scholars place importance on studying gendered aspects of society. The following section draws from theorists such as Butler (2006), Swenson (2009), Weedon (1997) and other scholars whose work is of interdisciplinary importance. Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity suggests that gender is culturally constructed by individual experiences. Based upon the success or failure of the gender specific behaviors throughout this repetitious process, subjectivity and identity are created (Butler, 2006, p. 359). This concept is used to analyze the media text in order to answer, in part, the research questions.

Swenson (2009) asserts that in postmodern conceptions, gender fluidity allows for the separation of biological sex and socially constructed gender norms (Swenson, 2009, p. 38). Gender, a socially constructed aspect of identity, is shaped not only by performativity but, as Weedon (1997) suggests, cultural and institutional discourses of society (Weedon, 1997). These discourses aid in the creation of deeply held ideological beliefs about gendered behavior (Swenson, 2009, p.28). Starting from youth, children learn what gendered norms should be for themselves from their parents. Social



institutions such as the family, educational systems, popular culture, labor and religious beliefs are vital in the dissemination of these discourses (Weedon, 1997, p. 3).

Sociologist theorist Acker (1992) identifies that social structures that differentiate between women and men are locations in which gender is assigned (Acker, 1992, p. 567). Gendered institutions are historically occupied by men and identify themselves by the absence of women. The family functions as a space where women have held a central, although subordinated, defining role. In our society, the divide between these institutions lies in a separation between “reproduction” and “production,” which has been interpreted in many ways (p. 567). Based upon this separation, hierarchies form hegemonic gender roles and norms (p. 568).

Ridgeway and Correll (2000) write that gender systems in society use cultural beliefs to find cues used to classify people as male or female based upon behaviors and traits. Once this classification has taken place, the expectation is for them to perform as gendered beings (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000, p. 110). Gendered beliefs or the dominant hegemonic forms of gender are institutionalized in society via governmental politics and the media (p. 113). Gender hegemonies are presented as all encompassing, yet they are primarily focused upon white, middle-class heterosexual men and women (p. 113). These hegemonies are enforced for all persons regardless of their individual gender beliefs and are expected to respond accordingly (p. 113). Contemporary American hegemonies view men as more competent than women, relying on the cultural presumption that men are the dominant gender (p. 119).

In a later article written by Ridgeway and Correll (2004), gendered hegemonic cultural beliefs act as cultural rules or guidelines for societal structures of difference

(Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 511). Gender rules remain intact within the home, since people are likely to live with persons of different genders, sexes and ages. As a result, domestic labor is often a result of sex segregation and hegemonic gender roles (p. 512). Contemporary gender stereotyping views women as collective in nature, and men as the producers and products of a social system where they are viewed as the dominant gender (p. 513). Societal structures that cross between the public and private, such as the nuclear family, act as conductors for gender hegemony (p. 517). Continuous reinforcement of hegemonic gender roles within the nuclear family maintains and sustains gendered practices, shaping children's behavior and characteristics (p. 517). The following section utilizes the above-mentioned gender concepts in order to analyze the media texts and discourses.

***17, 18 Kids and Counting: Gender (Roles).*** Upon viewing, gendered themes were found in 6 episodes; these manifested themselves in a variety of approaches. To begin, notions of gender roles within the Duggar family were addressed by production staff questions to Michelle:

Production staff member:

Do you believe that you are reinforcing gender stereotypes by having your girls do the cooking and cleaning?

Michelle:

I think there are some gender aspects you just can't get around. And I think there's differences in their personalities probably due to gender. In some of those respects, and that's not bad. I think that's a good thing. Um, because it's innate, it's in them – you know, from the time they're little.

Production staff member:

Are you basically setting up your daughters for a life of being a stay at home mom?

Michelle:

No, we're not setting up our daughters to be stay at home moms. Now, the majority of the girls – that's their heart. They want to be married, they want to have a family and they want to allow their husband to have that role of being the main breadwinner of the family. And that's just something that they feel strongly about. (Season 1, Episode 8, "Trading Places, Duggar Style")

Michelle enforces the idea that her family's gender roles are not predicated upon stereotyping but, rather, asserts that her daughters have the ability to do more than be stay-at-home moms. This ideology carries a high level of biological determinism and essentialism by suggesting that the Duggar daughters will be prone to carry out traditional gender roles. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) write that within the nuclear family, the continuous repetition of gender hegemonies shape and mold gender roles in children which are often carried through to adulthood (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 512). Gender roles are reinforced by Michelle's dialogue that gendered life skills are needed to prepare her children for the future, as she suggests that if the daughters need (or desire) to be the "breadwinner" they must have the skills to do so (Season 1, Episode 8, "Trading Places, Duggar Style"). On the other hand, Michelle hopes that her sons learn the skills needed to cook, clean and keep a house while the girls learn how to take care of an automobile, suggesting that this is a vital task for the parents (Season 1, Episode 8, "Trading Places, Duggar Style"). Domestic labor within the hegemonic nuclear family as illustrated by the Duggars is a result of gender roles and guidelines as suggested by Ridgeway and Correll (2004). The division of labor is found most often split down gendered lines. In the above episode, a brief exception is made.

Displays and practices of traditional gender roles are seen in the Duggar household. The Duggar daughters are often filmed nurturing their younger siblings and

laboring over their physical bodies. Jim Bob discusses the importance of the younger boys' hair, suggesting that the girls like to keep the boys' hair in shape (Season 2, Episode 7, "O Come all ye Duggars"). In the first episode of the series, as well as throughout other seasons, the oldest Duggar daughters are shown fulfilling domestic duties in and around the home. Specifically, each of the older girls is charged with a different domestic responsibility, such as packing luggage, completing household laundry, feeding children and participating in homeschooling (Season 1, Episode 1, "Big Family Meets Big Apple"). Michelle is often shown as calm in demeanor and quiet at all times, even when disciplining her children. One episode shows Michelle attempting to control her sons' behavior in public while maintaining gendered ideologies about behavior. Later on in the episode, the oldest girls are guided by Michelle in how to make homemade soap (a family tradition). During this time, feminine, domestic labor is illustrated (Season 1, Episode 7, "Cheaper by the Duggars"). The overarching societal divide between "reproduction" and "production" as written by Acker (1992) establishes hierarchal gender expectations (Acker, 1992, p. 567). The subordinate role slotted for women expects them to be calm nurturers desirous of collective socialization (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 513). Michelle's gender performance corresponds with hegemonic expectations of feminine behavior.

Audience analysis demonstrates that most viewers read the Duggars' gendered hegemonies in the preferred way, meaning that they agree with the gendered segregations and expectations set forth in the program. One commentator was found not only to accept the stereotypical gender ideologies of the Duggar family, but also outwardly agrees with and expands upon her own ideological framework, posting the following:

Women today are way too career-minded as it is. Jill and Jana are learning to run a household, which includes taking care of babies, cooking and learning home management. So many mothers today ABANDON their God-given role as manager of their houses because they don't know how to do such duties. (FourH, 2009)

This commentary does not only support the dominant hegemony of gender role segregation, but also draws upon essentialist viewpoints that traditional gender beliefs and behaviors are best.

Themes of modesty run throughout both seasons of this program. The researcher found that both Michelle and Jim Bob discuss these gendered principles. Jim Bob recounts the family's use of modest swimwear, something that he feels is important for both the boys and the girls (Season 1, Episode 9, "Big Family Reunion"). Michelle maintains in an interview that modest practices encompass the family's daily lives. From shutting and locking the bathroom door, to finding ways to keep their bodies covered, such actions are of the utmost significance. Remarking that this is of highest importance for the older boys, Michelle states:

Boys as they are growing into manhood, they need to learn self-control. And I think our eyes – especially for men – their eyes are the door to their heart. And if they can't control their eyes, there're gonna struggle with other things. (Season 2, Episode 10, "Duggars' room with a view")

Gender stereotypes view men as the producers of and participants in hegemonic behaviors related to gender roles is illustrated by the discourse generated concerning modesty (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 513). The Duggar sons are shielded by their older sisters from images and ideas determined to be inappropriate by their parents, thus making the sons active participants in this gender stereotyping. Upon analysis, the researcher finds this gendered concept unequal, for the daughters are expected to care for

and nurture the younger Duggar boys while acting as shields of immodesty, leaving themselves exposed to immodest aspects of reality. Audience analysis found postings which reject the Duggars' gendered hegemonies in this regard. A negotiated reading was found which understands the Duggars' intentions, but questions the way in which they approach the physical body. One commenter writes that she thinks the Duggars' stress on the physical body is "making the woman's body a shameful and dirty thing," while understanding the gendered hegemonies within the media text. She writes: "Of course it's a good idea to shield your family from things, but I feel that this emphasis on extreme modesty is sending a message that the female body is nothing but an object of lust" (Shawna, 3/22/09). Yet, this poster ultimately interprets this notion by writing: "I feel bad for all those kids because sexuality CAN be taught in a Christian, wholesome, honest way without making it seem shameful, dirty, and degrading" (Shawna, 3/22/09). This negotiated reading of the Duggars' gendered practices is aware of the hegemonic framework present within the family, but interprets it based upon their own ideologies surrounding gender.

In preparation for "manhood," the Duggars approach sexual intimacy and dating in accordance to hegemonic gender rules. More of this theme appears in relationship to religious faith. Jim Bob discusses the importance of cherishing one's wife with his son Josh on the eve of his wedding, about which the following ideology is presented:

I think it's important for the man to learn to cherish his wife and for him to realize that it takes a lot longer for her to kind of get in the mood and stuff after they're married, versus a man who is instant on, instant off. But a woman is like – it takes—it takes time. (Season 2, Episode 21, "A Very Duggar Wedding")

The above discourse is viewed by the researcher as Jim Bob's reinforcement of hegemonic gender rules about men, women and self control. The assertion is that gender hegemonies which view men as the knowledgeable gender while placing women in subordinated spheres is present in the discourse.

Overarching depictions and discourses surrounding gender expectations, roles and behaviors found within the media text reflect hegemonic trends. The Duggars actively perform displays of gender through discourse, family activities, and practices. Through these performances, gendered identity is created (Butler, 2006). Weedon (1997) asserts that discourse found in cultural institutions such as the family creates "deeply held ideological beliefs about gendered behavior" (Weedon, 1997, p. 3). Throughout both seasons, Jim Bob acts as the family's patriarch; he resumes the role of expert in every situation he enters. The idea that men are dominant within society both historically and currently is seen within this gendered behavior (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000). On the other hand, Michelle assumes a subordinated gender role within the family structure as seen through her discourse and actions. Expectations are placed upon the children in terms gendered behavior and domestic labor. Audience analysis discovered that viewers were generally divided on the gender hegemonies found within the Duggar family. Some fully accepted the preferred reading that the beliefs and behaviors within the media text are best, while others vehemently opposed gender segregated ideologies and expectations.

***Jon and Kate Plus Eight: Gender (Roles).*** Expressions of gender roles were found in 20 episodes throughout both seasons. The researcher found discourse generated from Jon and Kate regarding their children's gendered behaviors. Kate addresses the

issue of potty training in which she notes that the girls had been trained for a full year before the boys started the process. In an interview, Kate expresses her dismay over this time lapse and is excited at the thought of not having to change diapers any longer (Season 3, Episode 6, “Potty Training for the Boys”). This dialogue by Kate suggests an overarching idea that the girls are more mature and easier to handle. Supporting this notion, Kate describes the boys as “dirty” and says that the girls are more verbal and emotional, and more prone to outbursts than the boys. She states that the girls are “generally more needy while the boys are like ‘oh whatever’” (Season 4, Episode 1, “Boys’ Day Out”). This notion that the boys are nonverbal, dirty and less prone to emotional outbursts supports hegemonic notions of gender roles. Concurrently, the behavior expectations placed upon the children by Kate challenge hegemonic gender roles in terms of men’s superiority over women (Ridgewell and Correll, 2000, p. 119).

Audience analysis found negotiated readings of the gender hegemonies enforced by Kate on her children. One commenter notes that Kate “manipulates the rigid gender roles in this family so that they benefit her,” as well as the presence of gendered trips and activities (Anonymous 3/8/08). The audience is aware of the gender hegemonies within the show; they interpret Kate’s actions and discourse to mean that she is expectant that her children will behave according to their gender, which is something that she does not always do, thus reading the media text’s hegemonies in opposition.

Jon also reinforces hegemonic gender roles and expectations of his children. Taking his sons to the gym to “work out” places emphasis upon the physical body as a site for strength and masculinity; he tells the boys that the gym is “man camp” (Season 4, Episode 2, “Girls’ Day Out”). The gendered institution of the gym acts as a location



where gendered behaviors are encouraged. Jon emphasizes that men are more competent than women in such arenas (Acker, 1992).

In another episode, while Jon is taking care of the children, the boys are shown playing on the floor. Jon actively encourages them to fight, hit each other and wrestle in order to help “toughen them up,” which he says is required because they live with so many “girls” (Season 4, Episode 17, “Mr. Mom”). In another episode, Jon takes the sextuplets on a walk in the woods. Before they leave the house, each of the children protests that they do not want to go. Despite this, Jon bundles them up and takes them outside. While walking through the woods, the children trip and stumble on trees, leaves and sticks. At one point, Aaden begins to lag behind, to which Jon yells: “Walk like a man” (Season 4, Episode 34, “Walk in the Woods”). Each of the three situations described above reinforces gendered notions of behavior. He is found to focus on displays of masculinity and holds gendered expectations his sons’ behavior. The continuous reinforcement of hegemonic gendered behavior within the family circulates and shapes the children’s gender characteristics (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 517).

Discourses describing Kate’s gendered expectations for Jon are found in her desire for Jon to act as the leader and protector of the family. While in the airport on the way to Hawaii, Jon declines Kate’s request for him to lead the family line. Later in an interview, Kate says: “You’re (Jon) supposed to be leader in our family, and I like to follow you” (Season 4, Episode 20, “Hawaii, Here We Come”). In addition, Kate makes the comment: “I always beg him (Jon) to protect me; he doesn’t” (Season 4, Episode 9, “Embarrassing and Favorite moments”). This notion that Kate wants Jon to be the leader of the family as well as a person for her to follow illustrates compliance with hegemonic

gender roles (Acker, 1992). Both examples demonstrate Kate's desire for Jon to exhibit hegemonic gendered behavior.

Gendered divisions of labor are shown both at home and at work. In many episodes, Kate is shown as domestic laborer; duties such as laundry, cooking, cleaning and child rearing are fulfilled by her (Season 3, Episode(s), 5, 10, 14, 24, 26, "Winter Preparation", "Plane Ride to Utah", "Carpeting the House", "Household Chores", "Games Gosselins Play"). Jon is shown performing domestic labor utilizing his physicality. When the family is having new carpets installed, Jon is shown moving the furniture and working with the installation crew (Season 3, Episode 14, "Carpeting the House"). In many episodes, Jon and Kate argue over divisions of domestic labor within the home. In one particular episode; they dispute over laundry duties (Season 4, Episode 3, "Sextuplets turn 4"). Kate asserts that this is a task assigned to her, and that since it is her duty along with many other things, Jon does not have a voice in the procedure or methodology. Carrying on with domestic labor, in one episode the family is shown having multiple washers and dryers delivered to the house. While product placement is evident, Kate mentions the machines by name, proclaiming that they "make laundry a joy" (Season 4, Episode 35, "Home Sweet Home"). Kate asserts gendered ideas about labor that are not only evident in household chores, but also in tasks needed outside of the home. It is made clear in an interview that she refuses to put gas in any of the family's vehicles or take out the trash. She describes these duties as "men's jobs" and something that she does not care to do, and will not do (Season 3, Episode 20, "Mady's day"). Divisions of domestic labor within the Gosselin home and the above discourses reflect

gendered rules and expectations based upon hegemonic beliefs (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 511).

In some episodes, Jon and Kate are shown dividing up the household chores, as well as equally participating in the care of the children (Season 3, Episode 24, “Household Chores”). In more than one episode, the couple is shown dressing the children and preparing them for family outings together. Kate notes that Jon’s job is to oversee the children’s bath routine as well as make all of the beds in the house (Season 4, Episode 5, “Sunny Day”). These seemingly mundane, routine tasks are illustrated in a gendered manner. Depending upon the individual, a designated role and expectation is evident. Hegemonic conceptions of gendered labor and responsibilities would dictate that it is the responsibility of Kate to perform these duties. In many episodes, Jon and Kate bicker, through which Kate attempts to show that the rules and expectations she enforces make her the more competent parent. More often than not, Kate’s method is the preferred method. In one episode in particular, Jon and Kate argue over the use of a coupon. Despite Kate’s very specific rules about shopping and the family budget, Jon purchases something without considering the cost. Immediately a fight ensues in which Kate scolds Jon and insists that he be responsible for his actions (Season 4, Episode 33, “The Big Move”). This interchange is vital in understanding the gendered power plays taking place within the Gosselin home. At various points throughout the seasons, importance is placed upon domestic labor by both Jon and Kate. Generally speaking, gender hegemony views men as more knowledgeable than women as a basis for the cultural belief in men as the dominant gender. Here, Kate challenges these cultural beliefs by taking a leadership role (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000).

Another theme found within the media text is that of working outside of the home. Season 3 begins with Jon working during the day, while Kate stays home. On the weekends, Kate works a double shift as a nurse to help “make ends meet.” This family system shifts as the seasons go on so that Jon becomes a full time, stay- at-home dad. Kate, quitting her job as a nurse, begins to find work from her newfound celebrity. From book tours to speaking engagements, Kate takes many business trips while Jon is left to care for the children. In other episodes, Jon speaks directly to the camera, telling the audience that Kate is away from home, leaving him with the children. (Season 4, Episode 17, “Mr. Mom”, Season 4, Episode 38, “Trip to the Vet”, Season 4, Episode 34, “Walk in the Woods”). He is shown making lunches, planning activities, taking the children to school as well as attempting to complete the domestic duties necessary to run a large family. Gendered expectations continued to be transgressed by Jon and Kate. In a later episode, Jon begins to express his disinterest in working from home. He says in an interview that “it’s hard being on this side of the camera, no privacy, loss of identity” (Season 4, Episode 39, “Family outing”), while Kate maintains that she loves her job and the ability to write books and travel. This is the first appearance of a divide taking place between Jon and Kate in terms of work outside of the home.

Multiple audience comments found discussing Kate working outside of the home were oppositional (but in this case, hegemonic) in the way that they greatly disagreed with her time away from the children and her duties as mother. They are hegemonic because the way Kate functions in the public sphere goes against gender hegemony. Many “Kate Hate” fan sights, Face book groups and meta-texts have been created as a result of the reality show (see France, 2010). The researcher did find an overwhelming

number of audience members defending Kate, many on the TLC blog. One in particular centers her argument around gender: “The only reason why any woman can't stand Kate is because she can do more with 8 kids then they can with 1 or no kids... oh and to mention she needs no man standing behind to make her world go round!” (Tonya, 2010). This interpretation of the media text can be looked at as preferred, but counter hegemonic considering that Kate is shown, after her divorce through the media text and meta-textual representations as a strong, single mother.

Upon analysis of gender roles within the text, the researcher has found that at various points, hegemonic gender expectations are fulfilled by the family, while at other times, they are resisted. In other words, there are times throughout the series when Jon and Kate participate in a gendered division of labor complacently and without question. At other times, traditional conceptions of gender are challenged by the family’s activities and behaviors. Kate asserts herself her behavior and domestic labor in such a way which tinkers with hegemonic gender hierarchy. Meanwhile, the children are provided with continuous reinforcements of hegemonic gender rules and expectations by both of their parents. Audience analysis has found mixed reactions and interpretations of viewers regarding the gender hegemonies within the media text. Some audience members actively challenge the traditional gender roles and behaviors set forth by the media text while others criticize Kate when she challenges gender hegemonies.

### **Religious Faith, Hegemony and Representation**

Drawing upon theorists of religion, media and society such as Pearce and Axinn (1998), Abraham (2009), Fiorenza (2005), Jennings (2010), Miles (1997), Engstrom and Semic (2003) this section will analyze the media text and audience reactions related to

these topics. The Judeo-Christian doctrine contains pro-family messages which often guide family members in their relationships (Pearce and Axinn, 1998). The mother-child relationship is affected by attendance at religious services, the amount of time and attention focused on religion, exposure to religious faith, familial participation in religious activities and shared religious beliefs (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, pp. 818-824). Abraham's (2009) concept of gender essentialism as the primary location for ideological control of women in their relation to motherhood and religious faith points out a reliance on biological sexualities to reinforce male dominance in terms of many religious institutions (Abraham, 2009, p. 156). The utilization of gendered symbols to control wo/men while preserving patriarchal families appeal to religious doctrines and are vital for the construction of hegemonic understandings of identity (Fiorenza, 2005). Fiorenza's term, kyriarchal, refers to "emperor, lord, slave-master, father, elite male domination" as a category to articulate the "intersecting structures of domination: gender, race, class, and imperialism/colonialism" (Fiorenza, 2005, p. 111). This is addressed later in this section. The relationship between medical discourses, infertility and religious will be drawn from Jennings (2010). Hegemonic notions of motherhood stemming from religious socialization and family customs are examined in conjunction with the use of reproductive technologies. Pronatalist ideology reinforces women's and men's social roles regarding parenthood by linking a women's social value with her ability to conceive and rear children and encouraging reproduction (See: Parry, 2005; Morell, 2000; May, 1995; Jennings, 2010). Miles' (1997) argument that representations of religion on primetime television are most often devoted to Christianity, resulting in a lack of religious diversity in American society, is also applied to the media texts and audience

analyses (Miles, 1997, p. 43). Engstrom and Semic's (2003) study of religion and reality TV is consulted in order to explore the concept that non-Christian religious faiths are often underrepresented; this genre's failure to accurately portray the religious diversity of American society in an educational manner is assessed in the case at hand (Engstrom and Semic, 2003, p. 159). The following portion of analysis focuses upon representations and portrayals of religion within the media text.

***17, 18 Kids and Counting: Religious Faith, Hegemony and Representation.***

The researcher found that the highest number of episodes collected from both seasons focused upon religious themes and ideologies, a total of twelve. To begin, the family's religious beliefs are discussed throughout both seasons. The family does not name what denomination they are affiliated with or provide specific information. Pearce and Axinn (1998) write that the Judeo-Christian tradition promotes pro-family messages and ideologies which act as guidelines for inter-familial and marital relating (Pearce and Axinn, 1998). Jim Bob is filmed discussing pro-family messages which are correspondent with religious beliefs, stating on behalf of Michelle and him:

As Christians, we believe in love. We probably have more love than any couple on the face of the earth. But we believe in the context of marriage. We believe in our nation and believe that our nation should be one nation under God. (Season 2, Episode 2, "I left my Duggar in San Francisco")

Judeo-Christian beliefs associate strong bonds between husbands and wives as the central component for religious participation (Pearce and Axinn, 1998, p. 810). Michelle suggests that their religious commitment is one that is played out in every facet of their daily lives. While on a speaking engagement, Michelle and Jim Bob recount the early days of their marriage when birth control was used. It is insinuated that a miscarriage was

suffered as a result. Michelle says that as a consequence of grief, both her and Jim Bob “got on our knees and prayed together, and we said, ‘father forgive us’” (Season 2, Episode 2, “I left my Duggar in San Francisco”). The Duggars’ religious ideologies and beliefs are summed up by Jim Bob: “We really believe that God’s principles have all the answers to life’s questions,” implying that these principles are at the root of the family structure (Season 2, Episode 2, “I left my Duggar in San Francisco”). Again, it is unclear what specific sect of Christianity is followed by the Duggar family. Miles (1997) suggests that in American society, Christianity has become synonymous with conservative Christianity (Miles, 1997, p. 42). Pronatalist societies encourage women to bear and rear children and enforce the belief that their value within society is predicated upon their ability to biologically reproduce (May, 1995; Parry, 2005). Michelle and Jim Bob are found demonstrating facets of pronatalist ideology, most notably in terms of the number of children the couple has, and the correlation to their religious faith which apparently frowns upon any form of birth control.

Members of the viewing audience were found remarking on the Duggars’ set of religious beliefs in relation to their large family. On Michelle’s TLC blog, one audience member infers that the Duggars are practitioners of the Quiverfull movement. Here, one commenter calling him/herself VS (2009) criticizes the media text and the Duggars’ religious hegemonies:

I hate the Quiverfull movement b/c it produces women who are willing to do exactly this to themselves. No one is supposed to have 19 kids. No one. God gave you a womb but he/she/it also gave you a brain. Use it. (VS, 2009)

The researcher has determined that based upon multiple comments posted by audience members, many viewers directly link the Duggar’s family size to their religious



values. While this is not named within the media text, the Duggars have discussed their religious persuasion in other media texts such as the *Today* show, in which they profess that they are in fact followers of the Quiverfull movement which teaches that children are God's blessing and that husbands and wives should try to have as many children as they physically can based on a quote from the bible that reads: "Children are a heritage of the Lord," from verse 3, of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Psalm (Considine, 2008).

Family activities centering on religion occur in many episodes. To begin, the family participates in the community's Christmas parade. The entire family unit prepares a living nativity float for the competition, building a manger, borrowing wild animals, and making signs to adorn their bus. Michelle paints all of the signs, which read as follows:

For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. John 3:17 - Jesus is the light - Christ is born - Emmanuel, God with us - Peace on earth - Joy to the world. (Season 2, Episode 7, "O Come all ye Duggars")

This verbal imagery supports religious ideologies reinforced in family activities. Pearce and Axinn (1988) discuss three mechanisms used by religious institutions to strengthen family relationships. First is the idea that positive relationships among family members are desirable (Pearce and Axinn, 1988, p. 811). Second is the level of formal support that "religious institutions offer families," and third is the role of religious faith in the creation of a closure in social times "by linking friends and family members in the same groups (p. 812). The Duggars are found to be encouraged by their religious doctrine to spend family time on religious themed activities which allow for promotion and communication between members. While traveling to Michelle's family reunion, the Duggars make a

stop at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. Upon arrival, they are greeted by Ken Ham, the president/CEO and founder of Answers in Genesis-U.S. and the Creation Museum. They are given a privately guided tour of the exhibits. Jim Bob, while speaking directly to the camera, discusses why the family has made this part of their trip:

We wanted to bring our family here to teach our children about creation and to show them all the great exhibits of how the world was created. And also, to reinforce to ‘em the fallacies of evolution and how it was impossible for this world to just all happen by chance. (Season 1, Episode 9, “Big Family Reunion”)

This religious ideology of creationism rather than evolution is further illustrated by Michelle, when she says: “There really is a creator! And it’s, it is design. I mean we didn’t just happen from mush” (Season 1, Episode 9, “Big Family Reunion”). The family believes that evolution is something that is taught by many people and happens to be, as Jim Bob proclaims, “totally unscientific” (Season 1, Episode 9, “Big Family Reunion”). As the trip through the museum continues, Michelle is shown proclaiming the authority of the bible. She states: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And from that reasoning, you can, you can see how the earth formed with the flood and all of the things—that science really backs up what scripture says” (Season 1, Episode 9, “Big Family Reunion”). Upon analysis, the researcher found that this family field trip is one which operates not only to reinforce religious beliefs and ideologies within the Duggar family, but also to present the family’s religious agenda to the viewing public. The amount of participation in religious beliefs and practices combined with the amount of importance placed upon faith based hegemonies contributes to a person’s religiosity (Pearce and Axinn, 1998). The Duggars are found to be active participants and believers

in the Christian theory of creationism, placing a large amount of importance upon scripture.

Many audience members commented that they were excited to see religious beliefs on the reality show that reflected their own. Reading these religious hegemonies in a preferred way, it was noted that many viewers embraced the family and the show because of the religious values portrayed. JDB wrote:

I'm so thrilled that TLC is showing the world, through your show, what a Godly family looks like and how, when we follow God's ways, the outcome is the absolute best! Your children are well behaved, happy, loving, smart, hard workers, respectful, and love and serve God...what more could a family (or society) want! I hope this show never ends! (JDB, 2009)

This sentiment was found multiple times throughout the virtual ethnography. The researcher discovered a large segment of the base not only supports the religious hegemonies within the text, but also encourage more media texts to do the same. Dominant, preferred readings of the religious codes set forth by the media text were derived by the audience.

In addition, it was found by the researcher that not all religious family field trips include all of the children. In one episode, Jim Bob and Michelle travel to Lodi, California to speak at the Home Church. The couple was invited to share their life story as well as their “testimony about how the Lord’s worked in our lives” (Season 2, Episode 2, “I left my Duggar in San Francisco”). This trip shows that the Duggars feel so passionate about their faith that they are ready and willing to venture outside of their direct community and share their story and beliefs with the world.

From the start of Season 1, other elements are seen to support the Duggars’ religious lifestyle. While on the way to the airport, the family sings church hymns; text

on the screen appears, saying: “Hymns and gospel music are the genres of choice when it comes to Bus sing-along” (Season 1, Episode 1, “Big Family Meets Big Apple”). In yet another textual element, the eldest Duggar daughters, Jinger, Jessa, Jill and Jana, along with eldest son Josh and his fiancé, Anna, visit Anna’s family’s place of worship, Burford Grove Baptist Church in Florida. Upon entering the building, the camera gazes over the church’s signage as well as biblical messages as verbal imagery, followed by a discussion of how wonderful and welcoming the staff is, much like “home” (Season 2, Episode 1, “Once a Bride, Always a Duggar”). Engstrom and Semic’s (2003) study of religion in reality TV found that Christianity is presented more frequently than other religions in American culture (Engstrom and Semic, 2003, p. 157). The point is made that reality TV has the power to educate its audience about non-Christian religious practices and often fails to do so (p. 159). Textual elements such as those mentioned above are found to correspond with Engstrom and Semic’s findings. Representations of the Duggar’s Christianity does not allow for the educational exploration of any other religions.

The active reinforcement of religious principles can also be seen in an episode in which the Duggar family visits the Crater of Diamonds state park in Arkansas. Before the trip, Jim Bob lectures the children that “God’s principles are worth even more than silver or gold or diamonds,” and that they need to put this activity into perspective (Season 2, Episode 4, “A Duggar in the Rough”). The placement of religious beliefs as the core of the Duggar family is apparent. Continuing on religiously themed family activities, the Duggars take time to volunteer at a nearby wild animal refuge. Jim Bob explains the purpose of the trip in an interview:

We try to teach our children to serve their fellow man and look for opportunities to serve. And that's really true ministry. That's what Jesus said: "Go and wash other people's feet." And he set the examples for all of us doing that himself. (Season 2, Episode 3, "Duggars on Safari")

This trip, grounded in Christian ministry, is followed up by the family visiting El Salvador during the holidays, in which they volunteer with an organization whose goals and framework are those of hope, Christianity, and doing for others. A portion of the family led by Jim Bob executed these goals in visiting underprivileged families and delivering food and gifts while laying hands upon persons and praying for their health (Season 2, Episode(s) 5 and 6, "Duggars in El Salvador", "Duggars on a Mission"). Importance is placed upon religious principles and beliefs as a framework to guide the family. Pearce and Axinn (1998) suggest that Judeo-Christian pro-family messages encourage parents to teach their children religious principles and beliefs as a way to strengthen their relationships. In particular, the second mechanisms used by religious institutions to strengthen relationships among family members comes from the promotion of religious themed interactions and activities which provide families with time and space to discuss their religious teachings (Pearce and Axinn, 1998. p. 812). The Duggar's mission trip is found by the researcher to be an illustration of the second mechanism of religious institutions.

When looking for religious views in practice, it was found that the Duggars participate in what they call courtship. As described by the eldest son, Josh Duggar, courtship entails meeting a woman suitable to be a romantic partner and seeking out the approval of her father in order to express his interest. Once permission is given, the young man is then allowed to get to know her better by courting her. The specifics of

courtship are displayed throughout this season, such as the idea that chaperones are needed at all times. The young couple is never allowed to be alone or speak to each other alone until they are married. It should be noted that this practice does not allow for a couple to kiss until their wedding day. The only form of physical expression that is deemed appropriate is holding hands (Season 1, Episode 3, “Josh Gets Engaged”). In the episode, Josh proposes to Anna, bringing her back to the Duggar house in Arkansas. While in a family meeting, Michelle says the following:

Anna, since it was your 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and you had made that commitment to the Lord that you wouldn’t court or get engaged or whatever until you turned 20, your daddy had said you know that he really wanted you to keep that commitment. So I guess uh, Josh and your daddy figured all this out together to surprise you. Would you have ever have dreamed this on your 20<sup>th</sup> birthday? (Season 1, Episode 3, “Josh Gets Engaged”)

These practices, those of courtship, abstinence and desire to remain “pure” before marriage, are all deeply rooted in the Duggars’ religious faith (Season 2, Episode 21, “A Very Duggar Wedding”). Firoenza (2005) writes that with post modernity, fundamentalist religious beliefs have taken a central location within society uses to control wo/men’s sexuality (Fioenza, 2005, p. 113). In the above discourse, the Duggars are found perpetuating fundamentalist, conservative Christian ideologies concerning dating.

As seen in the above quote, Michelle maintains the patriarchal traditions associated with marriage and the idea that Anna’s consent for marriage did not lie in Anna herself; rather, it was found in her father’s approval. Extending upon this idea, Mr. Keller (Anna’s father) makes the following statement right before the wedding: “The way God ordained it all, she—or Josh—becomes the authority at the wedding. He becomes

her authority, not me. That's the way God designed the transfer of authority and it's a good design" (Season 2, Episode 21, "A Very Duggar Wedding"). This transfer of authority can be seen as deeply rooted in historically patriarchal practices which are encoded as religious values. Lerner (1986) argues that the family operates as the principal pillar of patriarchy in contemporary society (Lerner, 1986, p. 11). Many theorists note that the family acts as a locus for socialization in terms of gender roles as well as religious beliefs (Chambers, 2001; Jennings, 2010). Fiorenza (2005) asserts that the "heterosexual patriarchal family appeals to religious scriptures and laws, specific cultural codes of dress and behavior," and becomes the driving force behind traditional values (Fiorenza, 2005, p. 112). The illustration above provided by Mr. Keller shows patriarchal religious beliefs in practice.

Multiple audience members posted about the discourse generated by Mr. Keller in the episode above. Some directly opposed the hegemonies set forth by the media text which not only support and endorse traditional gender roles, but also evangelical Christian beliefs and practices (em, 2009). One audience member not only opposes the gendered practices of the media text, but also takes note of the overarching treatment of women based upon religious beliefs. Good Grief ! (2009) writes: "'Transfer of authority' from Anna's dad to Josh? What is this, the pilgrim days? Yet another example of how the women in that circle are not allowed to have an original thought in their head." (Good Grief !, 2009). This oppositional interpretation points out that the religious ideologies presented within the text are ones which subordinate and devalue women.

The researcher found that themes of Christian beliefs present in most episodes through discourse, imagery, observation and elements of production. Miles (1997) and

Engstrom and Semic (2003) argue that television presents conservative Christianity most frequently and perpetuates dominant religious hegemonies. This supports Pearce and Axinn's (1998) concept that parents and children actively involved in shared religious beliefs gain strength through their relationships and their level of commitment to their beliefs. Religious faith exists as a pillar of the Duggar family and they wish to illustrate their beliefs to the audience. A majority of the audience actively supports the religious hegemonies set forth by the media text; a smaller amount was found to read the text in counter-hegemonic ways.

***Jon and Kate Plus Eight: Religious Faith, Hegemony and Representation.***

Representations of religion and spirituality were found to be least frequent during both seasons, with a total of 10 episodes. Illustrations of religious beliefs were found, but often not in direct discourse. The majority of religious components were found in camera shots of the family, as well as in verbal messages on clothing as well as in areas around the Gosselin home. In three separate episodes, Jon is shown twice, and Kate once, wearing a shirt in the interview portion of the show with the text "Isaiah 40:31" written out (Season 4, Episode 2, "Girls' Day Out", Season 4, Episode 3, "Sextuplets turn 4" and Season 4, Episode 6, "All Aboard"). At first glance, the researcher was unaware of the religious significance of the textual message; upon further examination it was found to be a nonverbal declaration of their religious ideologies. The scripture passage from the new international version of the bible reads: "[B]ut those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Biblegateway.com). The use of these shirts to identify the couple's religious faith is done in a very subtle manner and is encoded to reach



Christian viewers. An article written in *Christianity Today* by Julie Vermeer Elliot explains how evangelical Christians were moved by the Gosselins' Isaiah 40:31 t-shirt and vowed to be devoted audience members (Elliot, 2009).

Audience analysis found many postings which negotiate the religious hegemonies set forth by the text that identify the Gosselins as evangelical Christians. The comments made by Dew echo what many responses insinuate that Kate has “misconstrued everything that Christian religious is supposed to be about,” and that “she is no better than the televangelist religious scam artists and hypocrites” (Dew, 2009). Based upon Dew's commentary, it can be inferred that the dominant religious hegemonies of the media text are not necessarily preferred by the audience.

In many episodes, the camera briefly pans over areas of the Gosselin home where scripture and prayers have been written out and posted on the walls. In five episodes, the camera pauses on the text long enough so that the audience is able to take note. The viewer is shown Proverbs 15:1, written out and posted in the dining room (Season 4, Episode 1, “Boys' Day Out”). This passage, from the new international version of the bible, reads: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Biblegateway.com). This passage corresponds with the Gosselins' family values. Colossians 3:20 is shown posted on the kitchen cabinet (Season 4, Episode 7, “Heading South”). This passage reads: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Biblegateway.com), and touches upon family values and mothering philosophies endorsed by Jon and Kate. In another episode, “Prayers for our Children” are posted on the refrigerator door and are noticed by the camera's gaze (Season 4, Episode 4, “Korean Dinner”). These textual elements further suggest the Gosselin belief

system as Christian. The uses of these allusions provide the audience member with a quick glance deeper into the family's culture. Each of these three scripture passages relate to the overarching research questions for this research project by touching upon and exemplifying the Gosselin family's Christian faith.

Some of the family's outings and activities are also religious in theme. In one episode, the Sight and Sound theatre is described by Kate as a "Christian theatre," as she states: "It makes the Bible come to life in the most amazing way" (Season 4, Episode 15, "Sight and Sound"). The episode revolves around the family outing but does not linger for very long on the religious undertones. Pearce and Axinn (1998) note that activities centered on shared religious beliefs strengthen familial bonds. In both seasons, the family is shown going to church on Sunday (Season 3, Episode 27, "Memorial Day Picnic – extended episode", Season 4, Episode 3, "Sextuplets turn 4"). Jon describes these trips as a "Typical Gosselin Sunday" and family ritual (Season 3, Episode 27, "Memorial Day Picnic – extended episode"). In an interview, Kate states that her family has been going to church since the sextuplets were a year old and that this is where all of the children have attended pre-school. Describing the dynamic of the church, Kate says:

Our church, it's non-judgmental. I mean you could come in, you know, t-shirts and ripped off shorts which people do. And they don't care. They leave us alone. Which is nice in that way of, you know, just not like hounding us. They love our kids. There's lots of. . . I don't know, there's a million things I love about our church. I think it's awesome. It's an Assembly of God church. (Season 3, Episode 27, "Memorial Day Picnic – extended episode")

In both of the seasons screened, this is the extent to which religious beliefs are articulated by Jon and Kate. An emphasis is placed upon their church as accepting, and as a place in which the family's celebrity is not noticed. The Assemblies of God religious

denomination's mission is to: "1. Evangelize the lost 2. Worship God, 3. Disciple believers, 4. Demonstrate God's love through Compassion" (Assemblies of God Mission and Core Values, 2010). The core values perpetuated by Assemblies of God are:

1, Passionately proclaim, at home and abroad, by word and deed Jesus as Savior, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Soon Coming King. 2. Strategically invest in the next generation. 3. Vigorously plant new churches. 4. Skillfully resource our Fellowship. 5. Fervently pray for God's favor and help as we serve Him with pure hearts and noble purpose." (Assemblies of God Mission and Core Values, 2010)

Apparent in the above discourse, the Gosselins name their religious domination as evangelical Christianity. While renewing their wedding vows, Jon and Kate both make mention of religion. Jon quotes Proverbs 18:22 while Kate tells Jon that she looks forward to "many more years of love and happiness as we follow God's lead together." The couple's cake is also adorned with various Bible verses that were selected by the couple (Season 4, Episode 23, "For Better or Worse – extended episode").

Through audience analysis, the researcher found oppositional readings to the Gosselins' religious hegemonies. These manifested themselves as overt criticisms of the family's authenticity. One commenter wrote: "Wonder when the last time you actually took them to church? Do you just write bs all the time to use them as PR?" (Kim, 2010).

To the extent that the program takes up the gendered issue of work outside of the home, one episode shows the family on a book tour. Kate gives an interview for the Christian television program, *The 700 Club*, which is known for its conservative themes. This is yet another example of the family's religious beliefs, which are not expressed in a dominant manner but, rather, are understated events that hint at their faith. Hegemonic views on Christianity are found within the media text.

In both seasons viewed, an episode was structured about viewer questions. In season 3, the couple is asked what form of reproductive technologies they used to get pregnant with the sextuplets. Kate replies: “TUI. No we didn’t desire multiples, but this is what God gave us and we love ‘em” (Season 3, Episode 32, “Viewer FAQ”). Jennings (2010) study explores how religious women with infertility problems use reproductive technologies as a means to achieve hegemonic constructions of motherhood (Jennings, 2010). Religious hegemonies reinforce the desire for women to participate in traditional family customs, even when reproductive technologies are used (p. 216). The Assemblies of God Church states that it does not have an official stance concerning the use of reproductive technologies as a means to overcome infertility. They do however, have concerns with medical procedures that tamper with the human embryo because there is potential to “circumvent the sovereign will of God” (*Assemblies of God (USA) Official Web Site*, 2010). While not outrightly rejecting reproductive technologies, the church asserts that any medical procedure that involves a third party, such as donor eggs and surrogates, violates the scriptural principles of the sacred nature of marriage, and must not be honored (*Assemblies of God (USA) Official Web Site*, 2010).

Jennings’ (2010) findings argue that religion shapes women’s experiences of and responses to infertility, and that specific dominations affect their decision-making (Jennings, 2010, p. 234). The researcher is then able to analyze the Gosselins’ use of reproductive technologies as a consequence of not being able to have children naturally within the framework of their religious doctrine.

The researcher has found that representations of religious faith, although mostly absent in dialogue, are continued through the reality TV program in covert ways, from

textual imagery, clothing choice, to quick moments of reference. It has been noted that despite the absence of an outright religious agenda, the family does participate in practices of their religious faith. Hegemonic constructions of religious beliefs based upon the Christian doctrines are illustrated by Jon and Kate. Audience analysis found that many viewers do not decode the religious hegemonies set forth by the media text in the preferred way. In other words, strong opposition exists regarding the authenticity of the Gosselins' religious values. Many audience members question whether or not religion was used in order to gain affinity with the viewing audience.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Audience**

The researcher employed the virtual audience ethnography in order to answer the research question: "How does the audience interpret these programs in terms of motherhood, gender, religion and family?" A large number of audience commentaries directly support the Duggar family's religious hegemonies as portrayed within the media text. This justification is used as the reason for spectatorship based upon shared religious ideologies and practices. The Duggar audience often reads motherhood hegemonies in the preferred way by commenting their view of Michelle as "super mom," while other audience members challenge the intensive mothering ideologies set forth. The Duggar family is seen as a close social unit which exudes traditional family values. Discussions of gender roles and the hegemonies set forth by the Duggars sparked debate between and among audience members. They were found to be divided between acceptance of the gender role segregation within the family's structure and total opposition of the hegemonic gender beliefs. In sum, the researcher found an overwhelming theme that the

audience generally supports the dominant hegemonies presented within the text depicting the Duggar family, and that the justification for this is rooted in shared religious beliefs.

Analysis of the viewing audience for *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* found that the audience challenges the hegemonies set forth in every theme related to the research question. In other words, the audience takes issue with the way that Kate performs as a mother, while criticizing her physicality, personality and behavior. It can be suggested that this reaction stems from gender hegemonies' which blame the woman for problems with the family. Some audience members do support the hegemonies of Kate as 'supermom' but they were found infrequently. Gender is a highly contested issue within the show; viewers questioned Kate's approach to gender role socialization with her children. Many audience members were found to dislike Kate and oppose her discourse as a result of her fluidity of gender behavior within her marriage. In other words, the audience was found to "hate Kate" because she acts as the dominant gender within the family; she is in control of the children, the home, the finances and overall family operations. The audience is thus operating from a hegemonic set of beliefs.

The Gosselins' family values are also challenged by the viewing audience. It was found that a large amount of disagreement surrounding the family's frequent vacations and activities sparked the audience's opposition. Many remarked that the family was found selling their family and exploiting the children. The hegemonies of the media text suggest that the Gosselins are active evangelical Christians, and strive to live by the principles set forth by the religion. A small amount of audience commentary does support this preferred meaning. The researcher found a large amount of commentaries which not

only criticize the authenticity of the Gosselins religious beliefs, but also criticize their behaviors based upon religious values.

Overall, the researcher discovered that a great deal of audience members endorse and support *17, 18 Kids and Counting* based upon preferred readings of religious faith, motherhood, family values and gender roles. On the other hand, findings suggest that viewers of *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* oppose the hegemonies set forth by the media program. The researcher has found that an overwhelming amount of viewers oppose the hegemonies set forth by the media text as a result of their negative feelings for Kate for seeming to violate hegemonic notions of gender, motherhood, religious and family values.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Textual Data**

The discourse discovered through qualitative textual analysis presented hegemonic trends and dominant messages of western society. Apart from of the dialogue in each episode transcribed, the production staff is ultimately responsible for the meaning that comes across from the produced programs. Final compiling of editing and splicing of footage of these families for content, context and chronology is the decision of the production staff and the network. It can be suggested that the producers of both multiple birth reality shows have little control over the daily events, practices, and dialogue of both families; yet, decisions are made about what images and ideas to air for public consumption. These production decisions affect and determine whether hegemonic views of motherhood, family, gender and religion are put forward.

Analysis of Michelle Duggar and Kate Gosselin's pregnancies using Cooper's (1992) theory of the medical gaze and the technological fetishization of pregnancy

implicated narrative, image, and audience subjectivity. In other words, the imagery surrounding Michelle's pregnant body was its nakedness shielded from view, leading the researcher to a conclusion which places emphasis on the female body as a site for male domination and control. Kate's naked, pregnant stomach provides the viewer to identify with the medical gaze, leading to dehumanization of female, pregnant bodies.

Textual analysis was utilized as a way to answer the research questions. The researcher found that hegemonic themes were present in both media texts. The question of how both programs further hegemonic ideals of family values was answered through analysis. The Duggar family's value system is one which revolves around Christian ideologies.

Hegemonic constructions of gender are present in both shows. Michelle does not work outside of the home and Jim Bob remains as the center of the family, and the authority on every situation he is involved with. Michelle remains at home with the younger children on several occasions while Jim Bob takes other children on field trips. Analysis found that the text operates in such a way to not only further hegemonic ideals of gender, but also to call upon views to return to traditional gender roles and behaviors.

Upon analysis of *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*, the researcher found that the show seeks to further hegemonic ideals of family values by providing their own family as revolving around religious beliefs as well as traditional family values. Little discussion of reproductive rights takes place within the text; some attention is paid to Kate's use of reproductive technologies. Gender hegemonies were found to be perpetuated throughout the media text in such a way that demonstrates traditional gender roles in the children. Kate as dominant parent violates gender norms, which is counter-hegemonic. In other



words, Kate as mom works outside of the home for the majority of the episodes while remaining in a matriarchal position.

The second research question seeks to discover how these media texts continue the discourse surrounding “good” and “bad” mothers. Based upon textual analysis the researcher has concluded that both Michelle and Kate operate inside of intensive mothering ideology. In other words, hegemonic views on how mothers should behave divide the discourse surrounding Michelle and Kate. Both of these women are mothers to multiple children. Conceptions and constructions of their families differ drastically, thereby placing them into different spheres of motherhood. More in-depth discussion of the study’s findings takes place in the next chapter.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### **Findings**

This research project's goal was to answer the primary research question: (1) In what ways are multiple birth reality television shows working to sustain or maintain culturally hegemonic ideals of mothering, family, gender roles and religious faith? This entails answering the secondary research questions: (2) To what extent do such shows as *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* and *19 Kids and Counting* serve to further hegemonic ideals of "family values" and place importance and weight upon reproductive rights and gender?, (3) In what ways do multiple birth reality TV shows continue the discourse of "good" and "bad" mothers?, (4) To what extent do Kate Gosselin and Michelle Duggar serve as a societal archetype of the mother within multiple birth reality television? (5) How does the audience view these programs in terms of motherhood, gender and family?

**Textual Analysis.** Qualitative textual analysis reveals hegemonic trends and dominant messages of western society. The programs' discourses express hegemonic family values and religious authority regarding gender roles and motherhood. The programs do not simply ignore the fact that the numbers of children in these families is considered to be abnormally large within American society; rather, they discount negative consequences and valuations of these circumstances. The media texts viewed for this research project were generally found to reinforce cultural hegemonies surrounding motherhood, gender roles, religious faith and family values. Such hegemonic messages

were frequently on display in terms of discourse, narrative, visual imagery and other content.

***Multiple Birth Reality Television and hegemonic ideals.*** The combination of qualitative analysis of the text and audience of multiple birth reality television, represented by the programs *17, 18 Kids and Counting* and *Jon and Kate Plus Ei8ht*, recognizes dominant cultural hegemonies surrounding family values, religious faith, gender roles and notions of motherhood. Hegemonic ideals of family values and religious faith were found considerably more in *17, 18 Kids and Counting* while less often or less overtly in *Jon and Kate Plus Ei8ht*. Very little discussion of reproductive rights was found in either program while gender remained a consistent theme throughout many episodes. Both of these programs place added emphasis upon the mothers (Michelle and Kate) by observing the autonomy they enact within their homes and families. While both of these women are mothers to multiple children, conceptions and constructions of their families differ drastically, thereby placing them into different spheres of motherhood.

Themes and representations of hegemonic ideals of motherhood were discovered by the researcher in *Jon and Kate Plus Ei8ht*. Yet, Kate as mom is not depicted as calm, even tempered and subservient to any social force. In contrast, Kate is seen as the dominant parent within the family structure.

***Family Values and Gender.*** In *17, 18 Kids and Counting*, discussions of hegemonic constructions of gender are present in all of the shows. Michelle does not work outside of the home and Jim Bob remains as the center of the family, and the

authority in every situation he is involved with. Michelle remains at home with the younger children on several occasions in which Jim Bob takes other children on field trips.

While now and then directly addressing familial ideologies, beliefs and opinions, *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* focuses much of its air time on activities and family trips taken by the Gosselins. A large amount of focus is put upon product placements and endorsements enjoyed by the family. A considerable amount of time is taken up in interviews with Jon and Kate, who narrate what the children did during the episode while spending very little time dissecting and discussing their own personal beliefs and ideologies of family.

Overarching themes of gender and gender roles were found by the researcher. Jon and Kate both directly address behaviors, expectations and criticisms of their children in a gendered manner. Frequently, Kate's dialogue and actions suggest that her daughters are better behaved, cleaner and more mature than the boys. This, in addition to Kate as dominant parent, contributes to a gender inequity that is counter-hegemonic. In other words, Kate as mom works outside of the home for the majority of the episodes while remaining in a matriarchal position.

Overall, some stereotypically hegemonic ideals are perpetuated through this program. Most obviously is the heteronormative script—that a family must include two heterosexual parents who display their love for each other, even if, at times, a counter-hegemonic position is taken by Kate the stronger personality within the family structure

***“Good” and “bad” Mother Discourses.*** Discourses surrounding “good” and “bad” mothers within multiple birth reality TV shows were found to be perpetuated by the media text and the viewing audience. As noted above, the viewing audience was found to be divided on their acceptance or rejection of the hegemonies present within the media text. These acceptances and rejections were found to be centered upon their conceptualizations of what “good” and “bad” are. Discussions which frame Kate as a “bad” mother stem from her refusal to be subordinate to her husband, her desire to work outside of the home and behavior which challenges hegemonic family values, gender roles and views on motherhood. Michelle, on the other hand, was generally found to be a “good” mother by the viewing audience. Active participation in hegemonic gender roles places Michelle as subordinate to Jim Bob and this is largely accepted by the viewing public. Michelle does not work outside of the home, never raises her voice to her children and is frequently viewed to be a role model by many audience members.

***Social Archetypes and/or Technological Fetishization of Pregnancy and Motherhood.*** The researcher has sought to discover to what extent Kate Gosselin and Michelle Duggar operate as archetypes for mothers within multiple birth reality television and society. It was found that Kate is seen as an example of what not to do by many. Yet, many audience members noted their support and approval of Kate’s success after her divorce. Serving as a role model for single mothers is trivialized as a result of her celebrity and the amount of help she has; yet, possibilities for such role modeling do exist. On the other hand, Michelle is held up by other viewers as the ultimate archetype of what a mother should be. She can be criticized for her need to biologically carry and birth as many children as possible; all the same, viewers endorse her mothering style.

Analysis of the technological fetishization of pregnancy found that both media texts perpetuate, as described by Cooper (1995), a transformation from private rituals of birth to public spectacles. In other words, these programs serve to exacerbate public images and representations of childbirth which dehumanize the mother and view them as public spectacles by audience members under a medical gaze.

**Audience Views of Multiple Birth Reality Television.** The audience members of these multiple birth reality television shows either accept, negotiate, or reject these messages as socially appropriate. It was common for most viewers, especially devoted fans, to prefer the hegemonic meanings as reflective of American society but even more common for them to identify themselves directly with those meanings and practices. Viewers expressed feelings of connection and acceptance for the families involved in these programs, and generally identified with their experiences. They felt the programs' families were faced with some of the same struggles, challenges, pleasures and outcomes as in their own familial structures. Some viewers were found to disagree with the hegemonies portrayed. This was often reflected in their expressed personal ideologies and behaviors.

A small selection of viewers expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which the Duggar family approaches traditional gender role behaviors and divisions of labor. Comments were found by the researcher on both posting sites studied which expressed discontent with the amount of responsibility left to the oldest Duggar daughters. Many viewers commented that it was unfair to expect these girls to act as surrogate parents by making them responsible for the younger children's well-being. Despite some opposition

to gendered labor and enforcement of hegemonic gender roles and behaviors, the audience embraced Michelle as mother.

Discussion focused on Michelle and her role as mother as well as how she acts as a social archetype for other mothers. Many viewers commented that Michelle is a “supermom” that inspires them in their daily lives. Some comments were focused around Michelle’s pregnancy and expressed distaste with the number of children in the family, while others viewed this as an inspiration and call to traditional views on motherhood and reproduction.

The researcher found an overwhelming amount of viewer commentary which fully accepted and embraced the Duggar family as the whole. Comments were found that indicated full allegiance and appreciation for the family’s values and structure. Often, the acceptance of the family’s hegemonic representation corresponded with acceptance of the family’s religious faith. In other words, the audience was found to support the Duggars by intertwining hegemonic conceptions of family and religion into one solid ideology. A large portion of the audience was found to fully accept the media text based off the religious ideologies and beliefs showcased. Commitment and approval of the religious focus of the Duggar family was cited by many viewers as being the reason they support the show.

Overall, audience analysis found that *17, 18 Kids and Counting* is generally accepted by the viewing audience. This acceptance takes place as a result of audience agreement and endorsement of the hegemonic values and behaviors surrounding motherhood, gender, family and religion which are implicit or explicit within the media text.

Audience commentary surrounding the Gosselin family was generally found to be critical of the show and of Kate. Many openly discussed their extreme aversion to the number of trips and freebies given to the Gosselin family. In other words, the difficulty of the audience in accepting the Gosselins' family values were based upon the amount of endorsement opportunities they enjoyed.

Discourse generated by the media text's representations and portrayals of gender were found to be significant. The majority of the viewers' comments rejecting the media text were directly tied to gender. The audience criticized and opposed the hegemonic gender roles assigned and expected from the Gosselin children while simultaneously critiquing Jon and Kate's representations of non-hegemonic behavior. In other words, Kate did not fulfill the markers of femininity that the audience required for acceptance; they read the text as oppositional, yet hegemonic. Therefore they rejected her not only as mother, but also as wife. Kate violates hegemonies which encourage patriarchal hierarchy, dominance and control. The audience was largely unable to accept the authenticity of the religious beliefs presented in the media text. Many remarked that they saw these beliefs and behaviors as inauthentic of the Gosselin family. In other words, the audience rejected the religious hegemonies of Christianity, but did not accept that the Gosselins are authentic in their religious beliefs and behaviors. Overall, audience analysis found that *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* is generally rejected by the viewing audience. This rejection centers primarily on Kate Gosselin and not on the hegemonies presented within the text. In other words, the audience does not seem to have a problem with the family values, religious faith or gender roles themselves but with the way in which Kate executes them. One possibility for this rejection could stem from the Gosselin's inability



to fit into the mythos of the white nuclear family as outlined by Chambers (2001) and Coontz (1992) due to the family's mixed cultural heritage and race. Thereby, they were not always identified by the viewing audience according the hegemonic standard.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study deal not only with the power of hegemonic messages in reality television but also with trends in the representation of traditional gender and family values in American society. Reality television characters need to be positively embraced by the viewers in order to produce preferred interpretations and reactions. If the ideologies themselves are embraced more than the characters, the implications for social hegemony in terms of reality television are questioned in terms of power and significance.

The implications of the media's influence are based closely on the long standing academic research on hegemonic meanings. The methods and theories employed in this research project were comprehensive and interdisciplinary. Using feminist cultural studies research such as that suggested by Walters (1995) and Schwichtenberg (1989) to breakdown the text's discourses, the programs' viewpoint became recognizable.

In conclusion, this research has found that multiple birth reality television shows level of acceptance within society is directly tied to the acceptance of hegemonic constructions of motherhood, family values, gender roles and religious faith. The messages embedded within the media texts, communicated through visual imagery, discourses and narrative structure, and other elements lead to audience readings that mostly embrace these hegemonic ideologies.

## **Future Research**

Future research may also engage in political economic and/or production analyses of this genre of reality television, as such multiperspectival work is encouraged by Kellner (2003), and production ethnography is encouraged by Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (2009). The programs under review for this study are featured on cable subsidiaries of The Discovery Channel Corporation. The Learning Channel also features many other programs focused on families, motherhood, pregnancies and religion such as *Little People, Big World*, *Table for 12*, *One Big Happy Family*, and *I Didn't Know I Was Pregnant*, all of which call for investigation and appear to mobilize hegemonic meanings of women's role under patriarchy. Future studies focusing on how these media texts, in conjunction with the above, operate within the post 9/11 masculinist *zeitgeist* discussed by Susan Faludi in *The Terror Dream* (2007).

Future studies focusing on understanding the ideological beliefs and underpinnings of audience members who consume these programs would be useful in getting to the bottom of why they tune in. In addition, a study which focuses on understanding the impact of these programs on viewers' daily lives would also be beneficial in continuing the study of reality television. Future studies focusing on the intersectionality of race and gender in the family could be beneficial in redirecting and reestablishing the mythos of the white nuclear family, as seen in this study as violated by the Gosselins.

The addition of research methods dealing more directly with the notion of multiple birth families is important, especially in terms of possibly unearthing the health related risks and implications of these practices. The use of focus groups and surveys to

gather data on the audience's perceptions of both of these media texts could have been useful as a means to address viewer readings face to face.

In conclusion, this research project has been relevant to the understanding of the ideological frameworks of media and their power to influence audiences. The messages encoded by media producers are communicated through various textual elements and can serve to circulate hegemonic meanings and gendered power relations

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