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### Behind the Bright Lights: Textual Analysis of 2018 Film “A Star is Born”

The effects of alcoholism not only affect the individual addicted to alcohol, but this disease also affects those who love and care for them. On top of alcoholism, some individuals are also addicted to drugs, meaning double the amount of substance abuse, which also doubles and/or exponentializes the negative effects on loved ones. The challenges within the relationships of a famous singer, drugs, alcohol, and his beloved wife are unveiled in the 2018 American drama film *A Star is Born*. This film is about how a famous singer, Jackson Maine (Bradley Cooper), helps a young singer, Ally (Lady Gaga), find fame while ending up falling in love with each other. Jack does this all while facing alcoholism and drug addiction which send him and his own career into a downward spiral. Ally faces betrayal from Jack as she watches him turn to drugs and alcohol for the rest of the movie, instead of turning to her. The perseverance and loyalty Ally holds throughout this movie and in her and Jackson’s relationship, helped Jackson “hold on” a little bit longer and battle through his continuous thoughts of suicide that were stimulated by his overuse of alcohol and drugs.

Embarrassment is a major negative effect that loved one’s face from those with addiction. The substance abuser may lash out at the wrong time, in front of the wrong people, or behave inappropriately in general. Their actions can make their loved ones uncomfortable and not knowing what to do with them in the situation, this brings on an overall feeling of

embarrassment. Jack caused Ally embarrassment a few times in the film, like when he didn't show up to one of Ally's shows to perform with her and instead ended up disappearing on a bender and blacking out in the front yard of an old friend's house. Another instance was when Ally was nominated for several Grammy's so her and Jack attend the Grammy Award Ceremony, she ends up winning "Best New Artist." During the ceremony Jack is extremely intoxicated and staggers up to Ally on the stage and begins shouting words that are slurred, publicly wetting himself, and passing out on stage. Ally tries to downplay what is going on with Jack and tries to cover him up with her dress on stage. This moment was the first time the public saw Ally's embarrassment which caused the public to question her and Jack's relationship—was it healthy? It also revealed that Jack may have been embarrassed for himself, for the chaos he caused, and how he may have felt sorry for embarrassing Ally. The act of forgiveness from the loved one is usually given to the addict after every situation that causes embarrassment. Ally forgave Jack every time. The loved one does this because they not only care for them, but they also don't think anything good will come out of getting mad at them and/or being resentful towards the substance abuser. This becomes a continuous, abusive cycle between an addict and a loved one.

Ally's continuous feeling of embarrassment does not go away, this feeling reoccurs throughout the movie as it would in an individual's life who's loved one is an addict. The embarrassment a loved one has from the addict can lead to isolating themselves or avoiding friends or relatives outside the home. This is because the loved one doesn't want to explain the addict's actions or feel the need to stand up for their addict in front of family and friends. There is embarrassment felt in two different aspects because of being so close to an addict. One is that it typically already feels embarrassing overall to love, care for, and be with the addict from the public eye as outsiders are quick to judge this sort of situation and relationship. The other aspect

of embarrassment comes from the behaviors or actions that the addict commits and that may be inappropriate. The loved one becomes embarrassed when the addict says or does the wrong thing in front of others. The feeling of embarrassment is more frequent and overwhelming within loved ones of addicts, and this can twist their idea of love into thinking that this much embarrassment is supposed to be felt when you love someone that much. Loving someone should be easy, but the feeling of embarrassment that comes along with loving an addict, can make love harder for them but they may not know any better. Ally begins to believe that her and Jack's relationship is what real love is, and that love is supposed to be this challenging, as the feeling of embarrassment has become the new norm for her.

Emotional abuse was hidden beneath the romance of Jack and Ally. Individuals can become trapped in the life of an addict. The addict may develop toxic behaviors due to the overuse of the substance and become emotionally and psychologically manipulative towards their loved one. One example of this was when Ally had finally found Jack at an old friend's house after he publicly blacked out, she told him, "I won't do this again. Next time you can clean up your own mess." Shortly after those words were said, Jack proposes to her, and his friend suggests they get married right away. This action puts Ally on lock down with Jack as he traps her into marriage before she can run away. The marriage was Jack's cruel way of rewarding Ally for her loyalty to him even though minutes before she threatened to leave him. The way Jack treats Ally, with or without the alcohol, messed with her head and caused Ally to sacrifice her emotions and mental stability to persevere in her life with Jack. Jack was not only a substance abuser, but an emotional abuser as well.

For Ally, romance began to get confused with emotional abuse. Not only does one's confidence chip away, but their independence does too when they are emotionally abused. Often,

an addict can become abusive physically or emotionally to the ones they love as, in their mind, it justifies their actions and behaviors. A big aspect of emotional abuse is manipulation, which is something Ally experienced throughout the movie from Jack. This manipulation generally instills fear in the loved one and the manipulator gains control of them. Control over one's thoughts and emotions are a huge result of manipulation. Frequently, an addict will manipulate their loved one into thinking that they should be guilty or should be the ones to blame for their addicts' actions. The mental and emotional pain that the loved one experiences from being emotionally abused and manipulated becomes "normal" for them. This sense of normal is what Ally experienced and caused her to think that this psychological pain is what you have to go through when you are in love, when really that's not the case.

Through multiple sources of media, we are able to see the symptoms and long-term effects that drugs and alcohol have on the user, but not as often do we get to see how negatively affected loved ones are by the addict, like we do get to see in *A Star is Born*. This film highlights the two important challenges that loved ones of the abuser face: embarrassment and manipulation. Of course, this does not mean that the feelings and emotions of the abuser should be neglected, as they themselves have a harder time coping with their own lives than their loved ones might. This film truthfully and wonderfully displays the hardships of addiction that many celebrities and artists face behind the bright lights and shiny stage.