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Trapped in Consumption

- A Qualitative Content Analysis of How *Lyxfällan* Portrays the
Consumer Society

Authors: Michaela Engström

Marika Nilsson

Supervisor: Tobias Linné

Examiner: Fredrik Miegel

Abstract

Authors: Michaela Engström, Marika Nilsson

Subject: Media and Communication Studies, The Department of
Communication and Media, Lund University

Title: Trapped in Consumption - A Qualitative Content Analysis of How *Lyxfällan*
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Summary: Today's society is a consumer society where consumption is dominated by the consumption of commodities. Consumption is a common theme seen on television, which is one of today's major media channels. Reality TV is a growing genre in television production. This essay discusses how consumer society is portrayed in reality TV. This is done through the analysis of the Swedish reality TV show *Lyxfällan*; a show about helping people with overconsumption and their personal financial crises. The analysis will include how norms of the consumer society, such as identification through commodities, daydreaming and insatiable needs are portrayed in *Lyxfällan*. Through the analysis it was found that commodities carry a high value to consumers. Commodities play an important role in people's identity making and often represent the pursuit of a dream. The commodities however, seldom live up to the consumers' dreams. This together with the constant search for an identity leads to people continuing to consume. *Lyxfällan*'s participants are portrayed as being fools; they can't control their consumption and instead rely on experts. The experts in *Lyxfällan* are portrayed through the hosts; they offer superior knowledge and solve every participant's financial crisis. *Lyxfällan*, as a reality TV show, may over or under exaggerate these roles and norms. As a whole however, the portrayal of these themes reflects the consumer society. *Lyxfällan* criticizes overconsumption on an individual level, however it does not criticize consumerism as an ideology in society. The show helps the participants towards better personal finances, but doesn't challenge the global risks of overconsumption. *Lyxfällan* is a part of, and dependent on the consumer society and will therefore not criticize it.

Key Words: Consumer society, consumerism, consumption, reality TV, risks, Lyxfällan, identification, experts, fools, consumers, insatiable needs, overconsumption

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1. Introduction

It has been calculated that since 1880, consumption per capita in Sweden has multiplied 20 times (Alvesson 2006: 206). Consumption is such a vital part of today's society that it is the central aspect of people's lives. Through consumption people aim to satisfy their needs and desires and it also plays a central role in the making of people's identities. New needs and desires constantly emerge and the means of satisfying them keep increasing through new commodities. One of the main problems in today's society is that people's needs are insatiable. Insatiable needs increase the risk of overconsumption, which is a main factor in today's widespread financial and environmental risks. For example, the risk of climate change would not be as high today if there wasn't such a widespread norm in today's society to consume heavily. People are aware of these risks and their consequences; yet they continue consuming. Today's risks are considered to be too abstract and beyond individual control that people have adapted a passiveness and lack of responsibility towards consumption. Instead people depend on those considered to be experts in the society to eliminate the risks.

Since consumption is the central aspect in people's lives, it is consequently a big part of what is seen in media. Consumption is a common theme in TV shows, including the Swedish reality TV show *Lyxfällan* (in English: the Luxury Trap). *Lyxfällan* portrays families and individuals who have through consumption, ended up in a financial crisis. The two hosts of the show act as financial advisors and try to solve the participants' financial situation. These individual financial crises portrayed in *Lyxfällan* can be related to the society's economic risk. The mere fact that there is a TV show solely about consumption depicts how important it is in society today. It's not just something people do; it is also a source of entertainment that is portrayed in media.

Reality TV is in some way or another *real*, how real the audience believes it is depends on to what degree the show is perceived as entertaining (Hill, 2005: 57). Reality TV shows can choose what aspects of reality to over or under exaggerate. As a whole however, the main themes portrayed in reality TV shows must be found in today's society, otherwise the shows would not exist. In the article, *The Role of Television in the Construction of Consumer Reality*, O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) study how television affects people's construction of reality and their consumption. Since television has a big influence on people's lives it also has the power to influence and change consumer habits. Television and other channels of media

can be seen as a product of the consumer society and wouldn't survive without consumption. In the article *Reality TV as advertainment* June Deery (2004) discusses how advertisement becomes a part of, and is embedded in the TV shows today. This creates a paradox in shows like *Lyxfällan* where they aim to influence people to better finances, yet at the same time encourage consumption through product placement, commercial breaks and sponsorship. As a reality TV show, *Lyxfällan* gives insight to today's consumer society and may offer an understanding of consumption in today's society.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this essay is to study how *Lyxfällan*, as a reality TV show, portrays consumption. Furthermore the purpose is to, through the essay's analysis and discussion, gain understanding of the consumer society. This leads to the main research question for this essay;

- How does *Lyxfällan*, as a reality TV show, portray consumption and how does this help us understand today's consumer society?

The main research question will be answered with help from the following topical questions;

- What norms of the consumer society are portrayed in *Lyxfällan*?
- What different consumer roles are portrayed in *Lyxfällan* and what does this say about the consumer society?
- How are the hosts portrayed in *Lyxfällan*, and what does this say about the consumer society?

2. Method

Most social science research aims to establish knowledge about our social reality (Johannessen et. al. 2002: 16). This essay aims to bring knowledge and understanding of how the reality TV show *Lyxfällan* portrays the consumer society. After having decided upon the main research question and the overall purpose of this essay, the next challenge was to choose the form of method that would answer our question in the best possible way.

2.1 Our Method – Qualitative Content Analysis

The research for this essay is best conducted by using a qualitative method. Qualitative methods tend to focus on gathering and identifying common themes that will help the researcher reach an understanding of a social phenomenon. Using a qualitative method, we gathered and identified reoccurring themes in the show *Lyxfällan*, which portray socially constructed meanings about our society (Aspers, 2011: 47). These were then analyzed to provide a greater understanding of today's consumer society. In contrast to a quantitative method that focuses more on verifying or contradicting a hypothesis, this essay doesn't aim to provide facts, but rather an understanding about the consumer society.

Content analysis is the preferred method if the communicated content in a media is most important for one's research (Meyer et al., 2000: 64). The difference between a text analysis and a content analysis is not always clear and can be discussed. For this essay the definition presented in *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* was used where content analysis is presented as a type of text analysis method. Text analysis is a very broad methodology since text can be seen from numerous levels of interpretation and analyzed from a wide variety of theories. Another reason text analysis is so broad is the term text, which is not limited to the written text but also includes other forms of texts such as pictures, music, films etc. (Helland et al., 2003: 67). The text in *Lyxfällan* is communicated verbally through narration and interviews with the hosts and participants. The text is also communicated visually since it is aired on television. This essay will look at both the visual and verbal text to gather data. The data will be presented throughout this essay as descriptions and quotes.

Content analysis is a type of text analysis where categorizing and coding is an important aspect of the method (Meyer, Titscher, Vetter, Wodak, 2000: 55). A qualitative system of categorization can be interpreted to be quite broad since texts can be so different in its form and content. The categories may be structured with the help of a theoretical base; choosing the

categories depending on the theories chosen for the analysis (ibid: 64).

Another research method that was mentioned in the method literature for this essay was the Grounded Theory. The Grounded Theory is a research method, which emphasizes that the theories shouldn't be decided upon before one begins collecting data. It is, according to this theory, a risk to choose the theories early on in the research process since it might lead to a close-minded researcher. As a result the method and data may not be chosen and conducted in the best possible way. Grounded Theory does however argue that some basic knowledge within the field and method is required early on (Johannessen et. al. 2002: 107). For this essay the Grounded Theory gave us inspiration for the research process and how to approach the relationship between theories and analysis. The theory gave us the possibility to allow a non-linear approach to find suitable theories for the analysis while collecting data. It is important to state that the theory itself is not considered the chosen method for this essay, but rather has acted as an inspiration for the research process. The content analysis states, as mentioned above, that the categories for the data collected may be established according to the theories chosen. When conducting the data and analysis of *Lyxfällan* the categories had not been pre-determined since the theories had not yet been decided. The categorization of the data was done after the collection of the data while we also searched for theories. The reason for approaching the research process this way was that the workflow became more dynamic and it allowed us as researchers to explore theories while not having to choose them straight away.

2.2 Our Method Journey

We collected immense amount of data from the 13th season of *Lyxfällan*, which included 12 episodes. We watched all episodes while simultaneously taking notes, at first focusing on what was verbally communicated. The verbal communication in *Lyxfällan* seemed to give us the most relevant data. For the analysis of which roles are portrayed in the show however, it was necessary to go back to some episodes and also look at the visual communication. The study of the visual communication gave data that was used to analyze how the show portrayed the participants and the hosts. This resulted in a large amount of data that needed to be organized into categories in order for it to be analyzed. Reoccurring themes and messages were identified, which became our basis for choosing theories and defining categories. While gathering the data we also started gathering and reading relevant literature concerning our field.

When the writing process began we found further inspiration from the Grounded Theory. Rather than having strictly theory chapters and then analysis chapters we decided to combine these two and have chapters covering a specific theme with both theories and analysis. The reason for this was that we started writing about the theories while simultaneously analyzing the data. By structuring the theories and analysis for a specific theme together in one chapter, we felt that the connection between the chosen theories and analysis of *Lyxfällan* became clearer and the common thread became more visible. This structure also eliminated the risk of having irrelevant theories or analysis.

2.3 Critics and Limitations

It is an important part of the content analysis to be able to choose samples, since the material is often too large to investigate as a whole (Meyer et al., 2000: 58). It would not be possible to analyze all 13 seasons of *Lyxfällan*, in regards to the time frame of the essay. We considered deliberately choosing specific episodes from different seasons. We could have then potentially seen a change in the show through the different seasons and discuss if this is related to a possible change of how the consumer society is portrayed. We concluded however, that this was not our initial purpose for the essay. We therefore decided to limit our study to the latest season, to be as current as possible. The samples we chose to include in our essay were the ones that exemplified the reoccurring themes most clearly and were most relatable to the theories.

Qualitative research is generally criticized for being subjective. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative methods do not aim to verify a hypothesis, but rather to gain understanding of a social phenomenon. Since qualitative research doesn't study objective values, different researchers can come to different conclusions from the same research questions. The conclusions can be influenced by the researcher's own values and previous knowledge (Helland et al. 2003:71). It is important to be aware of this critique and have this in mind when conducting a qualitative research. Likewise studies may be done resulting in different conclusions than our own, however the conclusions drawn in this essay still offer an understanding of the consumer society.

3. Reality TV as a Genre

The reality TV genre is very broad and includes a wide range of different factual programming. Since the 1990's, the genre has increased significantly and is continuously evolving into new sub genres. The main factor associated to reality TV is that it is in some way or another real. For example, there can be non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue and hand-held cameras (Hill, 2005: 41). The reality TV genre started with so called trauma TV; reality TV shows that are based on crimes, accidents and police and emergency stories (Creeber, 2001: 134). Today reality TV can be seen as a hybrid of information and entertainment, which can be referred to as *infotainment*. Television is today characterized by a post-documentary culture where factual programming has received more space on television, the formats within the genre have widened and entertainment is now a primary part of reality programs (Holmes, Jermyn, 2004: 2).

There are two general types of reality TV shows that can be distinguished. One type is observing, which shows real situations in their own environment. The other type is when real situations are created for the purpose of filming. The distinction between these two is not always clear, since reality TV shows can be a hybrid (Creeber, 2001: 138). *Lyxfällan* is an observing reality TV show since the participants' financial situation existed prior to the filming. An example of the other type would be *Big Brother* or *Paradise Hotel*; both of these shows create the scenes and context for the sole purpose of producing the show. Observing shows can be considered more authentic since the environment exists before the show.

Since the emergence, reality TV shows have created large audiences and widespread debates. These debates have not solely been about the shows' mere content, but more about how the shows controversially challenge social and moral aspects and values in the society (Holmes, Jermyn, 2004: 91). This is what makes it interesting to study reality TV shows from a social science perspective; the debates and discussions about the controversially implies that people relate it to their reality.

3.1 The Reality TV Show *Lyxfällan*

Lyxfällan airs on TV3, a profit-driven media company owned by the conglomerate media company *Modern Times Group*. *Lyxfällan* is a reality TV show about consumption and personal financial crises. Each episode portrays a person/family that has, through overconsumption, ended up in a severe financial crisis. There are two hosts, Magnus Hedberg and Patrick Grimlund, who lend their expertise to help each case and solve their financial situation. Every episode has the same structure starting with a short introduction of the participants, including where they live, their occupation and a short recap of their financial situation. When Patrick and Magnus first meet the participants, Patrick tries to summarize their financial situation by discussing loans, credits, debts and their income. During this time Magnus takes a look around the participants' home while discussing with a family member/friend/other participant why they are visiting. After this introduction the two hosts present a budget board where they visualize how much the participants are currently spending each month in comparison to how much income they have. Viewers then see the hosts and participants taking different actions to save their finances. Common actions that are taken include yard sales, flea markets, renegotiations of bank loans and cutting off extra spending such as satellite television, excess food shopping and gas. After this the hosts return to the budget board to present a new budget that the participants are to follow in the future. At the end of each episode Patrick and Magnus return approximately one month later for a re-inspection (Lyxfällan 2012).

Lyxfällan can be classified as a lifestyle reality TV show. The main attributes of lifestyle reality shows are low production costs, a repeatable format, linked to the retail finances and a reveal moment where the participants get to see their transformation (Holmes, Jermyn, 2004: 174). The fact that *Lyxfällan* is currently on its 13th season indicates the popularity and success of the show. In the 13th season premiere the show had 514 000 viewers in comparison to the previous season premiere that had 332 000 viewers (dagensmedia.se, 2012).

4. Consumer Society

Slater uses the term Consumer Culture, to describe a culture of consumption. This is the dominant culture in today's modern, western society (Slater, 1997: 8). Slater's theory about consumer culture will be used to argue that today's society is a consumer society. Consumption is not a recent phenomenon; it is something that has played a significant role in the creation of the modern world, but it has been expressed in different ways throughout history. In today's consumer society consumption is dominated by the consumption of commodities (ibid: 8f). According to Slater, being a consumer is about being aware of one's needs and aiming to satisfy them, and sometimes failing to do so. Slater also distinguishes between natural needs, which are basic and evident needs, and arbitrary and subjective needs. Both these types of needs are argued to have a social nature (ibid: 2). Consumption is an individual, private act; it is about making choices according to one's wants or needs. Consumption is closely linked to individual freedom and free choice. It is the most mundane activity that reminds people of individual freedom (ibid: 27). In a consumer society, people have the freedom to consume, but as Slater argues, people must consume to be part of this society, there is an ironic compulsion to this freedom (ibid: 59). Consumer society enforces consumption as a lifestyle upon its members. There is no choice but to choose to consume (ibid: 53).

4.1 Consumerism versus Consumption

To analyze the data collected from the content analysis of *Lyxfällan* it is important to put the TV show in its context in today's society. The TV show *Lyxfällan* is not just simply about people who overconsume, the show portrays today's main cultural attribute; consumerism. When researching the consumer society it is important to distinguish the difference between the two terms consumption and consumerism. Consumption is an act people perform on a daily basis. Like Bauman concludes; "Consumption is a permanent and irremovable condition and aspect of life bound by neither time nor history" (Bauman, 2007: 25). Consumption is seen as an ancient and natural part of human evolution (ibid: 25). Consumerism on the other hand, is the era of when consumption becomes the central aspect in people's lives to satisfy needs, desires and wants (ibid: 28). To clarify, Bauman simplifies the two by defining consumption as people's primary trait and occupation and consumerism as an attribute of our society (ibid: 28).

4.2 Identification through Consumption

Consumption is such an important part of people's lives in a consumer society that it has become to play a major role in the making of people's identities. Identification through consumption is one of the norms in today's consumer society. In earlier societies, identities were fixed and determined by traditions such as class, occupation, family and religion. In today's modern society, identities are formed free from these traditions. As a result, there are no fixed or predetermined identities but instead identities emerge through one's choices (Slater, 1997. 86). In today's consumer society these choices are practiced through consumption. One can, through the consumption of commodities, construct a desirable identity and display this identity to oneself and others (ibid: 30). In *Lyxfällan* this modern way of creating an identity is evident. In the beginning of each episode the participants' personalities are presented through what and how they have consumed. The participants are portrayed identifying themselves with their commodities. In most episodes there are scenes showing the participants' emotional attachment to various commodities that appear to have created their identities. In the second episode, one of the participants, Johan, has a big interest in the local football club. He has bought a book with the club's history and autographs costing him around 6000-7000 Swedish kronor. When the host asks Johan if he can consider selling it back to the club his reaction is portrayed as hesitating.

It hurts when you see your sports gadgets on the table. Of course, it hurts a lot. But then you think of the authorities knocking on your door, so it's for a good cause (Lyxfällan, episode 2)

These sports attributes are portrayed as very meaningful to Johan. The emotional appeal towards commodities that is often shown in *Lyxfällan*, such as the example above, can be explained by commodities being an important part of peoples' identity making. Johan is portrayed as a sports fanatic, and has through the consumption of sport commodities identified himself with this role. Therefore if he were to sell his commodities he would lose a part of his identity. The portrayal of identifying one's life with commodities is a pervading theme in *Lyxfällan*. This creates a possibility for dramatization since strong emotions are often shown when participants have to sell their commodities. This theme shown in *Lyxfällan* signifies the strong connection people have with their commodities since they have to some degree internalized these commodities to themselves. Commodities have received a symbolic meaning that may not be related to its actual meaning. These symbolic meanings however, are

not shared by everyone, but only to those who wish to identify themselves with the same identity. This provides an understanding of how advertisements of commodities today are strongly focused on portraying a feeling and an ideal, rather than focusing on the actual benefits of the product. People consume today not for the direct benefits of a commodity, but for the indirect meaning the commodity or the commodity's brand holds. The indirect meaning of a commodity creates a strong emotional attachment since it becomes part of an identity. To lose or detach oneself from a commodity results in the feeling that one's identity is being taken away. Consumption in a consumer society is not just the consumption of commodities to fulfill a certain need, but it beholds a deeper and wider perspective. This modern way of creating an identity differs from the past where traditions held great influence in identity making. This leads to question what role non-commodities play role in the consumer society. Traditional factors such as family and class, which are not gained through consumption, are perhaps given less thought and prioritization. In the sixth episode of *Lyxfällan* there is a scene where the two hosts ask the male participant, Tobias, to list the three most important things in his life.

Well that would be the television, sofa...you really need those don't you? (Lyxfällan, episode 6)

The hosts look at him and each other and reply they were expecting him to answer his son, his job, his life and other non-commodities. The participant looks rather shocked and quickly replies:

Oh yes of course that's more important, but I thought you meant things (Lyxfällan, episode 6)

This is an example of how *Lyxfällan* portrays its participants prioritizing commodities over non-commodities, such as family and job. It is hard to argue and conclude that non-commodities are less important in the consumer society; however through this portrayal one can discuss to what extent they are taken for granted. Commodities carry great emotional appeal and play an important role in one's identity making. This example portrayed in *Lyxfällan* may be an extreme case but it shows a way of thinking in the consumer society. Today people depend less on family and tradition and more on commodities in their identity making. Commodities offer an easy way of creating an identity independent of aspects such as family. Creating an identity free from one's family can lead to a society where people don't

recognize or appreciate family as high as people did in earlier societies. For example, marriage seems to have lost some of its value; it appears to be easier to get married and get divorced. This indicates that people's family isn't crucial in the making of their identity.

Lyxfällan portrays the participants' desire to maintain their constructed identity towards others. They appear to have built an identity that revolves around constantly having new commodities, and in order to maintain this identity to others they continue to consume. Today's advertising takes advantage of people's continuous search for and maintenance of an identity by offering solutions in the form of commodities. There is no reason for not being perfect, since there is a solution to every problem (Slater 1997: 85f). As mentioned above, consumption is seen as a private act, driven by personal choice and freedom. There is however, a view of consumption being a socially oriented act. This means that one consumes in relation to how others consume (Alvesson 2006: 15). Consumption determines the social order in a group. Through consumption people can acquire a certain status in relation to others in a group. In the seventh episode the host Magnus is talking to the participant's friend in regards to why *Lyxfällan* is there. The friend explains that Thomas, the participant, tries to consume like his friends consume. If one of the friends buys new gadgets or things Thomas also wants to buy new things in order to keep up with the "gadget race" that exists in his group of friends. This can be tied to the previous example that in today's society commodities include a wider aspect than the actual use of the product. A commodity is not merely a material object fulfilling a certain function but has a certain role in creating a person's identity and status. To maintain this identity and status, consumption must continue and thus the consumer society continues to evolve. It evolves in one way to become more materialistic since consumption becomes more and more important for people's identity, yet on the other hand the actual objects appear to have less and less material value and the symbolic value for one's identity becomes more important. The very close connection between identification and commodities create a society where people see commodities as a part of oneself and without them, would feel like they would lose a part of who they are. It gives an explanation to why some consume more than they can afford; consumption conveys their identity, which is considered to be a vital part of living.

Another aspect of identification through consumption is portrayed through the hosts and the actions taken in *Lyxfällan*. These examples portray a more general sense of how the identification norm plays an important role in today's consumer society. It is not only the

participants who are portrayed to be identified with their consumption, but it is also the way the hosts appear to help the participants out of their financial crisis which portrays how people as a whole identify themselves through consumption. In the show, common actions taken to stabilize the participants' financial situation often involve selling some of their commodities. Flea markets, as an example, are organized or the participants sell their commodities over the Internet. Both the flea markets and sales over the Internet are shown as very successful. The commodities are sold to other consumers, thus the participants continue to contribute to the consumer society. The participants go from consuming themselves to providing consumption for other consumers. This way of solving their financial situation is to some degree ironic. It illustrates clearly how people in today's consumer society identify themselves as consumers, not only for their own identity making but also for identifying themselves with their problems and actions. As mentioned in the introduction, *Lyxfällan* portrays the consumer society; the show would not exist in another type of society. There is a level of reliance that the consumer society must continue to exist in order to help the participants in each episode.

Another example of this identification is the gift that is given to the participants at the end of the episode when the hosts revisit. The gift varies but some examples from the 13th season include trips to various theme parks, a subscription to grocery bags, or bicycles (as a new means of transportation if they have sold their car). This is a form of identification; it portrays how today's society materializes and concretizes emotions and actions through consumption. The gift represents the hosts' approval, it is a materialized symbol of communicating that the participants have fulfilled the requirements and succeeded in the goals that the show set. The participants identify this approval through the commodity. This is also portrayed in a scene from the eighth episode where the participants, Micke and Helen, receive their tax returns, where upon Micke spends that money on a dress for Helen. Helen reacts by becoming irritated with the inappropriate gesture of buying a dress when they are in a very unstable financial situation. Micke explains that his intentions were to show his love for Helen (*Lyxfällan*, episode 8). This is a clear example how emotions are identified through consumption. In today's consumer society the identification norm includes identifying feelings and emotions through consumption rather than taking physical or verbal actions. It does, upon reflection, create a critical concern to how severe this consumer society is. If commodities can create people's identity, reflect others identities and identify emotions and actions, the commodity industry has an immense power in today's society. In the consumer society the commodity industries encourage the materialization of people's identity and

emotions. For example, holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day have been commercialized. Commodities offer people an easy way of showing their emotions through gifts, which are an essential part of celebrating these holidays.

4.3 Daydreaming and Insatiable Needs

Another norm in today's consumer society is daydreaming. Like identification, it is a common part of people's everyday life and plays an important role in consumption. Campbell makes a distinction between need and desire as well as between satisfaction and pleasure. Need is a state of deprivation, the feeling that something is missing. Satisfaction is the feeling one gets when the missing part is restored. Desire on the other hand, is what makes people search for pleasure (Campbell, 1987: 60). According to Campbell, pleasure is a "quality of experience"; an experience people have as a reaction to when a desire is fulfilled. A daydream is a dream that has a connection to reality and provides pleasure (ibid: 83). In daydreaming the mere anticipation of pleasure is exciting and becomes desirable (ibid: 85). The desire then becomes a pleasurable activity, and the wanting becomes more important than the having. When people in the modern society consume it is often based on a daydream. They have dreamt about the object in mind and how their life is going to be with this object. The problem is that reality is never the same as in dreams, and when the object is bought and the dream does not come true the desire for a new dream and a new object arises (ibid: 86ff).

In *Lyxfällan* participants are portrayed as having consumed more than they can afford. To explain this behavior by using Campbell's theories one must relate their consumption to their pursuit of pleasure. As stated above it's not the object itself that supplies pleasure, it's the daydreaming of the object.

There's nothing wrong with having dreams, everyone should have them, however when you allow dreams to completely take control and you don't have any track of reality [...] then you are off track
(Lyxfällan, episode 5)

The hosts on *Lyxfällan* are shown trying to raise awareness to the fact that the participants' consumption is often based on the realization of their dreams. The participants are portrayed pursuing their dreams to the extent that they find themselves in a severe financial situation and yet their dreams are still not fulfilled. This is a problem in today's consumer society; people have dreams about how commodities will change and improve their life, dreams that

can never come true by buying a commodity. As mentioned above, it's not the things that supply pleasure; it's the daydreaming about these things. Therefore the needs and desires will never be satisfied by commodities. Since the daydreaming has become more desirable than the actual commodity, one can again argue that today's consumer society is not materialistic. Today's consumption is dominated by the consumption of commodities, but this doesn't necessarily mean that the society is materialistic. Commodities are materialistic, yet it is not the materialistic value that is desirable; it is the dreams about the commodities.

A common dream, shown among participants, is owning a house. The participants relate owning a house to various daydreams such as family life, safety and happiness. After the purchase of a house, these daydreams aren't always actualized, thus leaving the desires unfulfilled. In two episodes the participants appear to have pursued this dream of a house with little or no regard to their financial limitations. The daydreaming of owning a house completely takes over logic reason. In the fourth episode the hosts question why the couple bought their house when there clearly was no financial possibility. The couple responds by saying;

We wanted it so bad, we didn't really think about the money

... but it's not human right to have your own house (Lyxfällan, episode 2)

In this example Kristina and her husband try to justify their house purchase to the hosts. Their desire for a house appears to have made them ignore the reality and they buy a house without having the money for it. The hosts try to make them realize that their action is irrational; they were acting as if having a house is a human right, not a privilege. This is an example of how the show distinguishes between basic needs and luxurious needs. To have somewhere to live is a basic need, but owning your own house is seen as a luxurious need. Today it's harder to distinguish what is considered to be a basic need and a luxurious need since there are so many new commodities that create new needs. Campbell explains luxury consumption by stating that it consists of superfluous items, things one wants but does not really need in order to survive. One can argue that most consumption in a consumer society is luxury consumption, since most of what is consumed is not necessary to survive (Campbell 1987: 59). In the example above Kristina is portrayed as not knowing the difference between what she needs and what she wants, and this is how most participants are portrayed. The hosts want the

participants to change their behavior and only purchase commodities that they need, and stop consuming luxury items, since they can't afford them. It is portrayed as an easy change in the show, but the question is how easy it really is. Consumption is a central part in a consumer society, and is therefore deeply integrated in people's behavior and is not something that can be changed over night, or in the case of *Lyxfällan*, in one week. It can be seen as an individual responsibility to decide what is a basic and what is a luxurious need. This distinction should be made according to one's finances. Consequently, the more money an individual has the higher the possibility is to satisfy luxurious needs. Loans and credits are relatively easy to take, and therefore people may perceive themselves having more money than they really do. This would result in people consuming luxury items with loaned money, since this is not money they own there is a high risk that people end up in debt.

One of the consequences of unfulfilled desires is that new desires arise, and when the new desires are unfulfilled, yet another one will emerge. This is one of the central issues in the consumer society; people's needs are insatiable (Slater, 1997: 28). There appears to be some confusion between the terms needs and desires in the consumer culture. Campbell argues, as mentioned above, that need is a state of deprivation whereas desire is what makes people seek pleasure. He also claims that consumption is not the mere purchase of commodities, but rather a process that begins already when people daydream about the commodity. The pleasure of daydreaming becomes addictive and people constantly try to find new ways to experience pleasure (Campbell, 1987: 89). Slater doesn't acknowledge these two different terms but uses only need to explain people's consumption. Slater argues that in a consumer culture, needs are insatiable. If consumption solely aimed to satisfy needs then one would consequently stop consuming once these needs are satisfied, but such is not the case (Slater, 1997: 28). It is argued whether human needs are naturally insatiable or if it is a consequence of modernity. Insatiable needs may be the drive to human evolution and thereby explain why societies continue to develop since people needs are never fully satisfied (ibid: 77). The insatiable needs may however, just be more transparent today since it is commodity-oriented. The participants are portrayed as consuming even though they don't have the means for it. Do people have insatiable needs naturally or is it a consequence of the modern consumer society? If people didn't have as many options of what to buy, maybe there wouldn't constantly exist needs for new commodities. This is an interesting debate, do people actually have the capability to choose how and what to consume, or are they victims of a market society and have no choice but to keep on consuming? Insatiable needs and consumption can either be

seen as an effect of the consumer society or as the cause to consumer society. As mentioned above, both Slater and Bauman argue that people in a consumer society have no choice but to choose to consume. Advertising is big part in a consumer society and advertisers take advantage of people's dreams (Campbell 1987: 91). They use people's daydreams and intensify them through advertising. Most advertisers try to sell various commodities by selling a whole lifestyle, which will automatically be included when buying the commodity. This is another argument for claiming that people in a consumer society are in one way or another forced to consume.

5. Experts and Fools

There has always been a presence of risk in societies, but Giddens argues that today's types differ from those in earlier societies (Giddens, 2010: 46). Giddens defines older risks as external risks, meaning that they are formed independent of human actions and ways of life. The risks in today's modern society are defined as manufactured risks. These risks are seen as a result of human actions and society's developments (ibid: 39). Risk society, as a theory, mostly refers to global and environmental risks affecting society as a whole. One of the major risks in today's society is the threat of climate change (Boyce, Lewis, 2009: 3). Climate change is partly a result of the consumer society and as long as consumerism defines the society, it will be hard to tackle the threat of climate change (ibid: 5). Another global risk existing today is the ongoing economic crisis. In this essay the term "risk" will be applied to the financial crises shown in *Lyxfällan*, which are on a more individual level. Climate change as an environmental risk will also be discussed as a result of consumption. The combination of the new concept of risk and the worry that there are yet no solutions has created a risk environment (Giddens, 1990: 124f). As discussed in the previous chapter, consumption is a central part in people's lives and people consume in order to satisfy wants and needs. Since there is yet no permanent solution to the manufactured risks, people seek solutions through consumption. The market offers commodities as solutions to the risks and people consume them in hope that they will eliminate the risks (Slater, 1997: 86).

A consequence of these manufactured risks is a collective lack of responsibility. It is hard to identify who's to blame and who are to be held responsible. The risks are far away from individual control and therefore people have a hard time identifying themselves with these risks and thereby don't feel responsible (Giddens, 1990: 131f). In *Lyxfällan* the participants are shown as not taking responsibility for their financial crises. The participants appear to continue their way of life without further worries for the risks it may lead to.

5.1 The Consumers as Fools

Slater presents an interesting debate in *Consumer culture and modernity* viewing the consumer as either a fool or a hero in today's consumer society. The first view that consumers are fools emphasizes that they are victims of advertisements and materialism. According to this view consumers have little or no self-choice and are inferior to mass producers. The other view presents consumers as heroes who are capable of identifying their needs and consume

thereafter (Slater, 1997: 33). The view of the hero is closely tied to the consumer sovereignty ideology. Consumer sovereignty is based on the political ideology of liberalism and individualism. It holds two major arguments that depict consumers as heroes. Firstly, this ideology sees consumers as having both the right and capability to act according to their needs and desires. Desires and needs are seen as private and the choices made to satisfy them are performed on an individual level. Secondly, consumer sovereignty states that consumers behold this sovereignty only in a market society. The competition that exists in a market society ensures that the consumers control the price of commodities since producers, in order to survive, must regulate their prices according to the consumers' preferences (ibid: 34f). For consumers to act according to their private needs and desires, consumer sovereignty requires consumers to be rational human beings. Both of these views are presented in *Lyxfällan*. The show portrays participants who see themselves as fools, with no control over their consumption and being passive. However *Lyxfällan*'s view on consumers is that they are in fact heroes. It appears that the hosts overall purpose is to change the participants' view of themselves from being fools to heroes. One way participants are portrayed as fools is that they seemingly have no control over their financial situation. In the first episode Patrick asks why Mette and Karl haven't sold anything to try to solve their situation. Mette replies;

That's something we haven't gotten around to, it has felt so
overwhelming, all of this... I feel like I don't have control
(*Lyxfällan*, episode 1)

Mette and Karl seem to have lost control over their financial situation, resulting in them taking no action and letting it continue. Believing that they don't have any control leads them to think that someone else beholds that control. As fools in the consumer society, everyone is seen as a victim of the market, thereby it is the market and society as a whole that have control. This can be related to today's risk environment where people find that risks are too abstract and complicated to understand, they are in no control over the risks. The portrayal of the consumer as a fool through loss of control can also be related to the lack of responsibility that exists in today's risk society. The participants are shown acting according to their desires without further regards to the financial consequences. Participants continue their consuming behavior since, as explained above, it is believed to be beyond their control to change their behavior. Every episode presents significant debts that are a result of loans with high interest rate and credits. In several episodes these debts have been sent to authorities, which quickly

can lead to eviction and confiscation of possessions. Despite the severe situation most participants are in, they are portrayed as continuing to consume and not changing their behavior. Through the feeling of not having control and the evident lack of responsibility, they are portrayed this way to be seen as the fools of the consumer society.

Believing they have no control over their financial situation leads to a feeling of passiveness. All episodes feature participants whom have debts. These debts are often conveyed by the participants as something that has come to them, instead of being a direct result of actively taking loans and credits. The passiveness portrays the participants as fools for not taking control or seeing their debts as a direct effect of their consumption.

The financial situation with all the loans and stuff has tumbled upon us (Lyxfällan, episode 12)

I've had loans more or less since I was 19 years old

sounds like you have a disease, you 'have had' loans on you... it is something you have taken because you have needed money (Lyxfällan, episode 6)

These two quotes exemplify the passiveness that is portrayed among the participants. As the host says, Tobias' view on debts is that it is something that has come to him, and not something he has chosen to take. Through this view, participants distance themselves from the blame and responsibility of their crisis. This leads to participants being perceived as passive.

According to Giddens there are four different ways of reacting to the risk environment, which are called *adaptive reactions*. One is called *sustained optimism*; which is when people, despite the risks that are present in our society, still have faith. Another reaction is *cynical pessimism*; when people have a pessimistic view on life and express it cynically through, for example, humor. A third adaptive reaction is *radical engagement*, where people act practically to prevent the risks from increasing. The fourth one, which is most often portrayed in *Lyxfällan* is *pragmatic acceptance*. Pragmatic acceptance states that people choose to focus on solely surviving and on day-to-day activities. Risks in the modern society are considered to be beyond one's control, so instead people focus on temporary rewards since it's the only thing

within control (Giddens, 1990: 135). Pragmatic acceptance is one way of portraying the consumer as fools. Participants in *Lyxfällan*, as mentioned above, appear to continue living the same way despite their severe financial situation. They appear to be focusing on one day at a time and not acknowledging the future financial risks. In the 11th episode Johan explains their way of life;

Both Linda and I are pretty spontaneous people. If we want to do something fun we usually do it, and we don't give it that much consideration, we do what we feel like in the moment (Lyxfällan, episode 11)

Johan and Linda are portrayed as people who live for the day and prefer to satisfy their needs straight away when they are identified, instead of reflecting upon them and prioritizing. This acceptance can be seen as an explanation to why people keep consuming. People with pragmatic acceptance are capable of overconsuming because their view of life is so focused on "right now", and allows them to ignore the future. Pragmatic acceptance helps *Lyxfällan* illustrate why people consume the way they do, and it appears that this is the behavior the hosts try to identify and change among the participants. The participants can easily be perceived as fools due to pragmatic acceptance. The pragmatic acceptance reaction doesn't mean that one doesn't acknowledge the risks, but it might be perceived that way by others. The day-to-day mind set is the only thing the outside world sees, and people can therefore be seen as fools for not acknowledging the existing risks. The risks are present in their minds and this leads to anxiety. According to Giddens, anxiety is subconsciously present in pragmatic acceptance and may at times surface to a conscious level (ibid: 135). When the hosts try to make the participants aware of their financial crisis the participants often react very emotionally.

The counseling and help provided by *Lyxfällan* can be explained by viewing the consumer as a hero; having both the right and capability to consume according to needs and desires. The hosts aim to change the participants' view of themselves from being passive and not in control, to realizing that their consumption is based on active decisions taken by them. The hosts lay the responsibility on the individual and not the society.

They [participants] have taken the roles as victims and believe that they have helplessly ended up in this situation, but everyday they have

taken active decisions that has put them in this severe situation
(Lyxfällan, episode 2)

Lyxfällan appears to believe that consumption is a right that people have in the modern society, however this right must be performed within each individual's financial limitations. This is *Lyxfällan*'s view of a "good" consumer. The participants are portrayed to acknowledge that they have the right to consume, however they haven't acted upon this right within their financial means. Whether or not consumption is a right can be discussed. Everybody should have the ability to satisfy their basic needs, which in today's society is done through consumption. Today there is an immense amount of needs and desires due to the vast variety of commodities. New commodities lead to new needs and there is a growing importance to be able to identify and prioritize all of one's needs. The view portrayed in *Lyxfällan* is that if one is not capable of prioritizing there is a risk of ending up in a financial crisis. One method of prioritizing needs, as shown in *Lyxfällan*, is learning how to distinguish between basic and luxury needs. From the hosts' point of view the distinction is portrayed to be rather easy, yet the reoccurring financial crises indicate that it actually may not be that easy. Consumption is today a part of one's identity making and an overall central aspect in people's lives. Bauman and Slater argue that in a consumer society people are forced to consume in order to be a part of the society. Therefore in a consumer society, consumption is seen as right. To survive people should have the right to consume in order to satisfy basic needs, such as hunger and shelter. A problem in the consumer society is that people's ideas of basic needs may in fact be luxurious needs. If today's basic needs really were "basic" then the society's environmental and economic risks as threatening as they are today.

5.2 The Hosts as Experts

A norm identified in the modern risk society is the expert role. The manufactured risks today are so abstract and have yet no solution, people find themselves helpless. It then falls to experts or those whom are considered superior to identify the risks and assist in solving them (Giddens, 1990:124f). *Lyxfällan* emphasizes the hosts' expert role and a lack of knowledge among the participants. The hosts are conveyed as respected experts taking control over the situation and fixing the problems. Throughout the show the narrator presents Magnus and Patrick as "TV3's experts" and the hosts title themselves as "financial advisors". These titles exemplify, to the viewer, that the hosts behold advanced knowledge and are superior to the participants in the show.

An example of this is the contract the participants must sign in the beginning of each episode, giving the hosts financial power of attorney. This implies that the participants believe in the hosts' roles as experts and that the hosts will make better decisions than they have done themselves in the past. The contract formalizes the expert role since contracts are often associated with formal decisions and actions. The contract also gives credibility to the show since it appears to be real and taken seriously by both the hosts and the participants. Another way the hosts are portrayed as experts are their attire and their terminology. The hosts have, in almost all scenes, suits and other clothes that can be perceived as business-like. They also often appear carrying smart looking folders and laptop cases. These attires give them an overall serious and formal appearance, which can be related to superiority. This superiority is further distinguished in contrast to how the participants are portrayed. The hosts enter the participants' homes as professional financial advisors; this is their job and they are in their official role as experts throughout each episode. The participants however, are filmed in their private sphere and their financial problems are a part of their personal life. The participants are filmed in their home environment, wearing more casual clothing. These expert attributes stated above help create the hosts' expert role for the viewer. Having the hosts portrayed as experts is a way to identify the show as serious. If today's society looks up to experts for knowledge and guidance, the viewers of *Lyxfällan* will relate this to the show and thus it may not appear to be just entertainment. The show also, as a result, helps to continue this portrayal of experts in the risk society. It encourages people to seek expert help and signifies that experts are needed to solve today's risks.

In several episodes there are scenes showing the hosts having meetings with banks to discuss and refinance the participants' loans. In every episode that contains such scenes, the hosts manage to get a new loan approved. The process of refinancing the loan is portrayed as a being relatively easy yet a task that only the expert hosts can accomplish. Would these loans and refinancing have been approved if the participants were not in fact participants but private in the real life? The portrayal is that experts are to be trusted and counseled regarding financial risks. The portrayal that it works every time gives the show and the hosts' strong credibility. The refinancing of loans might be an action taken in each episode but only the approved loans are edited into the show.

The expert role is shown through the contrast to how the participants are portrayed. As mentioned above, there appears to be an established difference in knowledge between the hosts and the participants. This higher degree of knowledge that the hosts behold is a way to portray them as experts. Participants, as a contrast, are often portrayed as being unaware of basic financial knowledge. An example of this is Michaela and Henrik in the fourth episode. In the beginning of the episode Magnus and Patrick sit down with the couple to summarize their financial situation and Magnus hears from Patrick that Henrik doesn't have a bank account due to all his debts. When Magnus hears this he exclaims;

This is outrageous. What do you even know about personal finances, I wonder?

Not much...

You can't just renounce all your responsibility. There's actually not much to know about finances. There should be more money coming in and less money going out, otherwise you fall back (Lyxfällan, episode 4)

This exemplifies the reoccurring theme of the participants being portrayed as "dumb" regarding their knowledge of personal finances. Magnus and Patrick don't consider this lack of knowledge as an adequate excuse and they simplify what there is to know about finances to make the participants come across as ignorant. In real life there is a lot more to know and understand about personal finances and these aspects are portrayed not to be known among the participants. The knowledge gap helps the expert role to exist in the show, and possibly through its viewers, in reality. There is a risk that people become passive and develop

overconfidence in experts. If experts are regarded as having the answer to, and knowledge about today's risks they have the power to influence people's actions. Taking this into consideration to the consumer society, experts can affect consumption in the society. This can be tied to the previous chapter where it is discussed how the hosts distinguish what is considered luxury consumption and basic consumption. This is a way the expert role, in *Lyxfällan*, has the power to affect the consumption among the participants and in turn the viewers.

The hosts use a budget board in every episode as a tool to enhance their expert role. The budget board helps concretize and simplify the participant's financial situation. It is portrayed as a black board, which may be associated to a classroom with the hosts as teachers who are trying to explain something by showing it on the board. On the board the participant's finance are shown with the help of real money magnetized on the board. This also signifies the need to concretize their situation in order for participants to understand. Their financial risk may not be acknowledged since it appears too abstract for them; the experts then help to create awareness by presenting the participants' situation in a concrete way. In the beginning of each episode a blank budget board is presented and the participants are asked to estimate their current budget using bills, placing them under different columns. The hosts then reveal the participant's actual budget on the board, correcting their assumptions. These scenes are often a vital point for the participants' realization of their financial situation. This contributes to the portrayal of the hosts as experts since they appear to have a better insight and knowledge of the participant's budget. In the fourth episode, the hosts present the budget board to Michaela and Henrik and discuss each column and their current budget. Regarding the column "miscellaneous" Patrick says;

Well here it completely goes off the chart, as usual when we are out saving people's finances (Lyxfällan, episode 4)

Patrick refers to their past experiences of helping participants with their personal finances. The use of the word "saving" implies the degree of the help they give and also imply that they have been doing it several times with the expression "as usual". The quote illustrates how the hosts' are portrayed to see themselves as experts, almost to the extent that they are heroes. After seeing the board Michaela and Henrik are, as most participants, shocked and have a hard time grasping their financial reality. Michaela reflects;

seeing the budget board really affected us a lot...we got to see how much we lose [financially] which we really had no idea about
(Lyxfällan, episode 4)

In most episodes the first budget board presentation is when the participants for the first time appear to start realizing how severe the situation really is. Reflections such as Michaela's exemplify how the participants are portrayed as being completely unaware of their spending and not realizing the reality. It exemplifies how people in today's society see their financial risk as a modern risk, meaning that it is abstract and hard to seek a solution, so an expert is needed. Towards the end of each episode the hosts and participants return to the budget board. Following the hosts' calculations, the participants revise the old budget into a new one that is financially stable. In these scenes the hosts continue to be shown as experts by directing the participants to their new budget and to some degree the participants are not included into why or how the budget has changed. It is evident that the hosts are to be seen as the ones who behold the knowledge of the budget and if the participants follow the budget their financial situation will be solved. These scenes also exemplify the hosts as experts by summarizing what they have accomplished during the week onto the board. The actions taken by the hosts may not be fully understood by the participants but the board concretizes, and to some degree simplifies, the results of the week so people can understand. It makes it appear that it is not only the financial risk which is complicated and abstract but also the solution and therefore the hosts try to exemplify their results using the budget board to make people with less knowledge understand.

These portrayals and examples create an unbalance of power, which further gives the hosts superiority. Giddens argues that in the modern society our trust and respect for experts is contextual and provisional. Experts and their knowledge are trusted until proven wrong (Giddens, 1991: 84). In *Lyxfällan* there is an established trust in the hosts as experts. The success of 13 seasons indicates that there is a continuous interest among people to be a part of the show; if no trust existed people would not continue to apply to the show. It is therefore assumed that the trust is contextual since knowledge of the experts successfully saving people's finances presumably triggers new participants to apply. If in a modern society experts are trusted until proven wrong, people will continue to trust *Lyxfällan* until an episode is shown where the hosts fail to help the participants. The likelihood of this happening, however, is extremely low since it is a commercial television production and they have no

interest in losing that trust since it would result in fewer viewers. Experts in today's society hold a strong power over people and, until proven wrong, carry a trust of the society. Experts in a consumer society have the power to show how and what to consume. In a consumer society so many aspects of life is commercialized, as discussed above, experts may have the influence of commercialization too. Bank experts, as an example, carry expertise regarding financing and would arguably claim that taking excess loans without a larger income is irresponsible and a risk. Banks are believed to be reliable experts due to their advanced knowledge; however banks increase their profits through loans with high interest rates. There is a risk that experts give advice that benefits themselves instead of the people asking for advice. It is hard to determine whether the given advice is for one's best interest or in favor of the expert. The experts are also a part of the consumer society; their knowledge and solutions may therefore be influenced by consumerism. Despite this, people in today's society must rely on experts since the risks are complicated and abstract, and require superior knowledge in order to be solved.

6. Reality TV versus Reality

An explanation to why reality TV has been so successful over the years is that it features real events and stories in an entertaining way. However, one can question the authenticity of a reality TV show *because* these real stories are presented in an entertaining way (Hill, 2005: 58). Viewers perceive a reality TV program as less truthful the more entertaining it is (ibid: 57). According to *Lyxfällan*, the show should inspire and help viewers towards better finances (*Lyxfällan* app, 2012). This suggests that the show focuses on information rather than entertainment. *Lyxfällan* is, however, a profit-driven show that relies on viewers and advertisement. There must be some degree of entertainment to attract viewers. A consequence of seeing *Lyxfällan* as entertainment is that viewers may perceive it as less real than if it was perceived as information. There is a smaller chance of viewers identifying themselves with the participants, and therefore won't change their consuming habits.

It is important to remember that television's portrayal of social reality is not the same as the objective reality. For example violence is portrayed 10 times more than it occurs in the real world. There is also a skew representation of certain age groups, classes and occupations. On the other hand, it is equally important to state that even though it is not real, reality TV still has some ingredient of reality since viewers can identify and recognize themselves. It is difficult for viewers to be critical and recognize what parts of reality TV is real and what is not (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997: 279). Television is seen as a primary mean of storytelling in our society and since its birth the television has changed our culture (ibid: 278). Television and its portrayal of the society can therefore heavily influence viewers and their lifestyle, including consumption. People might start to believe that real life is as it is shown on television and therefore consume more since that is what they often do in various TV shows (ibid: 280). O'Guinn and Schrum refer to research showing that when people are asked to make a social judgment they do not search their mind thoroughly; instead they refer to information that is most recent and accessible. Viewers who frequently watch television will then have a higher tendency to refer to the reality they viewed on television (ibid: 281f). This research offers an explanation to how reality TV can affect people's view on their reality and their society. The reference that occurs in people's minds can to some degree occur subconsciously and may therefore be hard to be aware of and even harder to change. This research gives television a large role in today's society since it is used as a reference when constructing people's thoughts, lives and reality.

6.1 Reality vs. *Lyxfällan*

The market society, which we today live in, is based on a capitalist system where the majority of companies are private-owned (Slater, 1997:25). In order to survive media companies must gain profits through different income sources, one being advertisement. TV3 is a private company whose primary goal is to increase profits. One of the company's income sources is advertisement. In every episode of *Lyxfällan* there are numerous commercial breaks. Today it is common for viewers to skip the commercial breaks in a television program. This results in advertisers wanting to embed advertising in the program, which is seen quite often in *Lyxfällan* through product placement and sponsorship (Deery, 2004: 2). A TV show whose purpose is to display the negative consequences of consumption in today's society also indirectly encourages viewers to continue consuming. If this TV show was instead aired by public service there would be no advertisement and the credibility of the show would be stronger since there would appear to be no hidden agenda. The show would be focused on informing rather than entertaining. Product placement and sponsorship weakens the credibility of showing real life, since the brands shown are strategically chosen (ibid: 11). Some viewers can question the show's objectivity and authenticity. They will probably be less affected by the content of the show or find it difficult to relate to since they question the show as a whole. Other viewers however, may not question the show's objectivity and authenticity. They can instead either react by concluding that their financial situation isn't nearly as severe and continue consuming, or they can react by relating to the problems and changing their ways of consuming. In other words there can either be a dis-identification or identification among the viewers. It can be discussed if the majority of viewers watch this TV show as mere entertainment and don't relate it to real life. One can argue whether the TV show's 13 season long success is due to the genuine interest of this risk in the society, or if it is due to the degree of entertainment it provides the viewers.

7. Discussion & Conclusion

Today's society is a consumer society characterized by consumerism. Consumption is the pervading theme in the society and the main attribute in today's culture. People have always consumed throughout history, however today the consumption is not just an act to satisfy needs; it is a central aspect of people's lives. Through consumption, people form their identities and establish social order. Consumption in the consumer society is dominated by the consumption of commodities. For example commodities have gained a higher value; it's no longer solely about the value of the commodity itself, but also what it represents on a more abstract level. People often have a certain dream about commodities, these dreams are pleasurable and trigger people's consumption. The search for an identity also triggers the consumption of commodities. A commodity however, seldom lives up to its dreams, and people's identity making is a continuous process, which leads to the argument that people's needs are insatiable. The identification through commodities, daydreaming of commodities and people's needs being insatiable are all norms of the consumer society, which are portrayed through the participants in *Lyxfällan*.

Lyxfällan is a lifestyle reality TV show that illustrates how today's overconsumption can lead to financial crises. These financial crises are portrayed on an individual level, but when put in a bigger picture they represent the existing global economic crisis, which is one of the manufactured risks in today's society. The expert role has emerged through the existence of risks and is portrayed in *Lyxfällan* through the hosts, Magnus and Patrick. There is today an established trust among people that experts have the knowledge to eliminate risks, a knowledge that however, is contextual and provisional.

Slater presents two different views of the consumer being either a fool or a hero. *Lyxfällan* portrays the participants as fools through their passiveness, pragmatic acceptance and lack of responsibility and control over their financial crises. The hosts' expert roles are further enhanced through *Lyxfällan*'s portrayal of the participants as fools. The analysis shows that the hosts' solution to the participants' financial problems is changing their view of themselves from fools to heroes. A hero in the consumer society is seen as someone who has both the right and capability to consume according to their needs and desires. This however, must be done within the participants' financial limitations.

There is a representation of real life in reality TV shows; the degree of representation varies depending on the type of reality show and who the producers are. Producers of reality TV can, through editing, choose to over or under exaggerate certain aspects of reality. This has been done in *Lyxfällan* to highlight the roles of the participants and hosts. However as a whole, the main themes portrayed in *Lyxfällan* must be found in today's society, otherwise the show would not have existed. The themes found in the show are norms in the consumer society, which have been identified, analyzed and discussed in this essay.

Consumption is a vital part of people's lives, despite the presence of risks. The act of consuming is so closely tied to the notion of freedom and personal choice, it appears to be something people are not willing to let go of in order to eliminate risks in the society. This can be tied to the view that the consumer is a hero. It is an act that individuals have the capability and right to exercise. The view of the consumer as a hero is the view *Lyxfällan* portrays as the desirable role for the participants to have. It can be questioned how much of a hero a consumer can be. Are people in a consumer society really free to decide whether to consume or not, or does the society force people to consume? In today's society people are constantly surrounded by advertising, and this does have an effect on people's consumption. The advertisements trigger people to fulfill their dreams through consumption. Companies and stores offer payment through credit, which makes it easy for people to consume according to their dreams and not their financial situation. Consumers aren't always fully aware of the consequences of consuming on credit. Companies benefit from the unawareness among consumers and profit from the high interest rate. In order to be a part of a consumer society one must, as the name suggests, be a consumer. There is a risk of not being part of the society if one doesn't consume and this makes people vulnerable. The view of the consumer as a hero, which *Lyxfällan* seems to believe is the ideal consumer, might therefore not be as easy as it's portrayed. This does not mean that people don't have the capability to make their own choices and think independently, but to be a hero is hard since people can easily be fooled by advertisement and companies' credits.

There is a heavy reliance on experts to eliminate and solve today's risks, which furthermore creates a lack of responsibility among people. *Lyxfällan* portrays finances to be a field of expertise, and this portrayal helps reinforce the reliance of experts in today's society. In one way *Lyxfällan* shows that it is rather easy to solve financial crises by following certain actions and creating a new budget. On the other hand, the existence of experts in the show presumes

that an expert is in fact needed to solve the financial situations. This is further enhanced since the participants are portrayed as not having taken control of the situation prior to the show. Today almost all banks have financial advisors who offer guidance for people's private finances. It appears that people today can't spend or save their own without the help of financial experts. There are other aspects in today's society that rely on experts, for example media. People rely on media for spreading and highlighting information concerning the society. Media beholds the power to choose what risks are to be highlighted and what their consequences are. The reliance on experts gives them the power to influence the society.

In order to exist, *Lyxfällan* relies on the consumer society. Consequently the show does not criticize the consumer society as a whole, but rather the risk of individuals consuming more than they are financially capable of. It's portrayed that as long as people have the financial possibility to consume according to their needs and desires, it's acceptable. The show helps individual participants towards a better, more stable financial situation. The deeper problems to why participants have ended up with debts and loans are not discussed, neither are the problems raised to a more collective discussion; why society as a whole consumes the way it does. It is important for *Lyxfällan* to not criticize consumerism as an ideology of the consumer society, since they would indirectly criticize themselves. The show heavily relies on advertisement and advertisement heavily relies on the consumer society. *Lyxfällan* criticizes consumption, but not consumerism. The show distinguishes the difference between basic and luxurious needs. It exemplifies that basic needs must first be pursued and satisfied before luxurious needs, however as long as it is within financial limitations, the luxurious needs are acceptable to pursue. Since people's needs today are insatiable, people will continue to consume; a show like *Lyxfällan* may teach people to consume differently, but not necessarily to consume less. The show may inspire people to consume more responsibly in regards to their personal finances, but it arguably won't teach people to consume more responsibly in regards to the society and the pervading risks that are present. The participants' financial crises are similar to today's collective economic crisis. Today's risks are acknowledged and known among people, yet there is a collective lack of action and responsibility. The pragmatic acceptance that is portrayed in *Lyxfällan* shows that people are more focused on dealing with problems and risks on a day-to-day basis and living in the moment. This creates an individual, almost selfish, view on life where each person's risks and problems are prioritized higher than the collective, manufactured risks. Consumption has led to grave economic and environmental risks, yet people continue to consume. According to Campbell, people are

aware that consuming is not morally the desirable thing to do considering these risks, however they continue consuming since it is “normal” and “rational” for people in today’s society (Campbell, 1987: 39). This view of consumption is reproduced in media, and *Lyxfällan*. As long as it is the dominant view portrayed in media it will also be the dominant view in the consumer society. People will continue to identify themselves as consumers and the economic and environmental risks will not be solved.

The analysis and discussion done in this essay have awoken thoughts and ideas that would be suitable for further research. It would be very interesting to further approach our research question by conducting some type of audience research. This could show how viewers interpret the show and whether it is predominantly seen as information or entertainment. Another interesting study would be to conduct a semiotic analysis; to look at what type of symbols and signs can be found in the show and analyze how these can help understand today’s consumer society. It is also possible to further look into the participants and how they are portrayed; what demographics are shown and why. We believe reality TV can say a lot about our society, *Lyxfällan* being only one of many examples. It is very interesting studying the connection and relationship between reality TV and reality, and we hope this essay gives inspiration, or at least triggers some curiosity to consider why our society is portrayed the way it is.

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