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The Commodification of Sexuality: A Critical Analysis of Queer Eye

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

THE COMMODIFICATION OF SEXUALITY:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *QUEER EYE*

By

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A mis padres, con amor.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses critical discourse analysis to conduct an examination of the reality television program *Queer Eye*. *Queer Eye* is a makeover show and each of the five main characters --Ted Allen, Kyan Douglas, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley and Jai Rodriguez—has an area of specialty (fashion, home design, culture, food and grooming). The first two seasons of the show entitled *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* gave makeovers exclusively to straight men. However, after season three the Fab Five, as they are commonly called, shortened the title and expanded their makeovers to couples, a gay man and a transgender man.

The purpose of this study is to help understand the manner in which the representations of queer culture in the show reinforce the binaries of sex, gender and sexuality. By investigating the evolution of *Queer Eye* (all four seasons), this study provides insights into popular culture's understanding and depiction of sexual difference and evidences the strong link between these representations and the commercial interests of the producers.

This study's theoretical framework brings together concepts from queer theory and political economy to the examination of the commodification and construction of sexuality and gender. In the show *Queer Eye*, the male guests sell access to their lives for a makeover and in the process they are indoctrinated into new patterns of consumption. The identity of both the five main characters and the guest character is represented as a reflection of their aesthetic choices, and audiences are exposed to numerous product placements and advertising messages. In encouraging materialism, the show transforms the term queer into a commodity sign and redefines masculinity as represented through wealth and accumulation.

Drawing on a critical discourse analysis of the show, I argue that the Fab Five serve as normative figures within the structure of the capitalist system because their performance reflects the intrinsic values of a materialistic society and ignores social responsibility. Moreover, consistent with the stereotypical representation of gay males in American culture the queerness of the Fab is depicted as asexual and a form of aestheticism. Ultimately, the program and the main characters support a narrative of heterosexual reproductive romance.

The combination of all these elements –the commercialization of sexual desire, the aggressive use of product placement, the reproduction of common stereotypes- is directly related to the success of the show and its historical significance.

CHAPTER 1

QUEER EYE FOR THE STRAIGHT GUY

“I am just a business owner trying to improve mankind one mullet at a time”

David Collins, 2004 in an advertisement for American Express

Executive Producer of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*

Surfing through the channels on a late night, I found myself watching a promotional interview for the latest fashion makeover show. During that interview, five men explained the purpose of the show. Their mission was to change the world one man at a time and their catch phrase was “we are not here to change you, we are here to make you better.” While the main premise of the show seemed promising, I was intrigued by the fact that for these men, changing the world involved wearing designer clothing. The show was *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a reality TV fashion makeover show that featured five gay men and used sexuality as a positioning statement. The program was part of the summer lineup of Bravo, an NBC Universal Inc. Cable Network (General Electric and Vivendi). It premiered on July 5, 2003, and it quickly became one of the most profitable shows of the station, winning two of four Emmy nominations and bringing great recognition and commercial success to the five main characters.

The Fab Five, as they are commonly called, have been marketed by Bravo TV as a sophisticated team of gay men. Most often a straight guy is selected and the five characters of *Queer Eye*¹ --Ted Allen, Kyan Douglass, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley and Jai Rodriguez-- give him a makeover. Each character of this “reality TV” show has an area of specialty. Ted is the food and wine expert. On the show he illustrates the appropriate kitchen tools and how to use them; sometimes he teaches men special recipes and gives them lessons for buying and ordering wine. Thom is the decoration expert; his contributions consist of rearranging the space in which the straight guy lives. Carson is the fashion expert in charge of deciding the “appropriate” look for the selected character.

¹ *Queer Eye* is used to refer to all four seasons of the show. While some episodes featured non-men – a couple and a transsexual female to male—the show primarily targets straight men.

Jai covers the area of “culture.” For *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, “culture” translates into lessons on public speaking, dancing and body language, mostly etiquette. However, it can also cover areas such as pet grooming, and dating; in sum, the focus of the area will depend on the mission of the week. Finally, Kyan is the grooming specialist, as he covers issues related to skin and hair care.

The Fab Five have several items and merchandise associated with the production of the show including a DVD, numerous music CDs and a book with general tips. Moreover, some of the main characters have additional books. For example, Carson has a children’s book (*You're Different and That's Super*), Ted released a cooking book (*The Food You Want to Eat: 100 Smart, Simple Recipes*) and Kyan published a grooming book for ladies (*Beautified*).

These five characters are the self proclaimed embodiment of good taste and class. They are depicted as five super heroes traveling through the streets rescuing males from bad taste. They arrive to the “challenged” straight man’s house in a black SUV, a contemporary representation of the “Batmobile.” In the SUV they describe the mission of the day, reminiscent of Charlie’s call when assigning missions to his angels in the series, *Charlie’s Angeles*. The super hero theme is also made evident in all advertising and promotion efforts. The five men are portrayed in their advertisements, merchandize, and internet pages in James Bond poses, using hangers and hair dryers as their weapons of choice when combating the style horrors of the world. In fact, David Metzler and David Collins, the producers of the show, comment:

“When the Fab Five was born, they were superheroes in our minds-- bigger-than-life gay men, armed with great fashion, good looks and bottles of eye cream. If there was a straight guy in need, they’d rush to his rescue” (Allen, Douglas, Filicia, Kressley, and Rodriguez 8).

The show starts with a shot of the five characters in their areas of expertise being paged with a “QE” (*Queer Eye*) emergency. They discuss the day’s mission in their SUV while driving to the straight guy’s house. During that time they provide the audience with a demographic profile (age, profession, marital status, location) of that week’s character and describe the mission or objective.

Once at the home of the straight guy, the Fab Five go through the space commenting on the style, decoration, clothing and belongings. Each of the five characters discusses his plan for the day and the areas each will be working on. Then each Fab has some alone time with the straight guy while selecting and buying all the elements needed for the makeover. When the straight guy returns home, he admires and reviews all the days' accomplishments (new clothing, decoration, food, etc). Then, he has a final meeting with each of the Queer Guys, and he is left alone with cameras filming what he has learned. Then, the Fab Five meet at their New York apartment and watch a video of the straight guy. The episode comes to an end when both the Fab and the audience witness the "life changing" event (e.g. date, standup comedy, proposal, wedding, etc.). They discuss the video over some glasses of wine or another alcoholic beverage and debate on the success or failure of the mission. The program ends with some concluding thoughts of the *Queer Eye* guys. Also, at the beginning of each segment, right after commercial breaks, the producers insert excerpts of prerecorded interviews with family members and friends of the straight guy, where they make remarks about their friend's "problem areas." Finally, the Fab Five give daily tips in their areas of expertise.

The transitions between the scenes are very sharp and usually accompanied by background music. The producers use interviews of friends and family members in order to establish the need of the makeover. Music is also used during certain shots to sustain the hip and trendy image of the show. Also, the characters are often running through the streets while upbeat music is playing in the background to give a sense of urgency and dynamism.

Understanding the structure and phases of the show is instrumental for the analysis of the program. During the first stage, both audiences and characters come to appreciate the challenge, then the Fab Five work on the changes and finally everyone gets to see the glorious results. Each stage of the show reveals the topics or ideas privileged by the characters and highlights the process of negotiating and constructing values and identity. Importantly, in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, the editing choices, music and general format of the show provide insight for the analysis of this cultural text and help construct the general narrative of the characters and the mission of the show.

Queer Eye aired for the first time on July 15, 2003 and quickly became very popular among audiences and marketers. The show was produced by David Collins, Michael Williams, and David Metzler by Scout Productions and Francis Berwick, Amy Introcaso-Davis and Christian Barcellos for Bravo. The original cast of the show consisted of Ted Allen, Kyan Douglass, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley and Blair Boone. However, the culture expert, Blair Boone, was replaced after two episodes by Jai Rodriguez.

During the first season, the audience share of the show reached unforeseeable numbers, making *Queer Eye* the best rated cable show of the summer of 2003. Wayne Friedam and Richard Linnett reported that the show captured 2.8 million total viewers, out of which 2.1 million were adults age 18 to 49. In their article, Friedman and Linnett explain that the primary target for the show was women 18 to 49, with a secondary target of gay men (Leno 4). By July 29, 2003, *Queer Eye's* audience numbers had reached an all time high, making the series Bravo's highest rating show ever.

By the end of the first season, executive producers for Scout Productions, David Collins, Michael Williams, and David Metzler, had deals for a spin-off of *Queer Eye* and franchises through the world. Between 2003 and 2005 the original version of the show- featuring Ted Allen, Kyan Douglass, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley and Jai Rodriguez- was transmitted in over 100 countries including Spain, England Turkey, Portugal and South Korea, among many others counties. Also, the franchise was sold internationally, thus licensing 13 countries (among them France, Italy, Spain, Finland, Australia and England) to produce their own versions of the show featuring a local cast (NBC Universal Media Village, "Broadcast").

The success of the series enticed Bravo's parent network NBC Universal to air a half hour version of the show (the regular hour format was compressed to a 30 minute format) on NBC that attracted 6.9 million viewers. Claire Atkinson in her article, "Comeback Trail" explains that *Queer Eye's* success with audiences impacted the way marketers used their advertising dollars. The show made media buyers look at cable as an alternative to the networks to place their ads. Moreover, Richard Linnett reported that the success of shows like NBC's *Will & Grace*, and Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, both part of the General Electric Corp's, was taken as evidence that gay themes were

mainstream and profitable.

The show was also significant for the Five main characters. Claire Atkinson and T.L. Standley's article "*Queer Eye for the Rich Guys*" describes how the Fab, who were each getting \$3,000 per episode during the first season, moved to \$10,000 a show each for the subsequent seasons. The Five also received individual offers for sponsorships and commercial deals. However, the salaries of the five characters were not the only thing that changed through the seasons.

The concept of the show also changed significantly during the third season. With the beginning of the third season, Bravo's president announced in June 2005 that the title of the show had been abbreviated to *Queer Eye* because they wanted to venture into new kinds of makeovers and add more compelling narratives to the story lines. According to NBC Universal Media Village the changes responded to a decline in the popularity of the show and increasing competition from the makeover show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* ('*Queer Eye*'). However, in an interview included on the bonus video section of the *Queer Eye* website, Ted Allen mentions, "We just call the show *Queer Eye* because we want to be able to work with women, gay women, straight men and gay men. As Carson always says, 'bad taste does not discriminate'." The changes in the third season included a makeover for a gay man and a transgender, thereby refining the positioning of the program. Finally, on January of 2007, Bravo announced the final season of *Queer Eye* (Serpe). The last ten episodes of the show aired in October of 2007.

Importance and Purpose of the Study

The concept of the show generated great controversy in popular and academic circles. For scholars, the program created a hype around issues of representation, identity politics, the use of term queer and the commodification of sexuality, sex and gender through aggressive marketing strategies. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* also had an enormous impact on popular culture. A year after the show premiered, *Television Week* reported that as a direct consequence of the success of the show NBC started discussing development of a series of spin-offs of the program. Indeed, in the fall of 2005, Bravo aired a spin-off of the show called *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*, a program where gay men conducted a makeover on a "fashion-challenged" straight woman. Moreover, *Queer*

Eye for the Straight Guy generated conversations at Viacom that pointed to the development of a cable network aimed at gays (Joe 2004). A first step in this direction was seen on the summer of 2006 when Bravo launched OUTZone TV, a broadband channel that caters to gay and lesbian audiences.

Further evidence of the success of the show is *Comedy Central's* three episode spoof of the program called, *Straight Plan for the Gay Man*. As noted by Devin Gordon, the "Flab Four" (unlike *Queer Eye*, *Straight Plan* does not include a culture makeover) are the satiric impersonators of the Fab Five and their mission is to help a gay man pass for a day as a hetero.

The popular culture animated show *South Park* also aired a satirical episode about the show called, "South Park is gay!" where the town joined in the *Queer Eye* craze. In this episode many of the male characters become metrosexuals. Although the change is received positively at first, the episode comes to an end when the women in town kill the Fab Five and explain that masculinity is what makes men attractive. Importantly, Hillary Atkin comments that part of the unintended consequences of this pop culture phenomenon is that it has created some misconceptions about the amount of gay programming on television (8).

The goal of this study is to intervene as a critical actor and conduct a multidimensional reading of the show that incorporates the socioeconomic context and the constructed meaning. My study explores the ways that the representations of queer culture in the show reinforce the binaries of sex and gender. By investigating the evolution of *Queer Eye* (all four seasons), this study provides insights into popular culture's understanding and depiction of sexual difference and the strong link between these representations and the commercial interests of the producers.

The title of the show and the use of the term queer suggested the possibility of the development of a new discursive space for contested sexualities. In fact, the promotion of the show generated great appeal among LGBTQ audiences. But this excitement was short lived. Thus, four research questions guide this work: 1) In what way is the program sustaining structures of power and the corporate capitalist media system to promote consumerism? 2) What is the role of advertising in the negotiation of identity and the representation of sexual desire? 3) Does the representation of queer in *Queer Eye* help

undermine or reinforce the goals of the queer project? and 4) How is the program constructing narratives of masculinity, femininity and heterosexual romance?

While many critical texts have been devoted to analyzing some of these issues, (see, Allatson, Bateman, Gallagher, Kavka, Pearson and Reich, Heller, Miller) this study attempts to extend the discussion by looking at *Queer Eye* from different theoretical frameworks -queer theory and political economy- and conducting a close analysis of a selection of episodes. To examine the research questions, a discourse analysis will be conducted on a random sample of episodes from the four seasons of *Queer Eye*. The episodes were recorded and transcribed in an effort to closely study the verbal and nonverbal remarks of the characters.

I frame the cultural study within Judith Butler's discussion of performativity and queer theory. Supplementing this perspective with insights from political economy, I look at the ritualized production of gender and sexuality in the popular culture program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Using discourse analysis, I discuss issues of representation of gender, sexuality and heteronormativity, readings of the body. Moreover, I provide insight as to the influence of commercial advertisements on the content of the show and its effects on audiences by also analyzing the texts within their system of production and distribution.

Outline of the Study

In the initial chapters of this dissertation, I review the published research on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and reality television, and articulate the relevant insights from queer theory and political economy that ultimately inform my analysis of the show. Thus, the first two chapters of this dissertation identify the gaps in the present research and argue for my study's theoretical positioning.

The goals of the second chapter are to situate *Queer Eye* in its historical context, to identify the factors that influenced its development, and to describe this study's contribution to the current scholarship on the reality television genre and *Queer Eye* in particular. I first provide an historical context and an overview of the representation of gay sexuality on TV and reality television. Then I briefly discuss the current scholarship on *Queer Eye* as well as the research that focuses on the reality television genre.

Chapter three looks at the advantages and challenges of conducting a critical discourse analysis of the show. This chapter covers the methodology. The data analysis technique is also explained here.

In chapter four I discuss the theoretical framework used for the analysis. My critical reading is informed by queer theory and political economy. Chapter four reviews the primary contributions of each area and examine the advantages of using them for the study of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Political economy supports my critical examination of advertising and the marketplace in relation to sexual identity, while queer theory will be instrumental for the evaluation of the discursive constitution of gender, sexuality and heteronormativity in *Queer Eye*.

The first four chapters position my study theoretically and methodologically. The remaining chapters of the dissertation focus on my analysis. Chapter five turns a critical eye toward the promotion of consumerism in the show. Here, I review the structural elements of producing *Queer Eye*, the strategies of cross promotion used to maximize the revenues of the show and the depiction of materialism. Furthermore, I explore the relationship between advertising, product placement and the representation of sexuality in the show.

Chapter six looks at the representation of queer in *Queer Eye*. The program identifies the main characters as queer, however, the label is stripped of any sexual desire. Instead the characterization of sexual differences, represented by the use of the term queer, is consistent with current stereotypes of gay males. The chapter reviews the representation of gay males in popular culture and the many ways in which the program uses stereotypical representations of male homosexuality (comical, asexual gay men) to negotiate the boundaries of interaction between gay and straight men. The chapter argues that contrary to the goals of the queer project *Queer Eye* reinforces sexuality as a differentiating category of identity.

Chapter seven focuses on the ways the show constructs gender. Using examples from the show, I explore the role of the program in the negotiation of gender roles. This chapter reviews the representation and construction of masculinity, femininity and heterosexual romance.

Finally, chapter eight provides a summary of main arguments and the implications for the consumer market, popular culture and media studies critics. This chapter revisits the theoretical and conceptual ideas presented in the literature review and addresses the way this study contributes to the literature on the representation of queer identity.

In sum, this study argues that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is much more than a key player in the study of the representation of sexual difference in American television. The show also marks a key step in the evolution of the partnership between corporate sponsors and media content, by expanding the way product can be incorporated into a show. Additionally, the program provides a lens for the examination of consumerism in popular culture.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is one of the many reality fashion makeover programs currently showing on the television. However, it is different than its competitors in that the show uses stereotypical representations of gay men as their unique selling point, thereby highlighting the role of sexuality. Sexuality, then, becomes a product, a point of differentiation that defines and constructs both homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Several authors have conducted studies about the show since its debut in 2003 (see, Allatson, Bateman, Gallagher, Kavka, Pearson and Reich, Heller, Miller) but an examination of the data reflects a serious gap in the literature. This chapter reviews the literature in three key areas. First, it analyzes the literature on gay representation in television. Second, I give a brief overview of reality television. Third, I examine current scholarship specifically focused on the show. Finally, the chapter comes to an end with a review of the general areas that remain unexamined in the study of the television program *Queer Eye*.

Queer Representation on Television

In an effort to account for the significance of *Queer Eye*, I turn to the literature on the representation of gays in American media. Most of the literature addresses the limited characterization of queer in terms of the type of characters that are represented, the frequency of gays represented and the gay characters' importance in regard to the plot.

Much current scholarship has been devoted to analyzing the representation of homosexuality in film and television. This section sought to establish homologies between the two areas, to address the types of characters and representations of sexual desire on the big screen, and to examine how those characters have moved to small screens.

In his groundbreaking work, *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo explains how the representation of homosexuality in film is directly related to a history of censorship. He

explains that in the 1930s, the Motion Picture Production Code was established. The Code represented part of the industry's effort to avoid formal regulation. This self-regulating policy restricted, among many other topics, the representation of sexual images of any kind in film. Most illuminating is his discussion of the three main types of depictions of queer characters that survived the regulations in American film: "the sissy," "the villain," and "the tragic hero."

For Russo, the "sissy" is the effeminate, flamboyant, asexual gay men. For him the sissies became symbols of failed masculinities, weakness and the things men secretly dread (homosexuality). In representing the dangers of being homosexual, films used the images of "the villain" and the "the tragic hero" to show the boding consequences of their "perversion." These two representations represented homosexuals as killers or as victims of tragic deaths.

Russo further explains that filmmakers used cues to suggest a character's sexuality without breaking the Code. In their book, *Queer Images*, Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin argue that unlike other identity markers, sexuality is not easily identifiable and therefore filmmakers rely on connotative means to suggest that a character is queer. Benshoff and Griffin categorized the cinematic resources used to convey the queerness of a character: dialogue (e.g., a male character who likes flowers); delivery (e.g., a male character who flips his wrist); name (e.g., a woman named George); and costume makeup and hair (e.g., women wearing plain shoes, women with short or pulled back hair) (15).

Benshoff and Griffin summarize the salient criticism regarding the representation of queer identity in film (251-6):

- Most films are made from a heterosexual perspective, and when there is an attempt to tell a story from a queer perspective, efforts are made to change the plot in a way that will not "offend" straight sensibilities.
- There is a conscious effort in Hollywood to minimize queer plotlines and characters from films and scripts (e.g. film *Fried Green Tomatoes*).
- Gay intimacy, romance and community are often marginalized. Producers often resort to flamboyant images as a way of avoiding addressing issues of sex.

- When gays are presented, producers use straight characters as points of audience identification; thereby making queer characters secondary.
- Most representations rely heavily on stereotypes.
- Films that address queer topics minimize gay struggles or the contributions of queer activists (e.g. film *Philadelphia*);

Interestingly most of the criticisms of queer representation in film are also evident in the portrayals of gay and lesbian characters in television. Like film, the characters represented in television rely on stereotypes, usually play secondary roles in the plotlines and are stripped from any sexual desire.

Stephen Tropiano undertakes a critical study of the history of gays and lesbians on television. He explains that some of the first representations of homosexuality in television can be traced back to 1950s talk shows where the topic was introduced as a taboo. During that time, the medical discourse in regard to sexuality (mental illness, cures, and psychoanalysis) dominated the discussions of homosexuality. The author asserts that during the mid 50s the topic of homosexuality was discussed in one of two ways: as a social problem or as a target of sensationalism. Tropiano cites “Homosexuals who Stalk and Molest Children” and “Introduction to the Problem of Homosexuality” as examples of the overall mood and topics that dominated the discussions (3-4). He also asserts that lesbians were often excluded from these discussions.

During the 1960s, networks started to address issues of homosexuality in selected episodes on dramas such as a 1967, *N.Y.P.D.* episode titled “Shakedown” where New York detectives, helped by a closeted homosexual, try to solve a case of blackmail. Homosexuality was also addressed in news programs such as the CBS report “The homosexual, the first major network news special about homosexuality” in 1967. After the 1969 Stonewall Riots the representation of homosexuality gained popularity in television (Tropiano 12). Shows like *All in the Family* (1971) and the television movie *That Certain Summer* (1972) addressed the subject of homosexuality while the ABC show *The Corner Bar* (1972) incorporated a regular gay character into the plotline (Tropiano).

Tropiano explains in the comedy genre that the character of the sissy was the leading recurrent portrayal of homosexuality up to the 1970s. Furthermore, he explains

that during that time, comedy sitcoms addressed the issue of homosexuality in the plotlines through: coming out episodes; shows of mistaken identity; programs where the characters pretend to be gay to escape a situation; or special episodes that addressed some specific social problems like AIDS (191-236). These plotlines were solidified in the 1980s in the narratives of shows like *21 Jump Street*, *Designing Women*, *Mr. Belvedere* among others (Hart). Moreover, the link between homosexuality and AIDS is still prevalent in more recent years. A commonly cited example of the link between homosexuality and AIDS is the *Seinfeld* episode of mistaken identity, “The Outing” that aired in February 11, 1993. During that episode, the main characters, Jerry and George, were identified as gay and they continuously denied it by adding “Not that there is anything wrong with that” (Tropiano).

Ron Becker notes that TV was dominated by three main networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) during the 1970s. He explains that over 97% of American households had televisions (81). Additionally, about 90% of audiences were watching one of the three networks, and therefore networks had little interest in reaching a smaller demographic or investing in risky programming that could potentially split their audience (Becker 82). Yet, two important events changed the way that television content was designed: a move towards niche advertising and cable.

Becker argues that in the 1970s the industry gained interest in targeting special demographics. The media environment was also changing, as signaled by the growth of cable and independent broadcast stations. With the growth of cable the media market became more competitive, network television mostly composed of NBC, CBS and ABC had to compete for audiences with channels that were able to produce content for specialized target audience. These two changes combined with political pressures for inclusiveness in the media made gay material more appealing to the networks.

In the 1980s, shows started presenting gay and lesbian characters as part of the ensemble of the programs (Tropiano). However, ABC reported losing more than one million dollars in advertising revenues when an episode of *Thirtysomething* showed two men in bed having a post-coital conversation (Tropiano x). Suzanna Danuta Walters explains that the increased exposure of gay characters in the media during the 80s also

elicited great opposition from conservative groups, and often resulted in lack of support from advertisers.

It was not until the 1990s that television saw an increased number of gay characters on primetime programs such as *Friends*, *Roseanne*, *Spin City*, and *Mad About You* as well as the daytime soap opera *All My Children*. However, in most cases these characters were only supporting characters (Tropiano; Becker; Kessler; Walters). Danuta Walters, however, points that while the popularity of gay characters increased in the nineties, the representation of intimacy (kissing, caressing, stroking) was still not accepted between characters.

In the late nineties, the gay and lesbians gained more cultural visibility. The infusion of gay characters was described by Tropiano as “GAYCOM.” For him, “GAYCOM” refers to situational comedies featuring one or more queer characters involved in their plotline: “A situation comedy that tries not to reduce gays and lesbians to second class citizens” (245). *Will and Grace* is one of the examples provided by the author to explain this phenomenon.

In April 30 1997, Ellen DeGeneres made history when her character came out during her TV show (Benshoff and Griffin 251). The episode was named, “The Puppy Episode,” because ABC, concerned about Ellen’s lack of a love interest on the show, had suggested that DeGeneres get a puppy (Tropiano 248). The coming-out episode was heavily promoted by ABC which charged premium rates for 30-second spots. ABC was a sellout, the advertising slots sold for 20% over the show’s usual \$ 170,000 and was the network’s highest-rated episode program in three years (Grover Duck). However, a year after the airing of the episode the show was cancelled. The last episode of *Ellen* aired in May 13, 1998, a year after the cited episode (Hontz).

In her book Danuta Walters explains that when Ellen came out both in the show and in her personal life she became the target of institutionalized homophobia and the spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign (82). The author maintains that although Ellen DeGeneres rejected the idea that the show was a gay sitcom, the development of the story line moved into that direction. For Danuta Walters, the coming out episode desexualized the character’s desire for a woman and framed the relationship as “the

meeting of like souls” (84). However, the storyline reflected Ellen’s gayness. The author explains this best when she writes:

We witnessed not just the climatic moment of ‘coming out,’ but the more mundane and prosaic process of reckoning with the homophobia (and love) of friends and employers, confronting parents with truth they so desperately don’t want to hear, and negotiating the changing and turbulent terrain of gay identity in a postmodern world. (Danuta Walters 85)

Yet the author is also careful to overestimate the impact of the show for American television. As Danuta Walters also explain that the cancellation of the show was indicative of “true double standards and heterosexual unease” (94). As she argues that the show became too gay for heterosexual sensibilities.

The show *Ellen*, was seen by many as a milestone for queer representation in television, however, it also generated much controversy as many grew critical of the new found “gay chic” aesthetic. For many, the popularity of gay and lesbian characters responded to a trend in the medium rather than a rupture with previous stereotypes. The type of representation did not change, mostly the character of the sissy is represented (e.g. Carson from the Fab Five, Will and Jack from *Will and Grace*) thereby perpetuating the status quo. Yet, more programs seem to successfully incorporate the sissy into their story lines.

Also, Kelly Kessler explains that in the case of television programs such as *Friends*, and *Mad About You*, the characters behave in a manner that minimizes their lesbianism while highlighting their roles as mothers from their previous heterosexual relationships. Robert B. Bateman also cautions not to confuse visibility for acceptance. He explains that while more representation might mean acceptance, the type of representations and characters are also important. For him more representation could respond to an increased interest to see homosexual identity as an object of amusement.

Recent Backlash of Queer Representation

The coming out episode of the television show *Ellen* generated strong reactions from audiences. Several religious groups organized bans against ABC, its parent

company Disney, and the marketers with media properties on the show. On the other hand gay activists also organized to prevent companies from canceling their placements on the program.

The Walt Disney Company acquired American Broadcasting Companies (ABC) in 1996, and renamed the broadcasting group ABC, Inc. Both Walt Disney and ABC were subjects of criticism because of the airing of “The Puppy” episode in *Ellen*. Walt Disney Co. was the subject of a boycott from Southern Baptists over its gay-friendly policies that included extending same-sex benefits to employees and having Ellen DeGeneres come out of the closet on her television show (Grover, *Duck*).

In terms of the marketers, Michael Wilke in 1997 reported that Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.'s Clairol, Domino's Pizza, Burger King Corp. and Johnson & Johnson avoided placing ads during the episode while advertisers like Chrysler Corp. and General Motors Corp. canceled their placements. In the case of Chrysler, the company had to create a touch-tone service to let viewers on both sides of the issue register their opinion and listen to a recorded explanation of the company's decision not to advertise their products during that episode of *Ellen* (*Adweek, An Ellen*). Clearly, the corporate decision to shy away from divisive gay content was the result of pressures from conservatives groups and other activist organizations.

Jack Neff writes that the National Federation for Decency, led by Donald Wildmon, was renamed in 1988 as the American Family Association (AFA). The AFA is an activist organization that supports conservative values, and their mission is to clean up media content. Among many other issues, the association boycotts companies that advertise or support programming with gay or lesbian characters.

In 2005, *Advertising Age* reported on AFA's pressure on companies such as Ford Motor and Procter & Gamble to terminate sponsorship of any kind of programs with gay characters such as *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye*. Although the companies addressed AFA's concerns and suspended their placements of ads on gay-targeted titles for some time, the brands returned to advertise on gay-targeted media (Neff).

Additional cases of consumer pressures to censure homosexual imagery on television came after the 2007 Super Bowl on CBS. Ken Wheaton explains that at the time the Federal Communications Commission received more than 150 complaints

regarding alleged homosexual imagery. The complaints made reference to the halftime show, which featured Prince as well as a Snickers (chocolate bar) commercial.

Viewers complained of the homoerotic imagery of Prince's halftime show “where at one point he went behind a curtain to play his guitar, and the silhouette created reminded some of a phallic symbol” (Wheaton). Complaints about the advertisement where two men unintentionally kissed while eating a Snickers were recorded too. According to Wheaton, one man was quoted stating,

"It was obscene to show Prince, a HOMOSEXUAL person through a sheet, as to show his silhouette while his guitar showed a very phallic symbol coming from his below-midriff section. I am very offended and I would prefer not to have showed it to my four children who love football. One of them has hoped to be a quarterback and now he will turn out gay. I am actually considering checking him for HIV. Thanks CBS for turning my son GAY" (44).

Another person wrote:

"The snickers bar commercial promoting homosexual behavior was disgraceful, also the giant shadow 'phallus' from prince's guitar was equally disgraceful, this behavior has no place in a prime time major family event. It was easier explaining to the kids about Jackson's boob being exposed, than explaining the pro homosexual theme of this year's event. We will never watch live again, only in TIVO, with the half time filth show cut out. It's pathetic when you can't keep porn out of the Super Bowl, just because 6% of the population is gay" (44).

Ultimately, the bans to Disney did not result in any losses for the company. The criticism did not prevent *Ellen* the show to sold out advertising time during the episode and register record audiences. However, even when marketers have seen great economic rewards for advertising on publications or programs that feature gay and lesbians, the reactions from some viewers and the boycotts demonstrate cultural resistance to such inclusion in popular culture.

Yet the resistance to the relationship between advertising and queer identity has also come from LGTBQ supporters. Activist groups like “Gay Shame” and “LAGAI - Queer Insurrection” among others, have criticized the commercialization of the social

movement, by contending that the celebration of a queer identity has been underwritten by corporate interest and the creation of a LGTBQ market. These groups are resisting the commodification of Gay Pride and the notion that the route to social recognition is to be empowered as consumers.

Reality Television

Reality television has become one of the most influential genres in television programming. Annette Hill states that the increased popularity of the genre is reflected in the ratings of these shows and has resulted in great advertising revenues for the networks. The author uses the popularity of shows such as *Survivor*, *American Idol* and *Joe Millionaire* to show the great attractiveness of this genre to viewers. Hill notes that in 2000, *Survivor* reported over 27 million viewers and earned about \$50 million in ad revenue; *American Idol* in 2003 had 25 million viewers; and in 2003, *Joe Millionaire*'s 40 million viewers made the show almost as popular as the Academy Awards (3).

There are several websites dedicated exclusively to cover news, events and general stories about shows in the reality television genre. Among them, *Reality TV World*, that in 2006 listed over 300 reality TV shows in America alone. Gerd Hallenberger explains that one of the appeals of many non-fiction programs is that they can be easily transformed into different markets and give the appearance of being a domestic production. For example, versions of *Big Brother* have been incredibly successful throughout the world. Reality TV shows have also become the highest rated shows in the Netherlands, Spain, Northway, France, Australia, among many others (Hill 4).

However, the success of reality television cannot be limited to its popularity among audiences. Of great importance is the fact that the genre provides a cheap production alternative to dramas. Hill notes that while the approximate cost of producing a one-hour drama is close to \$1.5 million, the cost of production of a reality television show is \$200,000 per hour (6). Chad Raphael further argues that the production strategies used for reality programming also facilitate the cheap production and maximization of revenues. Raphael details the most common production practices for these programs: hidden cameras, use of footage of the subjects in actual scenarios, an avoidance of

studios, the incorporation of footage by unpaid amateur videographers, on-location interviews and synchronized sounds.

Anna McCarthy argues that reality television in this sense should not be seen as a genre, but as a mode of production. For McCarthy, the genre should be seen as the network's strategy to maximize revenues by bypassing major labor costs such as directors, actors and writers. Such criticism is consistent with the assessment that establishes correlation between the lack of originality from writers and producers with the popularity of this type of programming.

Matthew J. Smith and Andrew F. Wood, for example, argue against a formula that can become overly simplistic. For them, the genre involves deriving entertainment from the belief that the genre is unscripted and therefore one is watching ordinary people in their day to day activities. Thus, the perceived strength of the format is deceptive. A.J. Frutkin also criticizes the genre by stating that the popularity of reality television has to do with the changing tastes of a younger generation and the shortage of original ideas for scripted series.

The criticism from media scholars and many others has not stopped the rapid growth of the genre; in fact, the popularity of the genre has resulted in the formation of several subcategories within the format and a network. Some of the categories that make the genre are: gameshows, life, docu-soaps, dating, dramas, talk shows, hidden cameras and law enforcement (See Hill; Smith and Wood). **Gameshows** includes shows such as *Survivor* (CBS 2000) or the *Amazing Race* (CBS 2001), where participants compete for cash and other prizes; **life programming** (also referred as self improvement) involving house, garden, or personal makeovers such as *The Swan* (FOX 2004) or *What Not to Wear* (TLC 2003); **celebrity docu-soaps** (also referred as dramas) such as *The Osbournes* (MTV 2001), *Newlyweds* (MTV 2003), *Real World* (MTV 1992) and *An American Family* (PBS 1973); and reality **dating shows** such as *The Bachelor* (ABC 2002) and *Joe Millionaire* (FOX 2003) describe shows where participants choose suitors. Some experts include documentaries as a genre, law enforcement shows like *COPS* and the entire television network CSPAN.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy falls into what Hill classifies as lifestyle programming involving house, garden or makeovers because it combines makeovers with

self improvement (24). For Hill, this subdivision of the genre is characterized by the "learning opportunities" provided to the viewers. This idea that reality television provides learning opportunities is part of a larger contention that television provides information and serves as an aid in the learning process. For Hill, television provides multiple learning opportunities, and in the case of lifestyle programs, audiences can learn from advice given in the program (79). Hill's argument makes an interesting case for the analysis of *Queer Eye* from a political economy perspective. A political economic reading of television would agree with her contention that television serves as an education source. However, such analysis would focus on the process of learning the exchange value of commodities as opposed to being centered on the "practical tips" she describes. Hill goes even further to argue that *Queer Eye* belongs to a subdivision of the subcategory that she calls gay lifestyle programming (20).

For June Deery, the dynamics of reality television are particularly interesting because it recruits people who are willing to work for nothing or very little in the hopes for the chance to win a prize. Central to the format, she claims, is the idea that "everyone has their price" (Deery, *Advertainment 2*). Participants in this genre will do and submit themselves to almost anything, including exposing their lives and sacrificing their privacy for cash.

Most illuminating in Deery's discussion of reality television is her take on makeover shows. The author states that the goal of makeover shows is also to sell commodities. These programs encourage the desire to attain an ideal of physical beauty through the consumption of goods (*Trading 211*). The main premise behind makeover shows is that consumption is the route to self improvement. These shows engage in superficial physical changes and fail to explore the reasons why many feel they need to alter their appearance. Moreover, for Deery, the participants are presented through individual stories which inspire empathy and become case examples for services the target of the makeover could not afford.

Another important theme for the study of reality television has to do with the conceptions of reality. Many scholars have attempted to address the question, how factual is reality television? Certainly a discussion of reality could get very complicated as one attempts to understand the philosophical implications of the term. Thus, it is important to

clarify that this specific discussion of reality refers to the degree of involvement of the production staff during the production, or the degree of “ordinariness.”

Misha Kavka, in the article “Love’n the Real,” explains that the medium (television) complicates further the discussion of how factual is reality TV. Television, she explains, is a medium that both opens a space for exposure to images and ideas, but simultaneously has a goal of entertaining (the spectacle). The medium has a dual role, one as forum for entertainment and one as a window into the world. This duality gives the impression that reality television is unmediated. However, the programs in actuality are sites of ‘constructed unmediation’ that have been shaped by technological sources (e.g. *Big Brother*, *Survivor*) (Kavka, *Love’n* 95).

Randall L. Rose and Stacy L. Wood argue that despite the availability of programming based on non-fictional happenings (e.g. CSPAN or biographies), the ratings for reality TV increase under the premise of the “real.” However, Rose and Wood state that the difference between the two focus on how audiences interpret the content of the show. The authors explain that the viewers of the genre get their pleasure from the assumption that the characters are real people just like them. Thus, for many researchers the intersections between the real and the scripted are directly related to the ability of the viewers to live vicariously through the characters. For them, the premise of reality works under the assumption that the audience will be able to identify, empathize and live the experience as its own because, unlike actors, the main characters give the impression that they are average everyday people just like them.

Terry Toles Patkin suggests that reality television is more than inexpensive production, lack of creativity and big ratings, but a way of constructing both our individual and societal identities. The author argues that the identities of both the participant and the viewers are constructed, as reality TV gives us a false sense of intimacy. In the case of the audience, the construct is a result of a false sense of social interaction. For the participants, it occurs as part of the production, camera, editing and other production resources.

According to Mark Andrejevic, reality television is rooted in three main promises. First, the genre promotes the idea that audiences can go beyond the role of the spectator to become participants and in some occasions the main character. In this, Andrejevic

coincides with Rose and Wood by asserting that the accessibility of the genre is highly related to the viewer's ability to identify with the narrative elements of the show.

Second, for Andrejevic, the genre becomes very profitable because the structure of that type of program allows for submission to comprehensive surveillance, meaning that the participants of reality television are being paid to be watched, making being the subject of surveillance a form of work. The author describes this form of employment as the work of being watched. However, for the author, the work of being watched has different dimensions as it makes reference to the characters in the programs that sell access to their lives (a form of surveillance) and to the audiences that consume those messages through mass communication. It refers to both the participants and the audience as consumers of advertising. Andrejevic proposes that both being watched and watching television are forms of labor. For example, in *Queer Eye* the straight guy and the audiences are working for the network. The straight guy is working for them as he sells access to his lifestyle and is indoctrinated into new patterns of consumption; on the other hand, the audience labor is to process all the product placements and advertising messages and consequently generate advertising revenues for the network station.

A third promise of reality TV is the high return on investment. Andrejevic indicates that this type of program typically generates a lot of media buzz and opens the space for spin-offs and sequels. In the case of *Queer Eye*, the program incorporates product placements in five categories, and countless possibilities for endorsements. David Collins creator of the show was quoted for *Adweek* as he explains "The show is a balance between creative and organically integrated product placement" (Frutkin Spotlight, 36). Also, cross promotion opportunities have materialized in the form of books, DVDs, franchises, and a spin-off show, *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*.

Literature on Queer Eye

The literature on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* discusses major themes from the first three seasons of the show. The themes of discussion can be divided into four areas: 1) the role of the show in supporting the heterosexual romance; 2) the characters as facilitators of the capitalist economy; 3) the discussion over issues of representation of

gay men and queer; and 4) the relationship between an alleged failed masculinity and the constitution of a new one, the metrosexual.

Many scholars agree that the role of the five main characters is to reinforce heteronormativity (Allatson, Bateman, Gallagher). For Paul Allatson the program *Queer Eye* is a reflection of the economic and political environment in the United States. Allatson recognizes that the show uses sexuality to service the heterosexual and reproductive logics of capitalism. His argument is premised on his assertion that the show privileges the heterosexual couple and states that the producers use the homosexual male characters to turn the working class into middle class consumerists, to reaffirm compulsory heterosexuality, and to exclude lesbians by equating queer with white, upper class men.

Mark Gallagher also believe that the Fab Five's main goal is to work exclusively for the benefit of the straight subject. He explains that only periodic comments relate to the sexual attraction of the main characters, and no context or personal details are given. Gallagher believes that the exclusion of the main characters' sexuality in the plot of the show is evidence of an attempt to center the story on heterosexual romance.

Gallagher also comments on the relationship between consumerism and sexuality and states that heterosexual romance motivates transformation, but usually the women are invisible. Gallagher's idea of the invisibility in the show, for both the straight women and the gay men, is provocative and certainly an interesting angle of analysis; however, like many other themes in the current literature, it is not fully explored.

Misha Kavka in her examination of the show uses queer theory for her analysis of the relationship between queer and space (*Queering*). When used as a tool of analysis, queer theory can describe the appropriation of spaces, buildings or codes in cities. While many of the critics have been devoted to analyzing the characters in the show, Kavka proposes instead a queer reading of the use of space by the main characters in the program (*Queering*). She argues that there is something queer about having people play out their lives in public as it is an inversion of public-private space. For Kavka, visibility also plays an important role in this process. Her work is at odds with Gallagher and some of the other authors in that she contends that even when the program reinforces the

heterosexual couple, it is a space that has been appropriated for the display of public gay lives.

In contrast to Allatson, Kyra Pearson and Nina M. Reich argue that the program is a truly queer space because it challenges heteronormativity. For these authors, the show disrupts the order and characterization of gay as being perverse or a disease and characterizes heterosexuality as being the source of sickness. The authors cite examples of the show where the main characters use latex gloves when inspecting clothing and quote the characters commenting that the tablecloths cause cancer, someone could get SARS in that living space or that the couch gives crabs.

For Pearson and Reich, the argument that heterosexuality is the source of sickness is part of a larger contention that characterizes the show as an open space for a liberatory queer identity. The show opens the door to a queer sensibility by reworking everyday objects and practices. However, they also note that these queer possibilities are presented as gay male possibilities. Bateman notes that while the show makes traditional masculinity appear inept, it neglects to present gay relationship desires and therefore it does not go outside of the normative realm of representation of gay identity. Moreover, for Bateman *Queer Eye* is part of representation in TV that portrays sexless gay men.

Gallager also discusses the idea of a queer space but suggests that the program capitalizes on the fantasy that one is entering an otherwise inaccessible unfamiliar gay culture. In his discussion of the negotiation of spaces, he argues that the show does not represent a gay culture, but a high class and urban culture where gay straight relations work strictly in the form of consumerism. Similarly, Allatson suggests that the Fab Five are the sellers of the myth of American Dream. This notion is interesting in that the program is seen as a facilitator of the capitalist economy as the Fab Five instructs us in how to use commodities to move through social classes.

Dana Heller argues that the message of the show is that self realization, romance and success are only possible through a sophisticated process of acquisition. The greater narrative of the program points out that our shortcomings are not a result of who we are, but rather are a result of what we have or how and where we shop. However, Heller also states that even when the show presents queer caricatures of gay white men that live in isolation on pottery barn (349), there are also some positive contributions in the realm of

representation. For the author, the show presents non-violent and mutually respectful cooperative relationships between open homosexuals and heterosexual men. Whether it is described as a liberatory queer experience, or as a window into a social class, an important part of the discussion on *Queer Eye* centers around the issue of gay visibility on television.

Michaela D. E. Meyer and Jennifer M. Kelley address issues of visibility in their critique of the popular culture show. They claim that although *Queer Eye* brings some visibility to gay men and challenges the position of heterosexual men as superior in knowledge, it also contains some dangerous representations. First, Meyer and Kelly argue that representing queer as gay identity further perpetuates the androcentric understanding of queer in the media. Second, the authors state that the show depicts a stereotypical appropriation of feminine desire by gay men and capitalizes on a particular performance of gay identity that is the most evident in the character of Carson.

For Meyer and Kelley the narrative of the show is constructed, so that Carson, the flamboyant and witty gay man, becomes the authentic representation of queer identity for the public. In addition, the authors argue that the show perpetuates a racialized discourse of queer identity that is evident in the narrative of the character of Jai. The authors contend that while Carson gets more airtime, the contributions and airtime of Jai are minimal.

Similarly, Jose Esteban Muñoz critiques the use of the term queer and states that when the term fails to include race or class, it loses its activist and theoretical strengths. Jaap Kooijman also discusses the issue of the use of the term queer and states that in the show “queer is nothing more than a fashionable accessory” (107). Toby Miller goes even further when he argues that queer is defined in the show as a fun commodity that can be adopted without sex. It is used to mean professionalization, good fashion and personal and professional achievement. The program uses the male body as the new commodity that comes to the market to address the needs of a new demographic. *Queer Eye* is for Miller a market response to the growing interest to target men to consume anti-aging and beauty treatments.

Gallager undertakes a critical study of the negotiation of spaces and tone on the show. The author comments that the program has a utopian or celebratory tone. He states

that the show seems to be placed within a perpetual weekend where participants don't need to work and all the discussions are in the realms of domesticity and romance. In *Queer Eye* the stress, competition and economic relations of the working world are nonexistent and Manhattan is a space for dining and shopping, stripped from work or crime.

Similarly Liz Morrish and Katherine O'Mara also argue that the program brings more visibility for gay males without challenging masculinity or heterosexuality. For the authors, the show characterizes the gay male identity with fashion and says that the 'gay way is couture'.

Michele E. Ramsey and Gladys Santiago state that in the program, gay men are represented as feminine for three main reasons: "the neutralization of homosexuality, the choice of men to be made over, and the focus on Carson as the program's primary source of humor" (353). The authors argue that the program neutralizes homosexuality by focusing on the heterosexual couples, representing the Fab five as fairy godmothers and ignoring the sexuality of homosexuals. Second, according to their study, the five main characters seem more feminine in comparison to the very masculine straight characters.

They further argue that consistent with scholarship on gay characters, the Fab Five serve as measures of comparison for normal masculinity. The authors state that there are two ways on which the Fab Five seem more feminine than the straight characters: professions and body frame. While the Fab Five have professions that are commonly associated to femininity, Ramsey and Santiago state that the straight guys have more traditionally masculine jobs (e.g., police officers). Also, they argue that the straight men seem to be physically stronger and taller, consequently more masculine than the Fab. This last point brings us to the discussion of masculinity and the role of the program in challenging the hegemonic masculinity.

Sasha Torres frames her argument within a broader discussion on the representation of masculinity. The author argues that in a way, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* shows that straightness means incompetence. She contends that it takes men to teach men because fathers are failing to teach anything useful to their sons. For Torres, having gay men teach masculinity is part of a larger debate that signals the inefficacy of the heterosexual family.

Ramsey and Santiago also discuss the idea of the metrosexual within the context of the show. Metrosexual as described in their research refers to men that are concerned with the body image in a way that would be usually associated with gay men. Mark Simpson, the man that coined the term, describes it as an advertising phenomenon: a well-dressed narcissistic heterosexual man admired by both men and women. In short it is a name to describe the commercial editing of hegemonic masculinity; an economically motivated redefinition of masculinity that incorporates an expansion of consumer products without challenging heteronormativity. Toby Miller, comments “The metrosexual is said to endorse equal opportunity vanity through cosmetics, softness, hair care products, wine bars, gyms, designer fashion, wealth, the culture industries, finance, cities, cosmetic surgery, David Beckham, and deodorants” (112).

In the show the image of the metrosexual is the source of entertainment for America. Beth Berila and Devika Ditya Choudhuri state that the object of the show is to turn heterosexual men into metrosexuals. Moreover the authors explain that during the makeover the Fab 5 “create the epitome of the metrosexual, the sensitive straight man who is confident enough to demonstrate some “gay elements” (whatever that means) and, not accidentally, coopt those “gay” elements to work in the service of heteronormativity” (8). However, authors like Ramsey and Santiago find the use of the term problematic for the LGBTQ community.

For Ramsey and Santiago, the use of this new cultural category has some important effects on issues of identity for the gay community. Ramsey and Santiago state that the program helps reaffirm the public opinions of sexuality by categorizing homosexuality as a “‘lifestyle’ rather than a legitimate and ‘normal’ sexual orientation” thereby reinstating common stereotypes and homophobia (354).

Interestingly Jaap Kooijman’s research indicates that in September of 2003 there was an ad for the male dating site mygaydar.com that was quickly removed from the lineup. The author states that in the show there is no place for gay targeted advertising, he further explains that NBC removed the ad that featured two white men flirting with each other because they considered the content inappropriate. David Collins in an interview with *Adweek* explains that the show was not about homosexuality but about guiding audience’s purchases “*Queer Eye* doesn't connote sexuality, but instead the idea of being

unique, different and extraordinary. Also, it's fun and fast-paced, and you get real tips and solid information” (Frutkin, Spotlight).

Discussion

Most of the research regarding *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* conducts a critical analysis of the show and centers around issues of representation of homosexuality and the use of different patterns of consumption to regulate social relations (e.g. heterosexuals and homosexuals, men and women, and characters and the audience). As explained in chapter one, the goal of this study is to conduct a close reading of the show by incorporating different areas of analysis to better understand the links between the representations of queer culture and the commercial interests of the networks. One of the major contributions of the show is that it showcases five openly gay personalities representing five leading gay characters. *Queer Eye* provides Americans with images of gay and straight men in harmonious nonviolent interaction. However, the Fab Five are still part of a tradition of equating male homosexuality to the image of the sissy.

I contend that there are two main gaps in the literature, one related to the methodology and another related to the themes being studied. In terms of the methodology and tools used for the study of the show, the literature on *Queer Eye* shows very little references to the episodes or the dialogue between the characters. Most frequently, the authors make a critique of the general themes presented on the shows in the first three seasons, but don't go into detail in their analysis. Also, none of the articles comment on the promotional materials such as DVDs and books or address the changes after the third season.

In the articles, the authors reviewed themes such as: the relationship between the show and the process of acquisitions, issues of gay visibility and stereotypical representations, the meaning of queer in the show and the themes of domesticity and romance. But the articles fail to contextualize the show within the larger dialogue on reality television. None of the studies look at the relationship between the show and its sponsors or conduct a detailed political economic study of the relationship between the systems of financing of the show and issues of representation and gay visibility. Finally the literature does not account for the effects of the show on our culture.

Critical theorists have done little to dismantle or suggest strategies to place *Queer Eye* within the broader political project of queer studies, LGBTQ activism, or even examine the reaction of popular culture to the show. Thus, my investigation uses queer theory and political economy to address some of the gaps in the study of this popular culture show. My study conducts a close reading of the episodes and the dialogue between the characters; additionally, some insight is drawn from DVDs and books.

The current literature on *Queer Eye* serves as a good starting point for the study of the show. The literature on reality television is instrumental in understanding the importance of the promotional elements and the financing aspects on the success and production of the show. One can infer that an important aspect in the production of the show is its close relationship to the sponsors in the five categories of the makeover. Consistent with the literature on reality television, *Queer Eye* proposes an incredibly profitable formula for the network and the producers as it is able to incorporate its advertisers and product extensions such as DVDs and books to the plot of the story. Utilizing insights from reality television scholars, I conduct a closer examination of the discursive and representational themes throughout the first four seasons of the show. The next chapter covers in detail the methodological framework for this study and the constitution and limitations of the sample.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Stephan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter explain that a method is the pathway that facilitates research by connecting observations to theoretical assumptions (6). This study is geared toward a deeper understanding of how sexuality is represented and commodified in television. This research focuses on the case of *Queer Eye*, a reality television show that revolutionized the way marketers and producers merged story lines to attract audiences and build consumers. In this chapter, I describe the methods to be employed and the rationale for these methods.

This study's theoretical framework brings together concepts of different areas of inquiry such as political economy, cultural studies and queer theory while using a critical discourse analysis for the examination of the television program *Queer Eye*. Although there have been some debates among cultural studies and political economy scholars (see Grossberg, Garnham) that address fundamental differences between the two, academics in both areas have developed models that incorporate both areas of inquiry in their analysis of popular culture (see du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus, Mosco). For example, Douglas Kellner proposes a comprehensive model of studying popular culture that considers production, textual analysis and audience reception, while integrating considerations of race and gender as categories of social analysis.

Like Kellner, Julie D'Acci proposes a method for the study of popular culture that incorporates different areas of inquiry. D'Acci is specifically interested in an approach that can bring together these areas while also exploring the interrelation between gender and television. D'Acci's model is concerned with the elements of production, programming and reception but she adds to that the social and historical context. Thus, her model is more appropriate for this study.

This chapter is a brief outline of D'Acci's model whose interdisciplinary approach most parallels my own interests. In the next pages, I explain the four elements in the model and its utility to the study of *Queer Eye*. Second, the advantages of using discourse analysis are explored. Third, I discuss the episode selection. The television

series *Queer Eye* has been divided into two groups, based on a name change that occurred after the second season and that affected the content of the show. Thus, this chapter ends with a justification of the sampling. In sum, the following section gives insight into the framework used for the study of *Queer Eye*.

Model

This manuscript uses a critical approach toward deconstructing the negotiation and representation of sexual identity in the television show *Queer Eye*. D'Acci explains that there are four areas to the study of gender and television: production, reception, programming and the social historical context.

There are two dimensions to the production aspect: structure and production. In this study, *structure* is understood as the study of the political economy of media and gender as it refers to the way in which corporate capitalist interests influence the representation of gender. It also includes the way in which the television industry constructs audiences and defines target segments, and consequently creates programming for those groups. Hence, political economy offers the theoretical foundation to study the *production* aspects of *Queer Eye* and to establish a relationship between advertising and the goals of the show.

Reception refers to a comprehensive analysis of audience members, the different factors involved in viewing television and the pleasure and/or meaning people derive from the act of watching. While all four elements of the model are equally valuable and important, reception will have only a limited role in this analysis, but I hope to take on a more thorough analysis of the responses of audiences in a future study.

D'Acci refers to programming as the study of gender in television by debunking images and the way gender is represented. Moreover, it is a way of looking at the visual and verbal language and the negotiation of gender in the screen. Critical discourse looks at the use of language (spoken and written) as a form of social practice. A critical discourse analysis informed by queer theory will be used to deconstruct the popular culture text.

Finally the social/historical context locates events within the history of representation. Queer theory examines the discourse of sexuality by situating it in a

historical context. This area is helpful in order to understand the general narratives of gender and identify the ways in which each piece contributes to notions of gender in society. Thus, a social and historical context will be reviewed when looking at the representation of sexuality on American media.

Discourse Analysis

To examine the research questions, a close reading of the popular culture television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is necessary. Stella Proctor, Ioanna Papasolomou-Doukakis and Tony Proctor argue that discourse both represents and constructs the world, identities and beliefs. Furthermore, Richard Elliott argues that there are two main assumptions when doing discourse analysis. First, language is a medium oriented towards action and function, and second, the world is intentionally constructed by society through the use of language. Because the main concerns in this paper are the normative characterizations that lead to the commodification of sexuality, discourse analysis is a useful tool for the examination of this phenomenon.

Discourse Analysis is a type of textual analysis. John Hartley explains that textual analysis originated in Humanities, and has been criticized by social scientists for not using “scientific” methods of investigation that rely on quantitative generalisable findings. Hartley summarizes the criticisms of textual analysis in three main categories. First, he explains that many researchers using the approach project their own prejudices into the texts. Second, analysts are criticized for celebrating commercial interests as manifested in popular culture. Third, textual analysis (more specifically semiotics, structural analysis) is criticized for being out of context (Hartley). Nonetheless, some of the advantages of conducting textual analysis are that: it allows practitioners to examine issues of subjectivity, culture, power, identity, conflict in the non-canonical context and it can serve as a base for the encouragement and stimulation of media literacy.

One specific type of textual analysis, discourse analysis, has been described as the study of the relationship between texts and social practices (Potter; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter). Linda A. Wood and Rolf O. Kroger explain that discourse analysis goes beyond a structural analysis and incorporates the importance of looking at

interrelationships between the texts and its cultural and historical context². Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter further explain that discourse should be understood as part of the act of communication. Thus, the text becomes a space that opens and inscribes itself within a multiplicity of readings and levels of interpretation, as the situational context in which language is produced causes a struggle between creating and subverting meaning.

While discourse analysis as a method is useful to understand contexts in which the text was created, critical discourse more accurately describes the ways in which social problems affect the creation of discourse. Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter explain that as a theoretical framework, critical discourse analysis is a result of the merge of critical linguistics and critical theory. Additionally, they argue that it has been influenced by critical theorist such as Gramsci, The Frankfurt School, Althusser, Bakhtin and Michel Foucault, concerned with the interpretation of texts, expressions, and conceptions of knowledge in relation to life. They also recognize that the emergence of this critical perspective is a result of the belief that there is a strong relationship between discourse and social meanings.

Critical discourse analysis is concerned with social problems and relations as they relate to power. Ruth Wodak, in *Disorders of Discourse*, describes the principles of critical discourse analysis and asserts that it addresses social problems, that it is interdisciplinary, and that it attempts to explain that power relations are exercised and negotiated through discourse and it constitutes and is constituted by society and ideology. Moreover, Wodak describes it as a form of political action that cannot be studied without taking into consideration context. However, it is important to note that the term critical discourse does not describe a homogeneous method. Instead it should be seen as an interpretative resource.

For example, Michel Foucault goes beyond structural analysis to conduct historical research. Wood and Kroger explain that Foucault's work is characterized by an overall rejection of the notion that knowledge is a reflection of the essence of things. Instead of focusing on the real meaning of things, Foucault proposes that one must study the emergence, degrees of rationalization and conceptual codes of discourse; the

² This way of looking at text, addresses the third criticism explained by Hartley that claims that textual analysis fails to consider context.

authorities of delimitation or institutions that legitimize, and influence public opinion (the law, the government); and the framework used to classify discourse (*Archeology*).

Critical discourse analysis allows one to question the discursive construction of sexuality and its effect on social structures and ideology. Foucault's contributions as applied to queer theory have interrogated the relationship between discourse, power and the construction of sexuality as an identity marker. In the realm of ideology, this method is valuable to address how capitalism uses discourse for the formation of a collective will.

Episode Selection

This study examines a random sample of episodes of the first four seasons of *Queer Eye*. A total of 90 episodes were aired during the first four seasons of *Queer Eye*. The show was initially titled *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. At the start of the third season the title was shortened to *Queer Eye*. This change marked an important move in the program as it affected the content of the show and the types of makeover they performed. The later episodes became more focused on making emotional appeals by using emotive stories (e.g. the story of a recovering cancer patient, a soldier being deployed to Iraq) and by eliminating the criteria of "For the Straight Guy," the Fab started giving makeovers to gay men and even a transsexual. Since the name change marks an important move in the goal and marketing of the show the sampling was divided into two groups: before and after the change. Seven episodes were analyzed for seasons one and two, and seven episodes for seasons three and four, a total of 14 episodes of *Queer Eye*. All but Episode 218 Jeff and Episode 302 Miles were randomly selected. These two episodes were specifically selected because the makeovers reflected the departure from the "Straight Guy" premise.

The materials were recorded between 2003 and 2006 from a broadcasting network in a medium-sized capital city in the Southeast USA. The date of the recording is important because a significant part of the analysis will look at the national ads placed during the show as the airtime and season of the year will affect the type of commercials aired and recorded.

Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter remind us that the structural elements of a conversation alone do not accurately represent the scope of a conversation and context is

indeed important (113). Thus, context, movement, costumes, the power dynamics that affect discourse and the interactional asymmetries among characters were noted. The episodes were recorded and relevant dialogue and nonverbal remarks were subsequently transcribed.

The transcriptions were categorized into themes. A list of questions was drafted to guide the coding process. The three major areas addressed in the coding included the representation of gender and sexuality in the text, the show's relationship with brands and products, and the specific themes and objectives guiding each episode. Research questions were refined during the process of data collection in order to establish connections between the text (the 14 episodes) and theoretical and conceptual implications:

- What is the Fab Five's particular objective for this character?
- What are the unstated themes of the episode?
- What types of products are used during the program? And how are they associated to an improvement in the character's life?
- How is queer represented in the episode?
- What type of comments do the main characters make in regard to consumption?
- What type of comments do the Fab Five make about their own sexuality?
- What types of brands are included in the product placements?
- What product categories and brands advertise on the episode?
- How are femininity and masculinity represented?

Each of the questions addressed some of the particular interests of the analysis. Finally, even though the 14 episodes are the primary texts, relevant insights from the DVD, website and books are incorporated into the analysis.

Discussion

In this chapter I describe the way I adapted D'Acci's methodology for the use in this study. I also argue for a critical discourse analysis of the popular culture show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Critical discourse looks at the use of language (spoken and written) as a form of social practice. This study's textual examination of the reality

television program *Queer Eye* employs an eclectic theoretical perspective that brings together concepts from gender studies and political economy.

D'acci model was chosen so that the many of the intricacies of *Queer Eye* could be uncovered, as the model suggests that the construction of gender is the result of the interweaving of production elements, representation, social and historical context and reception. Thus, the importance of looking at cultural texts from multiple angles. The production elements of the case in hand are explored by conducting a political economic analysis of *Queer Eye*, the production company and Bravo. The elements of representation are examined by conducting a critical discourse analysis of the text. Queer theory is used in the manuscript to examine the representation of sexuality in the show and its historical significance. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that informs the method.

CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As discussed in the second chapter, one of the main criticisms of *Queer Eye* is the troublesome relationship it establishes between sexuality and the process of acquisition. Much like conventional advertising, the content of the popular culture show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* provides audiences information about products and showcases a lifestyle associated with their consumption. Hence the television show capitalizes on the representation of queer and also makes it a product available for consumption. Moreover, through the show the identity of the characters becomes a commodity available for consumption.

This chapter discusses the two main traditions that inform the analysis. To better understand the case at hand, this section takes an in-depth look at the theoretical lenses that inform my reading of the television show *Queer Eye*. The first section covers general concepts of political economy, followed by an analysis of the advantages of using political economy for the study of the show. The second section discusses queer theory and addresses queer theory's contributions to the study of the television show. This theoretical framework helps setup an analysis of the commodification of queer and its implications for the queer project. In the concluding remarks, I attempt to make an argument for the utility of both traditions in the exploration of the show.

Political Economy

For Vincent Mosco, political economy can be understood as “the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources” (25). Gerald Sussman states that political economy asks how the means of accumulating material goods (wealth) is related to political practices (power) and the social structures. An important characteristic of political economy as a discipline is that it historicizes and politicizes social change within

the context of economics. In sum, political economy looks at the relationships among power, wealth and knowledge.

In relation to communication, political economists look at the central role of the media in the circulation of commodities, consumerism. Additionally, it looks at the way ideology achieves materiality through media. Mosco states that the political economy of communication looks at forces within the realm of capitalism, trade and the division of labor, that contribute to the formation and structure of channels of communication. Also, practitioners examine issues related to the production and distribution of media products as it relates to economic interests, and the transformation of media structure as a result of commercial interests and deregulation. Robert McChesney describes it best in *Making a Molehill*, “the political economy of communication looks specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g., advertising), and government policies establish media systems and communication technologies and (directly and indirectly) influence media behavior and content” (43)

Central to the discussion of political economy is an understanding of the primary goals of capitalism. According to Campbell R. McConnell capitalism is characterized by "private property, freedom of enterprise and choice, self interest as the dominant motive, competition, reliance upon the price system and a limited role of the government" (41). Moreover, McConnell explains that in contrast American capitalism is dominated by oligopolies and imperfect competition. He notes that while American capitalism has provided its citizenry a high standard of living and individual freedom, it is also unstable and has experienced a growth of monopoly power. The Market Economy is characterized by the disparity in the distribution of wealth and power. Wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of those who own the means of production and the producers strive to maximize profits while minimizing costs. But what is the relationship between capitalism and media industries? Moreover, why do political economists study the interrelationships between the two?

It is important to study the relationship between the two to understand the role of the media in consolidating power and to address the function of advertising in promoting the ideology and values of capitalism. McChesney explains that the role of critical scholarship is to examine the way power works and therefore critical scholarship is in

constant antagonism to capitalism (Molehill, 46). To understand the serious critique of the use of commercial interests to affect media content, I explore the relationship between media and power, the goals and effects of advertising and the role of corporate synergy. Let's first consider the role of the media in reproducing structures of power.

The Role of Media in Reproducing Structures of Power

Much scholarship has been devoted to the study of the role of the media in consolidating power and thereby affecting the economic system. The media have the power to affect values, ideas, and the political discourse. Matthew P. McAllister explains that media industries are important because of their contributions to the national economy and their potential contributions to democracy. This latter role is vital because a functioning democracy depends on the people being informed: people must be able to understand the messages, afford to use the media and have geographic access to the technology. McAllister also explains that diversity in content is also important, as competing ideas in the media are vital to an informed decision making process. However, such descriptions are far from the reality of the current media market in the United States. Instead, the logic of capitalism encourages concentration and depends upon policies that allow such consolidation to occur.

The media contributes to the notion that people must support the ruling class and the structures of power. Sut Jhally, in "The Political Economy of Culture," explains that one role of the media is to ensure the reproduction of the system by producing a form of consciousness that makes people believe that it is in their best interest to support those in power (Jhally, *Culture* 68). Those with the control of the media outlets can create and distribute messages that support the ideological apparatus and economic system that keeps them in a privileged position. He further explains that the special interests of those in power are reflected in the type and content of messages that are sent through the media.

An important aspect of the concentration of power, is the consolidation of media outlets into conglomerates. More specifically, looking at conglomeration gives insight into the economic aspects of ownership and its effects on the content and structure of media. William Kunz explains that being critical of media ownership is important as the

economic pursuits of corporations to maximize profits affect the creation, content and distribution of cultural products. Thus, let's examine these three aspects in detail.

Ben H. Bagdikian's work has dealt extensively with the topic of corporate consolidation. In his book, *The New Media Monopoly*, he contends that the media landscape is composed of five media conglomerates (Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Viacom and Bertelsmann) that have control over most newspapers, radio stations, book publishers, motion picture studios, television stations, cable networks and magazines. However, since the publication of the book, a new major player has emerged with General Electric's (owner of NBC) acquisition of Universal in 2003.

These corporations have been able to influence public policy and gain control of the market. The American government has willingly surrendered most outlets of mass communication under the rationale that consolidation is necessary to ensure competition in a capitalist system. Here the idea is that concentration is needed in order to be competitive in an international market.

The media landscape affects the creation and distribution of cultural products; formats that have been proven to be profitable are replicated and reproduced in the forms of sequels and spin-offs (Meehan *Why TV*). Content that is critical of the establishment or those in power is avoided (McChesney *The Problem*). Also, big media companies shy away from controversial or strong content that can negatively affect audiences and ratings and consequently revenues --advertising dollars (Bagdikian). Conglomeration is used to push internal promotion efforts to ensure the success of their intellectual properties (e.g. the 2007 Universal Pictures film *American Gangster* directed by Ridley Scott was promoted on the NBC television network, it was reviewed by Gene Shalits for NBC's morning show *Today*, and the actors Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe were interviewed by Matt Lauer for NBC's news program, *Dateline*, reviews of the film were printed on MSNBC webpage, its soundtrack played on the radio stations). In the last decade such cross promotional strategies have become a common practice. Finally, and arguably most important, when corporate interest controls the diffusion of information, corporations can potentially affect public policy, public perceptions and the overall political agenda for their own benefit.

The content of media is also important because of the effects it has on audiences. Eileen Meehan writes, “the television industry has no market in which viewers exert demand by directly telling programmers what they like or dislike” (*Why TV* 27). Television plays a vital role in the diffusion and constitution of the cultural discourse yet as mentioned earlier, the economic aspects of production play an important part on the storylines that are produced and the scripts that are supported. Advertising dollars determine plotlines because media content is designed to respond to the demands of advertisers. Representation is dominated by shows that rearticulate successful narratives and present limited portrayals that misrepresent our rich and complex society. Thus, the content of the media is of great concern and becomes an important area of analysis.

Ultimately, the problem lies in the disparity between the way the media have been conceptualized and their actual function. McChesney explains, “the idea that the market is the best and most rational manner to regulate affairs is the philosophical justification for the wave of deregulation, privatization, and commercialization that has swept U.S. and global media and communication systems” (45). When the commercial pursuit of maximizing profits is the main goal of a media outlet or corporation, its role in a democratic society is compromised.

The Goals and Effects of Advertising

A second area of influence refers to the relationship between the media and its financing structure or advertising. However, to better understand the impact of commercial messages in promoting capitalism, it is important to review the primary goals of advertising. Advertising has been defined as “the provision of messages or information about any aspect of commodities, services, or human activities,” and “commercial activity associated with the sale of products and services within economic markets” (Ekelund and Saurman 3). Jhally describes it as “discourse through and about objects” (*Codes* 1). Moreover, he states that it is the most influential institution of socialization because it structures media content, plays an important role in the construction of gender, mediates the relations among family members, serves as a conversation topic and aids in the creation of needs, politics, public policy, regulation, and cultural institutions.

As explained by McChesney, the emergence of advertising coincides with the rise of the industrialized economy (*The Problem* 140). Stuart Ewen, in *Captains of*

Consciousness, looks at the importance of mass consumption and advertising in relation to the emergence of American industrial culture by historically tracing the impact and implications of such changes (3). The author looks at the role of advertising in the process of educating consumers into new patterns of consumption. Ewen states, “Advertising would play into the frustrations of consumers and offered them mass produced visions of individualism or happiness and would put that to work in the same name of that society” (45). He argues that advertising industry suggests that business success, job insurance and self fulfillment can be achieved through consumption.

Robert McChesney explains that corporate interests affect media content in various ways. First, corporations are constantly looking to maximize revenues by increasing exposure to their messages. For example, a high percentage of media and news coverage is produced by public relations professionals whose work is to generate messages that meet the commercial interest of their employers. News outlets publish it because corporations provide this material free of charge, thus saving time and resources for the news programs. The result, audiences have less access to news stories that present neutral or critical messages. Second, media conglomerates and joint ventures among these conglomerates affect content as they use cross promotion strategies and synergy to promote their interrelated events and programming. Media content in these cases serve as promotional agents for those products. Third, media content affects the debates over policy, and the views represented favor those with economic interest in the area. Thus, the content focuses on the views of the political and business elite.

Much like McChesney, McAllister argues that the media behave like all other businesses: their goal is to be profitable and therefore advertisers, the primary source of revenue of media outlets, have the most control over content. The dynamics of the media, and more specifically television, are then to serve their primary client, advertisers, and provide them outlets to reach the greatest number of people. Producers in turn generate profits and audiences by replicating formats and formulas that have proven effective. Because advertising is the primary funding system for television, producers ensure that content meets the needs of marketers.³

³ This last point is important and particularly relevant to discussion on the representation of gays and lesbians in television. Advertisers are only interested in programs that will attract the highest number of

Tibor Scitovsky explains that it is in the best interest of producers to have uninformed consumers. The consequences of uninformed markets, according to Scitovsky, are reflected in the lack of variety of products, lack of information about products, and the elimination of price competition. For him, when consumers are lacking in knowledge about the products they consume, they tend to depend on advertisers to be the main or only experts in an area and the information shared is very limited. Then consumers are relegated to make superficial choices (style, size, or color) instead of being critical of the products they consume. He further explains that sellers benefit from such practices because then they can sell an image associated with the products and those perceptions become the differences among products that otherwise would be very much alike. Moreover, he argues that price is often used as an index of value or quality. Using price as a basis to determine quality supports the system of uninformed consumers.

Similarly, McChesney explains that advertising is essential for building distinctions among products, for building brand loyalty (*Problem 142*). He explains that the role of advertising is to establish a brand's distinctiveness and create an image where there are no real distinctions in terms of function or price. He further argues that "Advertising sells the idea that purchasing a product or service can solve a problem, sometimes one only loosely related to the actual product" (McChesney, *Problem 142*). Advertising is of great importance as an ideological and cultural force. Its basis is to convince people that there is something wrong with them and they can only solve their problems through consumption. As Jhally explains, advertising talks to us as individuals and tells us that we can be happier through the purchase of goods and services. However, research shows that what makes people happy are the "social" as opposed to "material" goods, and commodities are only weakly related to these sources of satisfaction.

Interestingly, the market society is guided by the principle that satisfaction should be achieved via the marketplace. Jhally notes that if goods are not the locus of happiness, then advertising must promote images that the audience can conceive as the "good life." For him, the consequence of using advertising messages to provoke affective responses is

people without alienating the public. When gays and lesbians are represented in television, many advertisers pull out their marketing money in fear that getting associated to shows that can be in any way controversial will damage the perception of their brand.

that given that symbols (the ads) and not goods are the source of satisfaction, happiness may seem illusory.

In sum, for Jhally advertising plays an important role in the creation of the symbolic meaning for goods and the relationship between the object and the uses of that object. The differences between the real value and the exchange value are created and mediated by advertising, and that process affects media content and the responses of audiences to the media. This is of great importance to the study of popular culture and *Queer Eye*. For the author, advertising affects the types of representations and images in the media, but also the meaning of the watching activity as it relates to labor.

In his groundbreaking essay, *Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism*, Dallas W. Smythe argues that all non-sleeping time is work time because even leisure time is time sold to advertisers devoted to the production of commodities (3). For Smythe, the activities of mass media and related institutions (advertising, public relations, market research and products) are related to consumer consciousness, needs, leisure, commodity fetishism, work and alienation as they affect the process of valorizing commodities (1).

For Smythe, the “blindspot” of many Marxists is to think that the commodity form of mass produced communications is messages, information, images, meaning, orientation, education, manipulation, news or entertainment. Instead he argues that the commodity of such industries is the “audience.” For him mass media is composed of a mix of traditional advertising messages (ads between segments) and disguised forms of advertising (content that promotes goods, product placements, endorsements). Audiences serve two purposes: they perform marketing functions for the producers and work for the production and reproduction of labor (3). They perform marketing functions as the demographics of an audience is used to attract advertisers to media outlets. It is related to the production of labor as the act of watching becomes essential in order to generate profits for the networks. In the case of *Queer Eye* the marketing efforts of the producers are the content of the show, thus the subtle distinctions between hidden and direct forms of advertising are completely erased.

The Role of Corporate Synergy

Eileen Meehan provides an important lens of analysis for the study of the media industry. Meehan uses the term corporate synergy to refer to the opportunities for crosspromotion that companies create to maximize the return on their intellectual properties, while reducing the cost and risk involving the creation of new materials. Meehan refers to corporate synergy as a form of exploitation of the “transindustrial structure” of media outlets, in that conglomeration facilitates the promotion of programs and consequently the maximization of revenues.

McAllister describes synergy as a form of multilevel commercials used by media conglomerates to promote their products. For example when promoting a new film, media conglomerates can use all of their resources (such as television, radio, cable, print, recreation parks, etc.) to create commercials for that film while simultaneously promoting other properties or business partners for the movie. Synergy then refers to the cooperative interaction among media messages to link all media properties, brands, products so that they are all promoting each other.

Meehan describes six important aspects that characterize this corporate practice: spin-offs, recirculation, repackaging, reversioning, recycling and redeployment. Spin-offs are new programs modeled after successful shows. Recirculation occurs when the media outlet airs special marathons or shortened versions after the original airing. Repackaging occurs when the original shows become available for purchase, often with none or minor changes to the original product. Recycling refers to the artificial creation of new chapters by adding clips from old programs. Redeployment occurs when media outlets use old characters or the narrative structures and the themes of one product to develop new programs. The combination of all of these crossreferences create a series of interconnected messages or intertext.

Meehan illustrates that these synergistic practices pose many advantages for media conglomerates. Synergy offers conglomerates “the ability to exploit each intellectual property as fully as possible, for as long as possible, through as many operations as possible” (*Why TV* 110). Synergy helps the reduce costs associated with creating original programming. According to Meehan, recirculation, airing the same

episode multiple times also ensures every episode has multiple opportunities to generate revenues from advertisers, and helps promote additions to the product line (e.g. DVDs).

However, Meehan also explains that synergistic practices help conglomerates keep control of the media by saturating the market with multiple branded products. Meehan explains “the saturation of multiple markets with branded products means less air time, cable time, shelf space, and the like for nonbranded products” (*Why TV* 111). Thus conglomerates can use their resources to control the market and eliminate competitors that don’t have the support of a conglomerate.

Moreover, saturation also helps reduce the economic risks associated with the production of programming. This excessive branding of media products also negatively affects creativity because conglomerates will reproduce successful formulas (e.g. genres, plots, narratives) rather than invest in new formats. While smaller companies will take economic risks and invest in productions that take more creative risks, conglomerates are able to reproduce successful formats and use their resources to promote them.

Advantages of Using Political Economy for the Analysis of the Show

David Collins expressed that the objective of the show *Queer Eye* was not to showcase homosexuality but to build alliances between products they (the production company) truly believe in and consumers. Thus, the program was meant to serve as guide to materialism, as consumption is naturalized and represented as an essential part of one’s identity. In the case of term queer, the market appropriated the political, academic and popular sense of the word to underscore a particular form of consumption. In this study, political economy is applied in four important ways: to better understand the structural elements of production, to discuss the cross promotional strategies and importance of the commercial intertext, to understand the representation of consumption, and to highlight the role of product placements on the show.

First, a political economic analysis of the show is useful to address the importance of ownership in production, distribution, content, and representation. I undertake a critical examination of the impact of media mergers and conglomerates on Bravo and consequently the show *Queer Eye*. Robert McChesney’s work deals extensively with the consequences of media mergers and a commercial media that leaves our information channels in the hands of commercial interests. His work is useful when exploring the

implications of this specific case, the effects mergers among General Electric, Co., NBC, NBC Universal and Bravo Television have on the production and content of *Queer Eye*. Thus, this section explores why ownership matters.

Second, an important area of analysis deals with issues of cross promotion and commercial intertext. In this area, I examine the commercial opportunities that resulted from the success of the show. Here the results of the negotiations between production companies and its effects on profits, franchises, contract renegotiations and promotional items like books, t-shirts, ring tones, podcasts, iTunes episodes, DVDs, spin-offs, among others are discussed. This section of the analysis also addresses the deals for product endorsement between brands and the main characters of the show to examine the impact of the cross promotion efforts on the show.

McChesney, in his book *The Problem of the Media* maintains that advertising conveys that problems are solved through consumption. The third area of analysis uses political economy to explore the representation of consumerism and materialism in the show. More specifically, the negative impacts of materialism are addressed in this section. The pedagogical aspects of advertising and *Queer Eye* are also discussed. I draw on the literature to argue that product placements are used in the program to create new needs for services, a practice that has resulted in the over consumption of goods.

Also, a political economic framework informs the discussion of media content and makeover shows by examining the relation between the sponsors of the show and the products that are showcased on the program. Sussman states that even though television was created and popularized in the 20th century, it has quickly become the most effective promotional and ideological instrument of capital. For the author, television serves as a utility in the circulation of commodities. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* showcases a variety of goods in different product categories; moreover, there are a variety of product placements on a weekly basis on the show and links to those products on the show's website. This final area of analysis looks at the impact of product placements on the content of the show. This particular aspect, distinguishes the show from similar programs, and makes *Queer Eye* an important text to study. While other shows incorporate some product placements in their content, *Queer Eye* is able to include products in all aspects of the participant's life, thus using a variety of products categories

to create an identity and a lifestyle. A critique of the role of advertising in the show is significant as it documents the close interdependent relationship between corporate interests and content.

As explained by McChesney, political economy informs critical scholarship by interrogating the impact capitalism and neoliberalism have on the media (*Molehill*). Thus, political economy is important to understand the economic and structural elements that affect the representation of sexuality. The next section addresses the theoretical framework that informs the analysis of the construction and negotiation of gender and sexuality.

Queer Theory

There is an ongoing debate regarding the causes of homosexuality; some argue that it is nature (essentialist thought), while others say is nurture (constructionist) (Eliason). While the essentialists assume that sexuality is a drive, the constructionists argue that is a historical and social construct. Furthermore, the constructionist thought assumes “identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself” (Jagose 8). In this view, sexuality is shaped by culture and the information available in our surroundings.

Queer theory follows the constructionist line of thought as it seeks to understand the relationship between our conceptions of gender, sexuality and power. Some theorists agree that we see sexuality according to our shared cultural and historical meanings and not as biological instincts; therefore, sexuality in general is a product of power relations (Foucault; Butler; Kates). Queer theory is founded on the idea that cultural norms create and reinforce heterosexual images.

When talking about queer studies we must first talk about the popular and academic use of the term queer. In general, queer studies as an academic discipline is informed by gay and lesbian studies, feminism, and post colonial studies and denaturalizes race/sex/gender. The contemporary popular use of queer in the LGBTQ community often refers to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and or intersexual. However, it can also include asexual, autosexual and heterosexuals whose sexual preferences or activities place them outside of monogamous heterosexual procreative intercourse (e.g., sadism and masochism practitioners). This

contemporary understanding of queer is often implicit in popular magazines and literature targeted to the LGBTQ community. The contemporary meaning of queer conveys inclusiveness. One of the greatest criticisms of this use of the term is that often it is often misused in mainstream popular media, and gay male oriented media outlets like *The Advocate*, as a synonym for gay men.

The term queer has a much contested history, as it originated as a derogative term and was later appropriated by activist groups. Robin Brontsema states that the term originated in the 16th century and was used to refer to odd, strange individuals of questionable character. By the early twentieth century, it was used to refer to male homosexual practices. George Chauncey states that once it became associated with homosexual practices, queer was used to refer to the most masculine men as opposed to “fairies,” who were identified as being more feminine (101).

Brontsema indicates that by the Second World War, the use of the term gay replaced the use of queer. However, in 1990s, the term queer experienced a rebirth because of the AIDS crisis and the political organization “Queer Nation” (Kirsh). In both instances the need to find a unifying term for gay and lesbians resulted in the use of queer. Mark Kirsch explains that “Queer Nation” used the term to represent all who rejected ideas of normalcy in regard to gender, identity or sexuality and power relations. Thus, queer became a more inclusive term to include a multiplicity of sexualities. In sum, it was a disruption of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and was associated with a radical challenge to the status quo. Kirsch explains that the popular and academic uses of the term do not coincide much; however, they have in common the use of queer to suggest resistance strategies to sexual labeling.

According to Kirsch, the beginning of the academic use of queer has been associated with Teresa DeLaurentis’ use of the term at a conference in 1989 as she was referencing to the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick that questioned the binary definitions of sexuality (33). Queer studies as a discipline developed from gay and lesbian studies. Post-structuralism and post-modernism led to the rejection of the categorization of sexuality. Thus an important characteristic of the term queer and consequently the discipline of queer studies is the idea of fluidity of identities. In both

popular and academic cultures, the use of the term queer highlights the multiplicity of sexualities outside of monogamous heterosexual procreative intercourse.

However, supporters of the queer project maintain that the political efficacy of queer depends on its resistance to definition. Annamarie Jagose described it as a zone of possibilities as its supporters call to question terms such as man and women, dismiss even the possibility of a natural sexuality and debunk the idea of a stable sex, gender, or sexuality. Queer theorists also scrutinize the discourse of homosexuality from different theoretical frameworks.

John D'Emilio takes a Marxist approach and argues that there is a correlation between the developments of a gay identity and capitalism. D'Emilio argues that "only when people began making their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity" (470). Thus, his works points out that capitalism relieved sexuality from the "'imperative' to procreate" (D'Emilio 470).

Michel Foucault, on the other hand, traces the changes in the discourse of sexuality and examines it within the context of power. He argues that in the eighteenth century, sexuality becomes associated with reproduction and silence became the rule, making the subject of sexuality a taboo. During this time, sexual conduct became an object of analysis and target of intervention through rigorous political and scientific examination. Sex is associated with marriage and the family as reproduction becomes intrinsically linked to the economic and political development of nations. He explains that it is in the 19th century that a discussion over the multiple types of sexuality takes place, and a distinction is made between "natural" and "unnatural" sexuality (Foucault, *Sexuality* 37-9). It is during this century that the notion of homosexual emerged and with it the process by which sexual acts became an identity marker moving from sinful or illegal temptations to become something that one is.

Jagose explains that for Foucault sexuality is not essentially a personal attribute, but an available cultural category; sexuality is a discursive production rather than a natural condition. Jagose explains that Foucault establishes an important connection between discourse and power. For Foucault the exercise of power in relation to sexual practices involves four operations: 1) surveillance; 2) corrective discourses; 3) the

incorporation of perversion as a new specification of individuals (“unnatural” sexualities became species); and 4) observation and medicalization of sexualities (41-8).

Foucault states that power is everywhere and comes from multiple sites. Because of the way he conceptualizes power (a force that both creates and enforces repression, discourse and knowledge), he does not believe that strategies such as breaking prohibitions or speaking out are effective. Instead for him discourse can coexist with power as a form of resistance, meaning that discourse itself cannot be oppressive because it is open to multiple interpretations and ultimately can be appropriated.

Judith Butler, on the other hand, challenges the idea of gender by arguing that “women,” “men” operate as a regulatory construct that privileges heterosexuality. Then she identifies that the first problem with the feminist movement, for example, is taking gender as a grounding category. Butler argues against the ideas of identity politics; drawing on Foucault, she argues that the systems of power produce subjects they subsequently come to represent. In essence she explains that power both regulates and constructs the subjects and therefore the only possible tool of resistance is to deconstruct the categories of gender, sex or sexuality. For Butler, emancipation cannot come from a category that has been discursively constituted for repression.

For Butler, gender is constituted as performative and “the effect of reiterative acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being” (Butler 33). Consequently, there is nothing authentic about gender because it is naturalized by repetition (Butler 25). Butler’s work destabilizes the categories of sex, gender and sexuality by arguing that they have been socially constructed and normalized through acts of repetition and acceptance. Because these categories are not natural, but learned, they should not be used as identity markers or as part of a political agenda. Instead of claiming “I am here and I am queer,” she suggests to destabilize and denaturalize queer.

Advantages of Using Queer theory for the Analysis of the Show

An important characteristic of queer studies is that it looks at the history of the discourse of sexuality. Foucault's work centers on his examination of sexuality as a discursive production created by the operations of power. His theoretical contributions

are important when considering the impact of the show within the history of queer representation on American television. Thus, a discourse analysis of the representation of sexuality and sexual desire on the American popular culture show *Queer Eye* seem particularly relevant to the goals of queer theory.

Judith Butler's reflections on gender contest the categories of gender, sex and sexuality. Butler persuasively argues that identity is, in a sense, performative. In this manuscript I trace the way queer is socially constituted and normalized on the show *Queer Eye* through its narrow and repeated acts of representation. More specifically, by examining the episodes of the show, I discuss the main characters contribute to the formations of gender expectations and the construction of gay male identity. In short, I examine the performance of queer.

Discussion

In this chapter the theoretical importance of political economy and queer theory are discussed. The literature review underscores two major assumptions which guide this study. First, the economical aspects of the production affect distribution and queer representation. Second, the commercialization of queer negatively affects the social or subversive value the queer project.

Political economy is useful to look at the relationship between power, commercial interests and the system of production while queer theory is more appropriate to discuss issues regarding the discursive constitution and representation of gender, sexuality, and queer. The next chapter marks the beginning of the analysis section of the manuscript. A political economic analysis informs the discussions of the first two research questions. Chapter five addresses the way the program sustains structures of power to promote consumerism and the impact of advertising on the show and the commodification of sexuality. Queer theory is most useful in chapters six and seven for the analysis of the representation of queer and the negotiations between straight and gay men.

CHAPTER 5

MATERIALISM, DISPOSAL, AND CONSUMERISM

“Listen to the store” Carson Kressley
Episode # 119 Compose Yourself: Warren L.
Queer Eye for the Straight Guy Aired on March 2, 2004

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“Commercials are passe,”
David Collins, 2003 Interview for *Adweek* On the spot
Creator and Executive Producer of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*

In the show *Queer Eye*, men sell access to their lives for a makeover and in the process they are indoctrinated into new patterns of consumption. The identity of the characters is represented as a reflection of their aesthetic choices, and audiences are exposed to numerous product placements and advertising messages. In encouraging materialism, the show transforms the term queer into a commodity sign and redefines masculinity as represented through wealth and accumulation.

This chapter explains the ways that *Queer Eye* functions as a normative apparatus that readily embraces and vigorously promotes a culture of consumption. To this end, I discuss the impact media conglomerates had on the production and content of the show. To uncover the distinctiveness of the show, this chapter conducts an analysis of synergistic strategies that create the commercial intertext and explains the ways *Queer Eye* supports the corporate capitalist media system by showcasing goods through practices such as celebrity endorsements and cross promotional efforts.

The chapter also addresses the second research question -what is the role of advertising in the negotiation of identity and the representation of sexual desire- by looking at product placements and celebrity endorsements. Such strategies are directly related the success of the show and its historical significance.

Drawing on a critical discourse analysis of the show, I argue that the Fab Five serve as normative figures within the structure of the capitalist system because their performance reflects the intrinsic values of a materialistic society and ignores social responsibility. Moreover, consumerism is depicted as a way to perform one's identity, as an agent for social mobility, and as a desirable skill to cultivate.

The Structural Elements of Producing Queer Eye

According to Ronald W. Schatz, the creation of General Electric Co. was the result of a merger of Edison General Electric of Schenectady, New York, and Thomson-Houston of Lynn, Massachusetts in 1892 (4). The history and growth of the company has been characterized by its venture into new business areas. By 2004, the company had 14 business units, including financial services, plastics, jet engines, energy, transportation and media outlets. The *Columbia Journalism Review* guide to media ownership lists all of GE media properties, among them: 28 local NBC stations, 28 local Telemundo Stations, NBC Universal Television Studios, NBC Universal Television Distribution, CNBC, MSNBC, Bravo, Mun2TV, Sci-Fi, Trio, USA, Universal Pictures, Universal Parks & Resorts as well as other businesses. As of 2006 GE has an estimated market value of \$390.6 billion (Shah). Not only does GE have a media empire, it can also assert its influence through investments in advertising. The *AdAge Encyclopedia* shows that in 2003, GE was the number 13 on the list of national advertisers in the U.S., spending a total of \$1.6 billion per year.

Key players in the diversification of NBC from 1926 to 1986

The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was formed in 1926 by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). In 1986 NBC was bought by General Electric Company. Maurine Christopher explains that NBC was purchased in 1986 for \$6.4 billion with the Federal Communications Commission's unanimous approval. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, as part of the deal GE agreed to sell a business which made electron tubes used in closed-circuit cameras and for military tracking and surveillance, as well as five NBC radio stations in New York City, Chicago and Washington. The acquisition was the

nation's largest merger at the time and gave GE control over RCA and its National Broadcasting Co. (NBC) subsidiaries.

Brooks Barnes and Ken Brown explain that on September 2, 2003, General Electric Co. announced they closed a deal for a \$14 billion acquisition of Vivendi Universal Entertainment. The deal resulted in NBC Universal, a consolidation of the NBC networks and Universal Pictures; Universal's TV production business; cable channels USA Network, Bravo and CNBC; and Spanish-language network Telemundo. Previous to this acquisition NBC was the only broadcast network without a movie studio. The transaction gave shareholders of Vivendi Universal Entertainment \$3.65 billion in cash (Barnes and Brown) and gave GE ownership of 80% of NBC Universal.

John M. Higgins argues that buying Universal helped NBC diversify its financial base. Before the buy, GE was the only conglomerate that did not own a movie studio. As a result of the merger the company was able to produce revenue from diverse media sources instead of relying almost exclusively on advertising revenue. Higgins maintains “A year ago, 90% of NBC's revenue came from advertising, which is directly affected by falling Nielsens. Today, NBC generates revenue from a mix of products, including a less volatile library of movies and DVDs, as well as cable-network license fees.” According to the Media Family Tree of *Advertising Age*, in 2005 NBC Universal became the fifth largest media company, generating \$12.44 billion in net media revenue. This is important because media concentration allows companies to combine a number of industries in such a manner that the product of one becomes material for another industry. In February of 2007, Wayne Friedman and David Goetzl reported rumors that General Electric was thinking of selling NBC Universal. However, General Electric Co. Chairman-CEO Jeffrey R. Immelt quickly dismissed all rumors.

A Brief History of Bravo

Bravo television was created in 1981 by Cablevision's Rainbow Media. The station catered to upscale audiences. At the time Bravo's programming consisted mostly of opera, classical music, and other arts-related programming (Gubernick). NBC gained full ownership of Bravo in December of 2002. NBC bought Bravo Television from Cablevision Systems Corporation for \$1.25 billion in stock and cash. Two reasons

motivated the acquisition: first, to gain additional venues for their programming and second, Bravo became a venue to diversify audiences. Buying Bravo gave NBC additional venues to show its comedies, dramas, syndicated programming and draw viewers (Nelson). The acquisition also gave NBC its first cable entertainment channel. It was also a strategic purchase for NBC because Bravo was the country's fastest-growing cable channel.

Currently, Bravo TV is available in over 80 million homes. Since the airing of *Queer Eye*, the network has consistently ranked among the top five networks in prime time among audiences 25 to 54 (*Advertising Age* 2007). Moreover, the demographic profile of Bravo's audiences indicates that the cable network is watched by adults, with a college education and in most cases earnings over \$100k.

Queer Eye

As noted earlier, *Queer Eye* premiered in the summer of 2003. Soon after its debut, *Queer Eye* became one of Bravo's most important properties, reporting record audiences during the first season. At the time of its release, the show was the biggest hit in the 22-year history of Bravo. *Queer Eye* was produced for Bravo by Scout Productions. The executive producers of *Queer Eye* are David Collins, Michael Williams, and David Metzler. Scout Productions, founded in 1994 by David Collins and Michael Williams, is a film and television production company. Wade Paulsen states that at the time of the deal between Scout and Bravo for the production of *Queer Eye*, the cable network was controlled by Cablevision, with NBC as a minority holder. After the first season, with NBC having full control of Bravo, the negotiations between the network and the production company changed, including salary renegotiations and cross promotion opportunities.

The series of mergers between NBC and Vivendi Universal Entertainment and NBC and Bravo, resulted in salary and ownership renegotiations, crosspromotional strategies, new reality shows, and greater profits in advertisement for cable network in general. First, the acquisition of Bravo by NBC helped open the door for new salary negotiations for the Fab Five because even though the show aired in 2003 the original deal for the show was made in 2002 before the merger. The first season of *Queer Eye*

earned the cable network its highest-ever rating, averaging 1.3 million viewers 18-to 49-years-old (Klaassen). Chris Pursell and James Hibberd state that after the first season the Fab Five negotiated a salary increase that went from a reported \$3,000 per episode to an estimated \$10,000 an episode, for a total of \$400,000 per season. Also, promotional deals came from their relationship with parent company NBC. Wade Paulsen states that after the exposure received in the first season, each of the members of the group started earning at least \$50,000 per speaking engagement.

Second, a condensed 30 minute version of the hour long show was shown on NBC in the summer of 2003 during the first season of the show. However, since the show was originally negotiated with Cablevision, NBC was not able to claim the property for their network. Instead, the producers at Scout Productions and NBC started negotiations for alternative deals.

Third, the economic success of *Queer Eye* generated great profits for NBC that resulted from the advertising and product placement buys on Bravo and its website. It also opened the door for the conglomerate to start interweaving cross promotional efforts. NBC's machinery started by selling the series internationally. NBC negotiated deals for \$15 million to \$20 million with countries like Australia and England. In those cases the content would be localized by translating the name, making cultural adaptations and producing the show with local talent. The network also gained profits from the licensing of the brand for shirts, CDs and hats in the NBC and Bravo's website. NBC helped negotiate a \$1.23 million book deal for the cast, creating multiple cross promotion opportunities for the show and its members. Additionally, they managed weekly podcasts for Ipods, ringtones and a *Queer Eye* phone line for tips and advice. Finally, in February of 2006, NBC Universal TV Group announced that episodes of *Queer Eye* would be sold on iTunes.

Fourth, the popular acceptance of *Queer Eye* resulted in the development of additional reality shows that showcased professionals in different fields and claimed expertise in an area. Bravo's developed original series such as *Project Runway*, *Top Chef* and *Work It*, all reality television shows that capitalized on the format of *Queer Eye*. Moreover, other cable networks started producing original series such as TNT's *The Closer* and USA Network's *The 4400*.

Finally, the success of the show affected the ad buys of media buyers in the field. Cable television became a popular option for brands looking to place their ads. *Queer Eye* impacted the way companies invested their media dollars by generating interest in cable networks. This practice benefited Bravo and all other cable networks as well.

The relationship between NBC and Bravo also affected the content of the show. During the second season of the show, *Queer Eye* was able to get more advertising dollars in the show and more brands wanted to place their products in the show. Additionally, the producers were able to cast high profile names for the makeovers like Olympic medalists and baseball players from the Boston Red Sox. More importantly, NBC used the show to promote other NBC properties. In August 16, 2005 *Queer Eye* aired a show titled, “Trump-ed to Triumph,” which featured Danny, one of the contestants from the NBC show, *The Apprentice*. During the show, the Fab makeover Danny and then visit Donald Trump’s office for the show *The Apprentice* to evaluate the success of their work. Kathy Griffin from Bravo’s *My Life on the D-List* made an appearance too on June 6, 2007, in the episode titled, “Small Time Entertainment to Big Show Headliner.”

The commercial partnership with General Electric is also evident in the show. Appliances are often replaced with General Electric appliances. For example, during Episode 127, the original appliances of the home, although functional, were dirty and therefore needed to be replaced. Needless to say, Thom replaced all the appliances in the house with GE appliances.

Conglomeration and concentration affects television content, helps reinforce dominant ideologies and sustain structures of power. In the case of *Queer Eye*, corporate interests use the show to celebrate and encourage the values of capitalism and have negatively affected and depoliticized the discourse and representation of sexual desire.

Synergy

As mentioned in chapter four an important area of analysis for the study of the television show *Queer Eye* is the use of corporate synergy. For Meehan, synergy refers to the creation of crosspromotion opportunities that help production companies maximize

the return on their properties. The author describes six important aspects that characterize synergy: spin-offs, recirculation, repackaging, reversioning, recycling and redeployment.

Let's start with spin-offs. After the success of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Scout started negotiations for the development of a new show, *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl* that premiered on January of 2005. Although, the new show included a new cast, the original *Queer Eye* cast was featured in advertising for the *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl* show. *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl* allowed the company to maximize the revenues from the original programming, the spin-off served to promote the original program and was a strategy to capture the loyal fan base from *Queer Guy* in a different timeslot.

Recirculation refers to the media outlet's control over the product after the original airing. In the case of *Queer Eye*, recirculation refers to the process by which the show was edited and shown on NBC in a 30 minute format. Also, the Bravo station aired "marathons" of the show (all day specials) for holiday marathons and to promote the start of a new season. The recirculation of *Queer Eye* allowed Bravo to saturate their programming with the show to attract new audiences and secure occasional viewers.

A third aspect of synergy, repackaging, refers to the process of making the product available for purchase to consumers. *Queer Eye* released a series of DVDs which featured edited versions of the episodes in the first season. For \$12.99, viewers obtained access to the best moments of each character. The DVDs are divided by character, thereby opening the door for the future release of the complete episode collection in the future. An additional form of repackaging occurred when the episodes were made available in an alternate form of consumption, online, through iTunes. The repackaging of *Queer Eye* allows the network to strengthen the fan base and maximize the revenues from this audience. Loyal viewers then buy these products to reinforce their fandom.

Studios and production companies often reproduce content with minor changes. For example, a DVD release of a TV show as a director's cut, in widescreen format, and with previously deleted materials, unaired footage, interviews and other features. Meehan calls this practice reversioning. For example, *Queer Eye* released in 2005 a special edition of Episode 204 "Championship Make Better" titled *Queer Eye for the Red Sox*. The DVD featured Episode 204, where players from the baseball team the Red Sox were

made over plus 20 minutes of additional footage, outtakes, and alternate takes from the makeovers.

Recycling occurs when a show incorporates clips from various episodes for the artificial creation of a new chapter. On December 16, 2003, *Queer Eye* aired, “A Very *Queer Eye* Holiday: Holiday Special.” During the show the Fab celebrated the holidays by reviewing clips from previous episodes along with the recipients of the makeovers. Unlike the reversioning of the Red Sox’s Episode, where the same content was sold in a different package, the Holiday special was a “new” Episode that included old material, edited in a new format and labeled new.

Finally, redeployment relies on the success of a brand and uses the characters, the narrative structures and the themes for the development of additional brands. David Collins, in an interview with *Adweek*, explains how Scout production used the structure of *Queer Eye*, which relies heavily on incorporating product placements into the narrative, for the development of the show, *Knock First*. Collins explains, “Our concept of product placement has and will most probably always stay the same. [We use it] if we truly believe in the product and feel that we can organically place it into our shows. Even though a demo may change, our taste stays the same.”

Eileen Meehan’s reflections deconstruct the corporate practice of exploiting intellectual properties in order to increase profits, also known as synergy (*Why TV*). Meehan’s analysis of media practices is part of a larger contention that reinforces the role of the media in sustaining structures of power and the ideology of capitalism (*Why TV*). Her work is premised on the assertion that media content has one goal, to provide conglomerates the highest revenues through the use of multiple venues and strategies. In the case of *Queer Eye*, producers used all of the strategies described by Meehan, to capitalize on the show.

Synergy is important because it helps a big conglomerate consolidate its power, promote its properties and avoid risk. Synergy allows big production companies to use all the resources from the conglomerate to promote their properties, while eliminating the competition from smaller production companies that don’t have the resources for crosspromotion. Moreover, synergy is also used to saturate the market with messages about the properties, thus reducing the risks of having an unsuccessful media product.

Synergy also affects creativity, and promotes the continuous representation of the same themes in the media. Media giants will support formats and narratives that have proven successful to avoid the economic risks associated with producing original programming or films.

Materialism

Materialism can be understood as the value a person assigns to acquisition and possession of material objects. Burroughs and Rindfleisch argue that consumption is a socially accepted vehicle for seeking happiness and success; however, the relationship between materialism and well being seems to be complex because the more materialistic a person is the less satisfied. In fact Ryan and Dziurawiec underline that research has continually supported a relationship between materialism and compulsive spending, low self-esteem, envy, and non-generosity. Therefore, there is a negative relationship between materialism and happiness.

Muncy and Eastman found a direct correlation between consumer ethics and materialism. The authors describe materialism as a drive to acquire goods that increases society's economic wealth. Furthermore, they argue that it is commonly associated with satisfaction, and self growth. Muncy and Eastman found that materialism leads to lower ethical standards, because consumption takes primacy over ethical choices; thus materialism is not in the best interest of individuals or society. "If encouraging materialism also encourages lower ethical standards, then it could certainly be argued that it is not in society's best interest to encourage materialism. If marketers do encourage materialism, knowing that it will result in additional societal burdens associated with lower ethical standards, then it could also be argued that they are acting in a socially irresponsible way" (Muncy and Eastman 143). Thus, instead of serving the public's best interest, *Queer Eye* is perhaps perpetuating stereotypes and consumerism as well as encouraging questionable behavior.

The engine motivating *Queer Eye* is consumption. In the first few seasons, the intent of the program was to educate straight men about a specific aesthetical mode of thinking and consuming. A clear example of this is found during Episode 119. When talking about shopping, Thom, the designing consultant for *Queer Eye*, chastises Warren, "It's like you have blind folds when you pass through the good stuff." Later in that show,

at the furniture store Ikea, they go through all the “must have items” in the store. Thom strives to educate Warren’s taste and modify his perceptions. When commenting later on his new apartment, Warren says, “I love all the things I would never get,” and “I feel like I have learned so much.” The program becomes a guide for consumption, one that is manipulated by the interest of the brands advertising on the show.

John O'Shaughnessy and Nicholas O'Shaughnessy argue that ours is a consumer driven society, defined as one directed by the accumulation and consumption of material goods. Furthermore, the authors argue that such a society will certainly be hedonistic. According to them, hedonism refers to the constant search for instant gratification, for the pleasures of the flesh. It is the idea that pleasure and the avoidance of pain is the ultimate good in life; in the popular sense it is associated with egoism. Furthermore, “Ideas of a self-gratificatory sensuality are linked to hedonism in the popular mind, with the implicit idea of excess, even of a kind of compulsion” (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 527). For the authors, the stimulation of consumption is the most tangible expression of attempts at marketing-directed hedonism.

Queer Eye is a program that serves as a normative institution embracing consumerism and vigorously promoting a culture of consumption. Excessive and immeasurable consumption and disposal of resources are some of the ideas of capitalism reinforced in the program. Beyond the customary shopping the Fab Five serve as normative figures within the structure of the capitalist system. It is evident in their actions that they embrace the values of a materialistic society. During Episode 120, one of the most frequent comments, “Out with the old and in with the new⁴” reinforces the idea that consumption is both natural and a way to self improvement. Also, during that episode Carson comments, “Nice cashmere because he is worth it,” thereby associating material objects with social and personal value. According to Baudrillard, “within ‘consumer society,’ the notion of status, as the criterion which defines social being, tends increasingly to simplify and to coincide with the notion of ‘social standing’” (22), meaning that often the consumption of goods is associated with social status and that is also the case in *Queer Eye*.

⁴ Please note that throughout this manuscript the excerpts of the show have been transcribed directly from the episodes. An official transcription of the show, or screenplay was not used. The comments have been added by the author of the manuscript and should not be read as director notes.

There are several themes represented in the show in regard to consumption: disposable consumption and waste, consumption as a form to construct one's identity; and consumption as a desirable skill that one must learn.

Disposable Consumption and Waste

For the Five, being wasteful is often seen as a pleasurable act. For them there is a joy that comes with the destruction of functional goods. Goods are disposed if they don't fit a particular aesthetic form. Often, wastefulness is represented as a fun and liberating act and ironically any challenge to this form of consumptiveness is described as being careless. For example, during Episode 119, Ted explains:

There's no reason to ever drink anything out of a plastic glass when you can get champagne flutes for \$0.75 a piece, it is so cheap. I feel so tempted to throw them across the room just to listen to it break, but I am afraid I might freak people out.

(Episode 119 "Compose Yourself: Warren L.", March 2, 2004)

He later adds, "We need to get you some plates. The plates you have right now are black which is fine for a casual set up, but I really want them to be white." This type of consumption is socially irresponsible and encourages disengaged social beings. It encourages hyper-consumption and ignores all ecological consequences that might come from these behaviors.

This idea of disposable consumption is never more evident than on Episode 101, when Kyan states, "Disposable razors, you know what I love about them, they are disposable." Moreover, let us reconsider the most common phrase used by the Five in Episode 120, "Out with the old and in with the new." In this episode, leaving the old behind includes breaking and smashing some planting pots, an improvised ritual that actually and symbolically kills a living organism.

When the Fab Five's consumptive ideology is contested, power is enforced. During Episode 123, James initially resists the transformation. The Fab Five hate his brand new couch because it is cheap looking, but for James it is functional and aesthetically pleasing. Here the theme of destruction and careless consumption is reflected when the Fab Five throw food and later toss the furniture only because they dislike the fabric.

TED. The good thing about this furniture is that it's very easy to clean (*as he adds stains to the couch*).

JAMES. (*Surprised by their actions*) No... You did not do that. What are you guys doing?

Later in the Episode Thom and Kyan tear apart the window treatment.

JAMES. I can't watch this.

(*The response of the five is to make fun of the James*).

JAI. Ohh... We are stressing out the straight guy.

THOM. He is so uptight.

JAMES. Oh my god look at my house, what have you guys done to my house?

TED. We've only have started. It gets a lot worse.

THOM. Can someone help me get one of these sofas out into the backyard?

CARSON. Are we really throwing it over?

THOM. I think so (*as Thom and Carson throw the couch through the window*).

CARSON. Ok, don't throw like a girl.

(Episode 123, "Training Day: James M." March 23, 2004)

Functional goods are often discarded because they don't meet specific aesthetic guidelines. Sometimes objects are even replaced just because they are dirty. During Episode 127, Thom explains, "You had this huge kitchen with old appliances, so what I did was I brought these GE appliances in stainless steel. The refrigerator you had before was so dirty that I thought it was easier to buy a new one than to clean the refrigerator." In redefining the concept of what is perishable, Thom is undeniably advocating an unsustainable form of consumption in today's global society.

Moreover the characters often encourage *over* consumption of goods. Jai, during a fashion show in Episode 119, comments, "Too much couture." To that Carson effectively counters, "There is no such thing as too much couture." Yet on the show, excessive consumption is only acceptable when it is in the realm of fashion; for example, the overconsumption of food is not acceptable. Consider that in Episode 229, Fab makeover friends Adam and Steve. The makeover takes several months and the goal is to help the two men lose weight. Interestingly, Carson describes Adam and Steve as the poster-boys

of overindulgence, yet one could argue that the only difference between the straight and the queer men is not how, but what they choose to over-consume.

Consumption as a Tool to Shape Your Identity

Goods become an intrinsic part of creating an identity, creating an image and telling a personal narrative. Personal choices in the various categories (food choices, attire, fashion, living space and design) are conceptualized as being a reflection of one's inner being. Often the Fab Five are presented creating personal stories and narratives through the use of objects. For example, in Episode 101, Brian is an aspiring artist and therefore it is determined that he has to communicate his lifestyle through his choices of appetizers and the way he wears his shirts. In reference to the foods served during the event, Ted advises Brian, "You need something that gives you a chance to be visual and expressive, something eatable that also looks cool." Similarly Carson counsels, "You can wear shirts untucked because for your lifestyle it's kind of cool and rock and roll." Later, Carson envisions, "I have this guy and he has an art gallery opening and I want to do kind of something snappy like what I have on an unconstructed jacket with some cool fabric because he is an artist and he has an edge." In this episode, goods are used to represent Brian's creativity.

Throughout the series the Fab Five use goods to construct a public persona for each individual. They create an identity based on "stuff" and general narratives of what it means to be an artist, a jock, a groom, a man. Consumption is also used to gain independence. Such as in Episode 123 when Ted explains, "So this guy is a jock letting women take care of him, we are going to set him up and make him more independent and cool."

The idea that items can create an identity is especially interesting in Episode 302. During this episode, the Fab Five use goods to help a female to male (FtM) transsexual become a better man. The Five suggest that clothing, grooming, and a juicer are the essence of masculinity. Carson explains, "We should prepare you with clothes that every man needs." According to Carson, the transformation from FtM can be achieved with goods, "We are trying to fool the eye, so that I can't tell how big or tall you are." Moreover, furniture is also essential for the transformation, as evidenced when Thom

describes his design as a “cool new Brooklyn dude apartment....so when you guys are sitting around thinking about removing your breasts you can also watch TV.... Guys like gadgets.”

Danny, described by the Fab as a “tecno-hippie,” was made over on Episode 212. The Five makes it clear that his long hair is not appropriate for corporate America when Ted states, “If he worked at a place where they sell bong, no problem.” Kyan adds, “I would buy a bong from him.” Not only does the show create narratives for the individuals they makeover, consumption as an intrinsic part of one’s identity extends to venues and events.

In Episode 220, a wedding planner explains that when planning a wedding, the venue for the ceremony and the reception tell one’s story. Interestingly, during this episode the Fab Five give specific details of the approximate cost of their contributions.

JOE. This has been the experience of a lifetime, and this would not become this way without the help of you five. I have prolonged something for over ten years, and this is the time it’s about you [Laura]. Everything from this point on I hope is everything you [Laura] hoped to be.

CARSON. You also owe us 700 thousand dollars

(Episode 220 “From the Doghouse to the Altar- Part 2: Joe U.,” December 7, 2005)

This rare detail into the “value” of the makeover reveals that the Fab Five are not only attempting to help guys “be themselves, but better” as they often claim, but they reinforce the idea that what they really mean is that they are helping guys be themselves by appearing wealthy. Even though Carson is prone to exaggeration, the list of over thirty sponsors that of the event included several high-end designers (e.g. Ralph Lauren, Etro, Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana) and service companies (e.g. bridal consultation by John Barrett Salon; manicure, pedicure, and massage for guy by Spa Chicks-On-The-Go; food by Creative Edge Parties; reception location by New York Public Library; location of wedding by St. Bartholomew's Church; accommodations Millennium Hilton Hotel, among others).

At the end of Episode 101, as the Fab Five reflect on the success of the transformation, Brian keeps his haircut, wore his new clothing and had a successful

showing of his art pieces. The words of the Fab are evidence that for them consumption - as opposed to education, merit or a hereditary system- is what facilitates social mobility.

TED. It looks like he really adopted the vive that we shoot for.

KYAN. He adapted to his new look.

CARSON. We took raw beef and made it into designer ham.

TED. Cheer queers

(Episode 101 “Hair today, Art Tomorrow: Brian”)

Acquiring objects is something used as a reward to communicate wealth, as shown in Carson’s claim in Episode 120 in reference to the Fab Five’s transformation of Rob, “We went to DKNY and got some nice cashmere because he is worth it....you are successful, you have arrived.” Thus, it is represented as a merit based reward that communicates social status and economical success.

The Fab privilege a bourgeoisie orientation for the participants of the makeover. This identity (bourgeoisie) is represented as something you can perform using consumption to guide appearances. This identity is in a sense performative, because the show showcases the appearance of wealth and not how to achieve such status. Participants receive gifts that are indicative of a higher social class, but they are not taught the skills needed to reach that status (e.g. financial investments, 401K, saving). Instead, more than an issue of access to wealth, consumption is represented in *Queer Eye* as a reflection of an ideologically based worldview, in the way that consumption is analogous to nationalism or any other element of the ideological apparatus.

Consumerism is depicted as a form of self-discovery. In the closing of Episode 120, Carson notes, “Cheers to us for helping him find the real Rob.” That quest of realization, that journey to discovering one’s own identity through consumption, is finalized after the makeover. O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy say that brands link people into communities, and consumption is a form of social interaction and identification. It is part of “a search for social bonds covering social integration, the display of power or status, and the attainment of friendship” (531). Furthermore, because consumers seek approval and belonging, goods are intrinsic to their interactions.

The relationships between the object and the self are also in question. During Episode 119, Carson comments, “Listen to the store,” as if consumers could engage in a

dialectic relationship between the product, and themselves. When I listen to stores they usually don't say much; however, my MasterCard seems to notice. The show depicts and encourages the development of personal relationships with brands, and products as part of the process of self discovery suggests a relationship with goods that goes beyond their function.

The Pedagogy of Consumption

Consumption is represented as a desirable skill that one must learn. The Fab Five serve as normative agents of the institutional power in charge of the pedagogy of consumption. The pedagogy of consumption is an instructional process by which the participants learn to “refine” their criteria when selecting goods. It not only involves learning the proper way of selecting, maintaining, and using goods, but it also includes lessons on brand preference and creation of needs.

In the area of fashion, Carson comments during Episode 119, “We are in the number one discount store in New York. We have to be wise shoppers because there is a whole bounty of couture treasure here. We just have to do a little digging.” The lessons of educating consumers concludes with Carson stating, “You need to be a smart shopper, a bargain is not a bargain if you are not going to wear it, if it is way out of season or if it too expensive to keep it clean.” Consumption then becomes more than selecting goods to satisfy general needs (food for hunger, clothing to cover one's body), but a desirable skill, and is a result of knowledge, practice and aptitude.

During Episode 123, one of the Fab Five, Kyan, trades skills with James, the straight guy. James gives Kyan golf lessons, and in exchange Kyan gives him James grooming lessons. The lessons crafted by the “Grooming Guru” involve learning how to use new product categories and specific brands. The first lesson, learning the craft of shaving; the second, mastering the use of Crest White Strips. This particular aspect of Kyan's “proper grooming” teachings is a common theme of the show. On Episode 127, Kyan teaches the Twins how to use specific brands to clean their bathroom, and how to use L'Oreal on their skin.

The show represents consumption as something one must learn how to do and a necessary skill for performing masculinity. This is most evident in Episode 302, when the Fab five give a makeover to a FtM transsexual. Carson states, “What I wanted to go

through is everything a guy needs in his wardrobe. It's wardrobe 101. This is a cashmere sweater. It's like the next best thing to world peace." And later, "Jeans are like the UPS men. They should always give you a nice package. The beauty of men's wear is that is not really complicated. Keep it simple, and look for quality." Here not only can you learn the skill of shopping, but how to be a man through consumption.

The pedagogy of consumption often leads to a process of self discovery. Consumption is also represented as a way to connect with one's hidden qualities or aspects of one's personality. Often after the makeover, the students realize all the goods that they need to include on their daily routine. Often they realize that there are a series of objects that they never thought to buy but that are now essential to their daily lives. Brandon says it best on Episode 127, "I didn't know what to expect... I mean all these things...I was clouded, but now I know I can see. You opened up my eyes."

The Role of Product Placements in the Show

Each episode of *Queer Eye* includes four commercial breaks each featuring around seven advertisements for an average of 18 ads per episode. Some of the product categories that advertise on the show include credit cards, cars, beauty products (hair color, teeth whitening) and vacation spots (cruises). Importantly, even the episodes of *Queer Eye* that included the biggest number of ads per hour (about 9 minutes) do not compare to the average on the big networks (e.g. ABC primetime 2006 16.5 minutes).

The brands featured in the show give insight into the targeted audience. As mentioned in chapter four Bravo's demographic profile includes adults of a high socioeconomic status with a college education. Some of brands advertising with traditional 30 seconds spots on *Queer Eye* are: *Citibank Cards Rewards*, *Celebrity Cruise*, *E-trade*, *British Airways*, *Crest White Strips Premium*, *Toyota Siena*, *American Express*, *L'Oreal*, *Sea World*, and *Lexus*. The brands advertising in the show targeted two key demographic groups, wealthy women and gay men.

However, the distinctiveness of *Queer Eye* does not rely solely on its use of traditional advertising messages. David Collins, the producer of the show, explains the advantages of product placement as opposed to traditional advertising during an interview with *Adweek*. In the article by Lisa van der Pool, Collins maintains:

In recent years and during a stronger economy, commercials on television were able to explore more creative ways of keeping the public's attention... If advertisers are looking to keep the TiVo generation from skimming past their world and e-commerce is looking to sink their teeth into a shopper's wallet, they are going to need a true creative leg to stick out and trip them into watching and buying. (36)

June Deery uses the term advertainment to describe a type of programming where there is not a clear distinction between the content and the advertising (*Advertainment*). The author uses this term to describe reality TV because for her it is a genre designed to sell the life experiences of audiences. Moreover, she explains that the format of reality TV is a perfect response to the new technologies that allow audiences to skip commercials by providing advertisers alternatives to promote their products.

Queer Eye showcases a variety of products in different categories. In addition to traditional advertisement, there are a variety of product placements on a weekly basis on the show and website. For example, designers such as *DKNY*, *Club Monaco*, *J Crew*, *Ralph Lauren*, *Etro*, *Calvin Klein*, and *Dolce & Gabbana*, are among the many luxury brands showcased in the program. The product categories that have product placements during program can be divided into eight main categories: style and fashion, technology, accessories and furniture stores, retail stores, beauty and care, food and wine, cleaning products, and personal services (dog trainers, wedding planners, personal defense schools, cooking schools, etc).

In the category of style and fashion, the product placement often includes a visit to the clothing store, a display of their merchandize and interaction with store staff. In the area of technology, brands like *PRINTING.COM*, *Lexmark*, *Mitsubishi*, *Sony*, *Dell* and *General Electric* promote their brands in the show. The plug of the brand includes a detailed explanation of the features of the gadget and the results of its use measured in terms of convenience, printing quality, etc. Often the introduction of a product also includes a demonstration on how to properly use it. Thom usually brings the participants to furniture or retail stores to shop for furnishings and accessories. His section often includes a showcase of different alternatives and information about the merchandize in

that store. In the area of beauty and care Kyan often brings participants to a beauty salon or a massage parlor, introduces the staff and their areas of specialty. *Queer Eye* also advertises high end food markets and wine stores in the section of food and wine. Ted takes participants to locations around New York City to get personal services, cooking and wine classes and learn how to select quality ingredients. In all of these categories, the camera gets a clear shot of the entrance of the establishment, their logos and overall setup of the store.

For the *Queer Eye* guys, it is not enough to showcase a product like *Lysol Sanitizing Wipes*, but they also explain to audiences and participants, the mode of use, the regularity and give a demonstration. Like in Episode 127 when part of the makeover was to teach David and Brandon how to clean their bathroom. Ironically, during this episode the inclusion of a cleaning solution forces the Fab Five to teach the brothers a practical solution to their problem, to clean. Most often in the *Queer Eye* world practical solutions are never privileged over consumption. When presented with the choice, the quintet will rather replace an item than to clean it.

Hillary Atkin explains it best when she argues, “After all, what is *Queer Eye* really, but a sea of blatant product placement, designed to appeal to the average straight guy, and his girlfriend or wife? Advertisers have found in these gay men the perfect spokespeople to push their products. They just happen to be the niche flavor of the moment: gay” (8). The formula of making advertising placements an essential part of the narrative of the show, complemented by traditional advertising and aggressive strategies of corporate synergy, make the show an ideal property for any network.

The commercial relationships between the characters, the plot and the brands affected the program in two important ways. First, it made the format of the show a commercial success and an important property for Bravo television. Second, it affected the way sexual desire is presented in *Queer Eye*.

The significance of the show is based on the way it successfully places products of five different categories into the plot. Unlike other makeover shows that only include brands in the areas of fashion and beauty or decorating and remodeling the *Queer Eye* formula was able to integrate beauty makeovers, home remodeling, and cooking shows into one package. The inclusion of several brands into the plot helped producers create a

narrative that associates high fashion to furniture stores and cleaning products. Thus, in creating a lifestyle for the participants the makeover includes the clothing, furnishings, food selections, cookware, electronic gadgets, cleaning supplies, beauty products, and services needed to be a successful artist, husband or father.

Product placements also affect the representation of sexual desire in the program. Targeting homosexuals has been a controversial subject among marketers for a few years. Gillian Oakenfull has written several articles exploring the possibilities of including homosexual characters or imagery in advertising without affecting heterosexual audiences with homophobic sensibilities. In fact, the article entitled “Queer Eye for A Gay Guy: Using Market-Specific Symbols in Advertising To Attract Gay Consumers Without Alienating The Mainstream,” by Gillian Oakenfull and Timothy B. Greenlee, looks at the impact of depicting gay males and lesbians in advertising. The study concludes that explicit gay male or lesbian imagery results in an unfavorable response from mainstream consumers. However, Oakenfull and Greenlee explain that heterosexual (and I add homophobic) consumers are less averse to the representation of gay males and lesbians when the images are “subtle”. Moreover Oakenfull and Greenlee in the article entitled, “The Three Rules of Crossing Over from Gay Media to Mainstream Media Advertising: Lesbians, Lesbians, Lesbians,” further explain that heterosexual (homophobic) consumers respond more negatively to depictions of gay males than to representations of lesbians in advertisements.

The media landscape is driven by a need to maximize revenues for producers and brands. Product placements are problematic because it is a strategy that blurs the distinctions between commercial messages and content and affects representation. First, in *Queer Eye* the promotions of the brands are presented to audiences as valuable content packed with learning opportunities consumers need. The role of the media is to serve audiences by providing access to information however, the disguise of commercials as content weakens the distinctions between commercials and content, supports an economic system that focuses on profits above everything, complicates the democratic functions of the media and privileges the importance of consumption.

Finally, the importance of the commercial relations with the brands and the centrality of integration into the plot influenced the characterization of the Fab Five. The

representation of sexual desire in the show was never meant to be explicit or progressive because producers wanted to protect the image of brands and avoid boycotts. Instead in *Queer Eye* sexuality becomes another commodity and is used exclusively as a marketing gimmick to create novelty for the show.

Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrity endorsements are a common practice in advertising. It has been estimated that about 20% of American network television commercial ads use celebrity endorsements (Miciak and Shanklin; Hsu and McDonald). According Hsu and McDonald a celebrity endorser is any individual who uses his or her public recognition to represent and sell a consumer good. Celebrity endorsers encompass actors, actresses, singers, models, athletes, politicians, and business people.

Endorsements are a useful tool for advertisers because it helps enhance revenues by associating the brand with the public image of celebrities. It also serves as a counteroffensive strategy against “channel surfers” and “zappers” due to the capacity of celebrities to hold viewer’s attention and penetrate the clutter of advertising spots (Miciak and Shanklin). Hsu and McDonald indicate that the general assumption is that the endorser should share similar traits with the target audience (e.g., same gender, same age). However, research suggests that the key for success is the perceived fit between the celebrity and the product characteristics.

Buford argues that advertising can be expected to move past stereotypes as gay images become increasingly acceptable to non-gay consumers. He uses the case of African Americans to show how marketing efforts start with broad stereotypes (Aunt Jemima’s), and slowly move into portraying African Americans in virtually the same range of everyday situations as any other group. Buford claims that as the general audience becomes more familiar with gay images marketers will become more sophisticated in their portrayal of gay and lesbian people beyond topics such as fashion, and home decorating.

Queer Eye plays into the stereotype of gay men being experts in fashion and decorating. The five main characters, now celebrities, have been hired for paid endorsements. Thom Filicia, the home design expert has been tapped by Pier One Imports (2004) for national campaigns, Kyan Douglass signed a deal with L’Oreal

(2004), Carson Kressley endorsed Pepsi (2005), and most recently Ted Allen appeared endorsing the television program, *America's Iron Chef* (2005), and Bravo's *Top Chef* (2007)⁵. Even David Collins, creator and producer of the show, became a spoke-person for American Express (2004).

Additionally, the show turned the Fab Five into celebrities and therefore in the plot line of *Queer Eye* there are multiple celebrity endorsements of products. As the quintet became more famous, their celebrity status is stronger. Thus, Carson endorses lines and designers that are fashion forward. Ted endorses the best food and wine in New York City and so on.

Celebrity endorsements are yet another strategy to create commercial intertext and cross references between successful properties. The celebrities use the positive associations they arouse in consumers and their alleged expertise in an area to create an emotional and commercial relationship between a feeling and a brand, the celebrity and the good. Endorsements become another avenue for generating revenue for a brand. Using this strategy the five main characters become products along with the brands they sell. Advertising, becomes a channel to promote the Five and the product being endorsed. Moreover, the advertisements featuring the Fab become a reference back to the original program, *Queer Eye*. Thus, when looking at Thom Filicia in the Pier One commercial, the viewer can think of the beautiful furniture in the store and the pieces used by Thom in the show. The celebrity endorsements also solidify the relationship between the brand and the program as the product endorsed also buys time to advertise during the show.

Discussion

The General Electric Co. consists of over 14 business units, including financial services, plastics, jet engines, energy, transportation and media outlets. GE Co. is a powerful media conglomerate that controls most NBC stations, Telemundo stations, Universal Television, CNBC, MSNBC, Bravo, Sci-Fi, Trio, USA, Universal Pictures,

⁵ While Ted Allen's endorsement of cooking programs -*America's Iron Chef* and Bravo's *Top Chef*- reinforces his role in *Queer Eye*, Carson's endorsement of Pepsi Co. is not in his area of celebrity expertise. Instead, his endorsement deal plays into his "fun" celebrity expertise. Carson's endorsement capitalizes on two things, gay men are witty and gay men are knowledgeable about popular culture (for a detailed exploration of the representation of gay men see chapter six).

Universal Parks & Resorts. In the case of *Queer Eye* conglomeration resulted in salary and ownership renegotiations, crosspromotional strategies, new reality shows, and greater profits in advertisements for Bravo. The series of mergers between NBC and Vivendi Universal Entertainment and later NBC and Bravo increased the number of products wanting to advertise in the show, the recipients of the makeovers, the public personalities promoted in *Queer Eye*, and in the products featured in the episodes. Additionally, synergistic practices such as the spin-off show *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*, the all day “marathons”, DVDs, “best of” shows help the conglomerate capitalize on loyal *Queer Eye* audiences, maximize the advertising revenues, and saturate the market with their message.

In the program consumption is naturalized with every act and idea. The role of the characters in *Queer Eye* is to create social needs and the narratives to satisfy those needs through consumption. Thus, materialism becomes an instrumental tool to solve family disputes, conciliate relationships, celebrate events, unite cultures, transcend phobias, and mark changes.

This chapter also looks at the role of advertising in the show and its impact in the representation of sexuality. *Queer Eye* featured traditional commercial breaks, product placements and endorsements. The brands advertising in the show targeted two key demographic groups, wealthy women and gay men. The product placements in the show included several fashion designers, furniture stores, professional services, technological gadgets, food markets and wine stores. The endorsements used the public recognition of the Fab to represent and sell the products features on the show. The strong commercial relationships between the characters, the plot and the brands is an important aspect of the analysis because it made *Queer Eye* a profitable property for Bravo and influenced the way sexual desire is represented. Importantly all of these advertising strategies also created commercial intertext and cross references between the brands, the show and the Five.

The next chapter looks more in detail at the representation of queer in the show. There is a strong relationship between the economic interests of the producers and the representation of sexuality on the show. Such relationship is supported by marketing research that suggests that producers, marketers and brands should not support

commercial messages with explicit homosexual imagery. Researchers claim that homosexual images result in negative reactions towards the message and the brand among those consumers that already have negative attitudes toward homosexuality (see by Bhat, Leigh and Wardlow; Oakenfull and Greenlee). Thus, the representation of sexuality in the show is intrinsically linked to the economic interests of producers, brands and the network. Chapter seven historicizes the evolution of the stereotypical performance of queer seen in the show.

CHAPTER 6

REPRESENTATION OF QUEER AND THE IMPACT ON THE QUEER PROJECT

“We are not cartoonish, and we’re not pretending to be supergay or superstraight or whatever. We’re just being ourselves. I’m not going to make any excuses for who I am, and I don’t think any of these guys are neither.”

Carson Kressley, Interview September 2, 2003 for *The Advocate*

“Even if we are embracing a stereotype that guys are effeminate or whatever, so what?”

Kyan Douglas Interview September 2, 2003 for *The Advocate*

This chapter addresses the third research question and looks at the representation of queer in the program *Queer Eye*. The show identifies the characters as queer; however, references to sexual desire are rare and only introduced to the plot in the form of flirtatious remarks or witty comments. Moreover, there is an androcentric bias in the show’s representation of queer. In this chapter I contend that sexual desire is conceptualized in *Queer Eye* in function of the heteronormative narrative discourse and the dominant systems of cultural production. The representation of queer in the show does little to advance the queer project and instead proposes queer as an identity.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. First, it discusses the stereotypical association of gay men with effeminacy, domestic pleasure, urban spaces, wit, and high fashion that is ever present in contemporary American culture. To show how pervasive this label is, this section looks at this stereotype in popular literature, film, marketing research and economic theory. Second, the chapter explores the representation of homosexuality in *Queer Eye*. Finally, the chapter reviews the many ways the program subverts the goals of the queer project. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the representation of gay men as humorous, asexual, affluent trendsetters is used to negotiate the boundaries between two distinct worlds –queer and straight. Far from contesting

heteronormativity, the Five's characterization embraces the economic agenda of the media industry, typifies homosexuality as asexual and supports hegemonic gender roles.

Representation of Gay Males in Contemporary American Culture

As noted earlier in the manuscript the representation of homosexuality in Contemporary American culture is quite complex and has been mediated by social, scientific, economic and political interest. Homosexuality has been represented as deviant, has been associated with illness (e.g. HIV/AIDS), has been informed by the medical discourse and has been the target of sensationalism. More superficially progressive characterizations of homosexuality have aligned sexual desire to high culture and consumption. *Queer Eye* is part of a tradition of representing gay men as cultured, witty, classy and lively. The representation of the main characters in *Queer Eye* is consistent with stereotypes presented in popular literature purchased by gay males; the portrayal of homosexual males in film; the marketing research that claims gay men are sophisticated, wealthy and trendsetters; and one urban economic theory.

In popular literature, books that target the gay male audience, such as *The Gay Man's Guide to Heterosexuality* and *The Unofficial Gay Manual, Living the Lifestyle*, use humor to challenge the heteronormative discourse and theorize sexuality. C.E. Crimmins and Tom O'Leary in *The Gay Man's Guide to Heterosexuality* pathologize heterosexuality and represent gay males as witty, ironic, and articulate. Much like *Queer Eye* the authors argue that the limits of heterosexuality lie in straight men's inability to: make an entrance, dance, paint ceilings of large churches, decorate, or dish (Crimmins and O'Leary 23). Kevin Dilallo and Jack Krumholtz use a similar tone in *The Unofficial Gay Manual, Living the Lifestyle* to depict the world of gay males as one with its own vocabulary, customs and rules, where men can cook, can arrange flowers, are good conversationalists, shop at designers shops, are thoughtful and "handy consultants for weddings, parties, decorating and wardrobe" (13).

Such representation of male homosexuality is also consistent with a history of representation of sexual desire in film that is still present today. In film, Russo identifies the performance of "the sissy" as the representation of the fragile feminine and comical

gay man. As noted in chapter two Russo explains that the origins of the sissy trace back to silent comedies when men often took women's roles as a device for an on screen joke. Russo says "early sissies were yardsticks for measuring the virility of the men around them" (16). For Russo, the image of the sissy helped construct a form of masculinity that told audiences that being a real man meant avoiding feminine qualities. Russo concedes that silent comedies allowed for more explicit representations of homosexual possibilities, but he argues that the characteristics of the genre profoundly influenced the reception, thus comic representations were never taken seriously as realistic options.

Russo also states that during the times of great censorship the image of the sissy served as an outlet for dissident ideas and to present an alternative truth (32). Filmmakers developed sophisticated strategies to avoid breaking the prohibitions of the time by using mannerisms and costumes to indicate a character's sexuality. Boney indicates that some signs for effeminacy used in film are running or walking in a manner traditionally viewed as delicate; having recognizable nonverbal mannerisms (e.g. crossing legs, holding arms, carrying books) and vocal cues (e.g. speech patterns, vocabulary, pitch), and engaging in activities historically reserved for young girls, such as playing with dolls, baking, sewing, and reading (40.) Although much has been written about these characterizations, the sissy continues to be present in contemporary American film (e.g. the 1996 film *The Birdcage*; the 1997 movie *In & Out*; the 2000 picture *Best in Show* and the 2006 film *The Devil Wears Prada*).

Marketers have also represented the gay⁶ community as a group of affluent and influential trendsetters. Several marketing companies such as Rivendell Media and Community Market Inc. specialize on gathering data for marketers about the gay and lesbian community. Researchers like Gillian K. Oakenfull and Timothy B. Greenlee argue that gay consumers have the highest purchasing power of any minority group in the United States (422).

Moreover, publications targeted at the LGBTQ community position the gay market as a group of well educated, trendsetters and a desirable group to reach. In a commentary for *The Advocate*, Bruce C. Steele explains, "It has been and untrumpeted

⁶ Importantly, the in the examples the authors (Oakenfull and Greenlee, *The Advocate*, Fejes, Florida) don't qualify the the term gay. However, their use of "gay" underscores the androcentric basis of the term (gay equals male, lesbian equals female).

truism for millennia that gays have been the trendsetters and style gurus of Western Culture, from Alexander the Great to Michelangelo to Andy Warhol” (43).

However, such representation of the gay market has been strongly scrutinized. Fred Fejes work, for example, is critical of marketing researchers, as he maintains that the research on the gay market has inaccurately represented the demographic profile of the community. He argues that the methodology used to gather the participants of such studies, primarily self identification, affects the validity of the data resulting in research that represents people that enjoy a greater sense of personal, professional and economic security that allows them to be open about their sexual orientation.

The narratives that associate the gay community with wealth are also echoed in Richard Florida’s economic theory known as the “creative capital theory.” Florida suggests that having a big gay population is one of the factors associated with the economic development of a city. Florida developed a “Creativity Index” that measures the relationship between the creative class share of the workplace and the economic growth of cities. According to Florida, the cities that achieve economic growth also attract the gay population and reflect tolerant environments that are conducive to creativity. Thus, Florida’s research also establishes a link between the gay community and wealth and creativity.

In sum, there is an ongoing narrative that associates gay males with urban spaces, a high socioeconomic status, cultural centers and high fashion. The message is consistent and comes from diverse media outlets. Moreover it is consistent with the representation of homosexuality presented in the makeover show *Queer Eye*.

Representation of Queer in *Queer Eye*

Lee Edelman indicates that as part of the heteronormative agenda there has been an interest to identify and define homosexuality. Heteronormativity has been used to describe heterosexual privilege, and the tendency to interpret heterosexuality as normative (Michael Warner). As noted earlier, queer theory looks at the discursive creation of sexuality. Edelman, for example maintains that both the homosexual advocate and the enforcer of homophobic norms insist upon the social importance of codifying and

registering sexual identities. “Homosexuals were not only conceptualized in terms of a radically potent, if negatively charged, relation to the signifying ability of language, they were also conceptualized as inherently textual- as bodies that might well bear a hallmark that could and must be read” (Edelman 1994, p. 6). He further writes that the process of representation of homosexuality as a subject of discourse and a cultural category about which one can think or speak or write, coincides with the process whereby the homosexual subject is represented as being even more than inhabiting a body that always demands to be read, a body on which his sexuality is always inscribed.

The title of the show, *Queer Eye*, identifies the main characters as queer however, neither the content, title or introduction of the show qualifies that label. Sexual desire is rarely discussed in the show. Although audiences learn that the characters are queer, the love interests of the Five are never shown on camera. Instead, the Five become queer texts, where homosexuality can be read and identified. The show reinforces the notion that homosexuality must be identified and inseparable from one’s identity.

Anna McCarthy in her essay, "Crab People from the Center of the Earth," uses the term “queer pedagogy” to explain the program’s mission of guiding or teaching consumers the complexities of developing good taste. Moreover, the Fab Five’s role as educators is to teach domesticity and facilitate heterosexual coupling thereby also reconstructing heteronormative gender roles. McCarthy further argues that this queer pedagogy is sexless, as the characters are not educating the public about homosexuality, but are instead the symbols of the emerging neoliberal gay subject. This type of representation, far from contesting heteronormativity, supports the normative and family-oriented formations associated with domestic partnership, and gender-normative social roles and actively embraces the economic agendas that privilege consumer rights over citizen rights.

The coding of the Fab Five as queer is problematic on several levels and subverts the goals of the queer project. First, it equates queer to male gay sexuality. Second, the representation of male homosexuality in the show is limited in scope, the characters are wealthy, flamboyant, hedonistic and prioritize style above any other value. Third, queer is represented in the show as asexual; the program completely censures sexual desire. Moreover, the show claims that the Fab are queer because they have an eye for

consumption. Four, the representation of queer in the show makes evident that gay men and straight men live in two very distinct worlds. Finally, the representation of queer is complicated by the flirtation between gay and straight characters. Ultimately, rather than challenge the centralization of heterosexuality, *Queer Eye's* representation helps institutionalize sexuality as an identity by claiming queer as a foundational identity that is in constant tension with hegemonic masculinity.

Queer equals gay male

Jane Pilcher and Imelda Wheelehan explain that queer theory questions ideas of normalcy, the notion of a fixed sexuality, and the direct association of sexual desire to the construction of the self. Queer offers a theoretical framework for the examination of the blurring boundaries of sexual desire, “a celebration of continuing marginality which then holds the ‘centre’ (heterosexuality) up for scrutiny” (129).

In appropriating the term “queer” activists and scholars proposed the use of an inclusive term that would challenge the binaries of sex and gender. The current use of the term queer, both in the media and in Bravo’s *Queer Eye*, fails to meet those goals. Teresa de Lauretis, an early supporter of the queer project, later distanced herself from it because for her, the term failed to counter the masculinist bias also inherent in the term gay. Also, other lesbian feminists like Terry Castle and Sheila Jeffreys also voiced their objections to queer.

Queer Eye uses the term queer to refer exclusively to gay males, weakening the political or critical value of the term as DeLaurentis predicted. Ironically, in an interview with *The Advocate*, Ted Allen explains, “There are a lot of people in the rest of the world that aren’t even familiar with the word queer being a positive word for us now... And being an inclusive word. We’ve had to explain that to so many straight reporters” (Giltz 42). Thus, there is a contrast between the show’s portrayal of queer, five gay men, and Ted’s description of the term.

Queer equals wealthy, cultured, vain, witty and effeminate gay men.

The show portrays a socioeconomic and cultural contrast between the gay and straight world. The fivesome, representing the gay world, have a high socioeconomic

status, easy access to cultural centers and high fashion. Moreover, Fab Five are effeminate and witty, the embodiment of “the sissy.”

First, the show represents gay men as wealthy, because they wear designer clothing, shop for groceries in high end specialty stores, and can afford monthly facials, tickets to the theater and designer furniture. For example, the Fab often appear in the show wearing clothing from high end designers like Roberto Cavalli and Gucci, and their makeovers include fashion from Ralph Lauren, Donna Karen, Dolce & Gabbana and Lacoste. Their access to wealth also makes them develop certain brand preferences. Thom on Episode 119 suggests that Saab is a brand of car preferred by gay males. Moreover, because of the Fab Five’s high socioeconomic status they have skills not available to those in other classes. For example in Episode 220, it is evident that straight men don’t learn how to tie a bowtie.

KYAN. Where is a gay man when you need it?

JAI. Can somebody send a gay man there?

CARSON. Thank God there was another gay man to save the day.

(Episode 220 “From the Doghouse to the Altar part 2: Joe”, December 7, 2005).

It is strongly suggested that because gay men have access to wealth and high culture (e.g. operas, symphonies, fundraisers), they possess important skills like knowing how to tie a bowtie. In the process of the makeover, the fivesome introduce straight men to a world where such skills are needed, and while they don’t disclose their working budget, David Metzler, producer of the show, explains, “It’s about giving the straight guy a starter kit he can move on from. A really nice starter kit”(Giltz 41).

Gay men in *Queer Eye* are portrayed as being knowledgeable culture. Gay men’s dominance in certain professions, for example, is reinforced in Episode 119. In this Episode, the Fab are skeptical of Warren’s sexuality given his profession, musical theatre composer. During that Episode Thom noted, “I cannot believe Warren is not gay and this is what he does for a living.”

The show also represents gay men as avid consumers of popular culture. Carson often makes many references to events and characters of popular culture. For example, Carson alludes to the 1981 film *Mommie Dearest*, starring Jane Crawford, when he mentions “What are these? These are wire hangers. What did JC said? No wire hangers

EVER!” (Carson DVD). When talking about look-alikes, he mentions, “People say I look like Ellen DeGeneres” (Carson DVD). Also, while revealing the newly purchased clothing for the straight guy Carson notices, “This still has a security tag on, which is not a good look usually, it is a little too Winona Ryder for my taste” thus making a reference to the 2001 arrest of Ryder (actress) for shoplifting from a high end store in Beverly Hills, California (Carson DVD). In another episode Carson clarifies, “It is a very old tuxedo, I can tell because the lapel it’s definitely Nixon Administration” (Episode 153). In Episode 212, Carson declares, “It’s Glamorosa” making reference to Omarosa from the NBC reality television show, *Apprentice Two*. Importantly, the references to popular culture often allude, perhaps not so incidentally, to other NBC properties.

Third, gay men are represented as vain. This is best seen during Episode 101, when Kyan is seen alone in the bathroom totally immersed with himself, while the other characters are talking with the new participant. Besides narcissistically looking at himself on the mirror, Kyan is also seen later lifting weights without any interaction with any of the other characters.

Fourth, gay men are witty and effeminate. Carson, the “fashion guru” and the most emblematic character on *Queer Eye*, epitomizes these two characteristics. Carson’s contributions during the episodes get more airtime than the other four characters. He is consistently witty, flamboyant and performs the stereotype of the sissy. He uses phrases like “Shopping is my cardio!” or “TSZUJING” the style. He fits Boney’s description of the cinematic “sissy,” as he is the type of character that screams on a high pitch when he finds clothing on wire hangers. He goes into hysterical breakouts when talking about shoes. When he is photographed next to the Fab he has a pink detail on his attire, because it is his favorite color. He moves his hands while talking and jumps up and down with excitement when he buys new outfits. Carson works the catwalk with the latest couture, uses bold colors, low collars, and half bottom shirts. Moreover he is portrayed as the most effeminate one in the group, as seen on Episode 302, while talking about the hormone therapy of Miles, a female to male transsexual.

TED. He [Miles] was born a woman but he identifies more as a man.

KYAN. Just like Carson.

And later in the same episode:

CARSON. My God... he has bigger muscles than I have. It's the testosterone.

Let's go do some... I can use some.

TED. Could you make Carson butch?

MILES. I don't know if anybody can make Carson Butch.

(Episode 302 "Trans-form this Trans-man: Miles G.," August 1, 2006)

Carson is a vital character in the show because his wit allows for the negotiation of boundaries between all the characters. For example, in Episode 215, the Fab complete a makeover for the members of a Moose Fraternity. The Episode showcases images of an almost naked 50 year old man being plucked, waxed and sprayed with an airbrush tanning system. Carson describes the scene as "Another day at the auto body," thus making an ironic remark about masculinity. In this case humor is used to negotiate a space for straight and queer interaction where both participants and audiences can feel comfortable with a gay man making remarks about the body of a straight man.

Queer as Asexual

In the show, being queer is stripped of any type of sexual desire. Although the five main characters have been coded as queer, the object of their affection is never visually represented in the stories. Occasionally, the Fab mention their love interests during interviews but never in the show. Also, during Episode 218, "Bringing out the Inner Fab," the Fab give a makeover to a gay man. The Fab Five agree that Jeff, the participant, has problems meeting guys, so they decide to set him up on a blind date as part of the makeover. However, during the day Jeff and his date are only alone for a brief moment, and there is no physical contact or intimate moments between them. Even though the program suggests the possibility of same sex romance, audiences only see fraternal relationships between self identified gay men. Their sexualities are stripped from their source of "deviance" and instead their queerness is defined by their consumption, movements, language and intonation.

Queer as a separate world

Edward Soja argues that spatiality is socially constructed and makes a distinction between physical and mental space. The author indicates that space is more than physical or mental constructs, but a medium for the production and reproduction of ideology.

Moreover, he questions the possibility of natural spaces as he argues that physical spaces are always mediated and never organic. This understanding of space is important as we explore alternative forms of resistance. If space is socially constructed it can be appropriated and reconstructed to serve the specific needs of socially silenced groups.

In the case of *Queer Eye* the program's conceptualization of space adds to the notion that the queer world is one separate from the straight world. After each makeover, the Fab retreat to a loft where they evaluate the results of the makeover. The loft is marked as a separate queer space where only gays gather. The Five meet alone at a spacious well decorated loft in Manhattan where they drink theme beverages and eat while evaluating from the distance the failures and success of the straight world.

In many episodes Carson uses his wit to reinforce hetero/homo distinctions by talking about two separated worlds. For example, "Who knew you could get all this stuff at a fly fishing store? Look at these pink feathers. What do your people use this for? My people would use it to decorate shoes or perhaps a festive Tiara" (DVD "The Best of Carson").

The separation of these two parallel worlds is never more evident than during Episode 218. As part of the introduction of the episode, the fivesome must guess who, out of five roommates, is the one that is gay. In order to achieve this task they start by examining all the bedrooms in the apartment looking for gay clues. The Five identify as gay clues art books, plants, books by Oscar Wilde, nice sheets on the bed and women's clothing. Heterosexual cues are a baseball glove, a soccer ball and a bike helmet. Hence, reinforcing the idea that gays are cultured and interested in the arts while straight men are interested in sports. Moreover, during this Episode, the "make better engineers" conduct a gay trivia test. The test reinforces all of the stereotypes mentioned above and represents gay males as witty, vain, fashion oriented and savvy pop culture consumers. Moreover, it shows that all these categories often overlap.

Table A. Gay Trivia Test. Episode 218 “Bringing out the Inner Fab,” June 27, 2006

DIALOGUE	QUEER PREMISES
KYAN. One should have a facial every __ week?	Queers are vain.
JAI. Name all the characters on the <i>Golden Girls</i> .	Queers are avid consumers of Popular Culture.
THOM. This one has sassy jeans and a lesbian shoe but this one has gay shoes and underwear.	Queers are vain. Queers are male (not lesbians). Queers are vain.
CARSON. Final question who is better Cher or Madonna? (Jeff chooses Madonna)	Queers are avid consumers of Popular Culture.

The test concludes with Carson noting “(you are gay) and you don’t like Cher, I have to teach you a thing or two”(Episode 218). Thus, the implication that there is a rigid script that guides conduct and informs preferences associated with one’s sexual desire.

Queer Leads to Complicated Flirtations

In the show, the Fab Five occasionally flirt with the straight men. Rob’s Episode 120 is particularly interesting in that there were many playfully sexual overtures. During the introduction, when it is mentioned that Rob is a telephone engineer and a aspiring photographer, Jai asks, “Does he climbs the poles?” and Carson replies, “No that’s our job.” Later, Carson ponders, “Do you think he will want to do a nude of us?” When evaluating the furniture at Rob’s house, Thom muses, “He must only see his penis when he looks at himself in the mirror.” Also, even Ted directly asks Rob, “Do women dig it during sex?” in reference to his dreadlocks.

Carson’s performance of the sissy opens a space for flirtatious remarks with the straight characters. Being a sissy allows him to make comments such as “These are things that I pulled when thinking about you (when talking about images and color pallets) I pulled some other things too, but we are not going to get into that” or “Have you ever had a man undress you?” or “What does Tina have that I don’t?...besides a working Vagina” (Carson DVD). Also, in Episode 229 when at the gym he shouts, “Everyone drop your

balls.” Carson can enter spaces that are censured for gay/straight interaction because he is a sissy, but also because of the silliness and naughtiness of his interventions.

During Episode 120 Carson comments, “Just for the giggle instead of having Terry [the girlfriend] have me for dinner.” In fact, Carson’s sexual remarks toward Rob in Episode 120 were so frequent that Kyan steps in to protect Rob.

CARSON. So this is a really important night. The two most important women in your life are going to be in one room together.

ROB. You know they have been there when I was down they have watched me come up...

CARSON. (*while laying on his chest*) Oh daddy keep talking.

ROB. (*looking at Kyan*) Are you going to help me?

KYAN. I am here... the code word is zucchini if this gets a little too weird just say zucchini and I will get him off you.

And later in the same episode:

CARSON. (*in front of a mirror outside the dressing room*) Any of these soft pastels are going to look great on you cause you have that beautiful brown cocoa skin color I am so fond of.

Carson enters the dressing room with Rob and while closing the door comments,

CARSON. I thought I tried something on too.

ROB. zucchini, zucchini, zucchini

CARSON. Let’s try something new.... Let’s go make out

ROB. Ok...Zucchini

KYAN. I am right here

(Episode 120 “Meeting Mildred: Rob M.,” March 16, 2003)

Moreover, at the end of this Episode while the Fab 5 watch the video with the results of the makeover, Thom observes, “Carson is getting turned on, I can see it in his eyes.” Furthermore, when Rob’s girlfriend saw the results of the makeover, she notes, “I love them more than I love you right now.” Kyan quips, “You will not have much of a sex life.” In this Episode, humor is used to clearly demark the boundaries between acceptable and uncomfortable flirtation.

To some degree the interaction between the Fab Five and the straight characters is a progressive step in two major ways. First, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported in 2006 1,425 hate crimes offenses targeted at gay males, *Queer Eye* represents nonviolent relationships between straight and gay men. Second, the censorship of verbal and nonverbal public displays of affection between gay males made the program more accessible to heterosexual audiences with negative perceptions of homosexuality. Not so incidentally, the representation of the five main characters has even helped the main characters negotiate their sexuality with their conservative families. For example, during an interview with *AfterElton.com*, Ted states:

The funny thing about *Queer Eye* with my family, most of which is southern and conservative and votes very badly. When I told my parents I was doing the show, they were of course completely appalled and terrified. They thought I was going to get killed and they hated the title. And then, about a month after the show started airing and it was such a hit, A, they loved the show against all odds, but B, it was a real gift for my mother because none of my relatives will ever again ask her why I'm not married or don't have a girlfriend.

This example shows how the representation of queer in *Queer Eye* helped families deal with the social (e.g. marginalization and prejudice) and physical consequences of coming out (e.g. hate crimes).

However, it is important to note that the representation has progressive elements because the interactions between the Fab Five and the straight characters are coded as humorous and are not meant to be taken seriously and because queer is represented as asexual. Moreover, when one of the five crosses the line (e.g. Carson's flirtation with Rob) there are four other characters to police that interaction (e.g. Kyan's zucchini code). Thus, the representation of sexuality is consistent with a tradition of representation that reinforces common stereotypes rather than challenge conceptions of homosexuality in American culture.

Discussion

Queer Eye is not reflective of the diversity of the gay and lesbian community but rather reinforces for common stereotypes. Far from satirizing or contesting the structures

of power, the show is instead a place for the reproduction of institutionalized heteronormativity. The humorous interventions of the characters in *Queer Eye* gives the program its charm, making it a successful property for Bravo. However, it does little to advance the LGBTQ political agenda. Indeed, the show reinforces heteronormative power relationships, as the Five gay men are at the service of heterosexual men and heterosexual romance.

The increased visibility of queer individuals like the Fab Five is consistent with a history of representation that equates male homosexuality to effeminacy. The representation of gay men in *Queer Eye* serves two main purposes. First, to create a non-threatening space for interactions with heterosexuals, by representing the flamboyant, clever and asexual image of the sissy. Second, to further the myth of the affluent homosexual with sophisticated tastes. The Fab Five serve as tools from the consumer market to institutionalize forms of consumption while supporting heterosexual privilege.

Susan Sontag, in her 1964 article "Notes on 'Camp,'" described camp as "the love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric -- something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques." The major strength of Sontag's account of camp is both the evocative detail of her description and the insistence of conceptualizing it as a mode of aestheticism. Sontag describes camp as an aesthetic phenomenon seen in clothing, furniture, visual décor, art, texture, irony, and satire. As stated by Sontag "Camp introduces a new standard: artifice as an ideal, theatricality."

Rhonda Garelick criticism of Sontag states, "Sontag's essay seemed to authorize the use of "camp" as an adjective for objects, artworks, and styles seen merely as ironic -- to be appreciated for their retro-charm, their nostalgia or their flamboyance -- but not necessarily as political gestures." Moreover, David Bergman is also among the authors that have distanced themselves from the work of Sontag. Bergman explains that camp must exist in tension with popular, commercial and consumerist culture (5). Similarly, Moe Meyer denounces Sontag's depoliticization and commercialization of the term, and criticizes its categorization as "an unqueer bourgeois subject under the banner of pop" (10).

The flamboyant wit, and camp performance of Carson (to some extent in all of the Five Fab) helps negotiate the boundaries of their interaction with the straight male

characters. Carson's camp performance incorporates harmless forms of flirtation and serves as a measurement against or contrast to the hegemonic masculinity of the straight characters. Much like Sontag's, Carson's camp performance is completely depoliticized and commercialized and helps reinforce society's association between sexuality and aestheticism.

In *Queer Eye*, the Five serve as mediators of what they claim to be real and symbolic separation of the two worlds, gay and straight. Interestingly these two distinct worlds, with different language, customs and skills have one thing in common, an absence of females. In the next chapter I discuss the representation of masculinity and femininity in the show.

CHAPTER 7

THE CONSTRUCTION MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

“For the very first time, the Fab Five rush in to help straight guys with the most important decision and event of their lives – marriage.”
Andrew Cohen, Bravo, Vice President of Production and Programming
Press release October 11, 2005 NBC Media Village

Broken furniture, a dirty bathroom, a messy house: are these indicative of heterosexuality? According to *Queer Eye* they are. This chapter addresses the fourth research question posed in chapter two, how is the program constructing narratives of masculinity and femininity? I present, in turn, a brief introduction to general understanding of masculinity, in order to examine its representation in the program. Second, the chapter looks at the construction of femininity and its relationship with the representation of femininity. Third, I contend that the show's representation of gender reinforces the heterosexual romance plot.

The Representation of Masculinity in the Show

Hegemony, a term that originates from Gramsci's work, is used to define the process by which a dominant social group uses persuasion to sustain power. Masculinity refers to the social/cultural practices and representation of men. Hegemonic masculinity, according to RW Connell, refers to the patterns of practice and political relations that legitimize patriarchy and the dominance of men over women. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is heavily dependent on a historical context. However, currently the dominant ideal of masculinity, in contemporary American society, is associated with strength, authority, emotional control, heterosexuality and paid work (Pilcher and Whelehan).

Masculinity is not related to sex or biology. Connell explains that our general understanding of gender, and therefore masculinity, is constituted through discourse and practice (e.g. labor, violence, sexuality, etc.). Although, Connell has been critical of

research that heavily relies on discourse to analyze masculinity, he also explains that an analysis of discourse gives great insight into the production of social realities (Connell). In the case of *Queer Eye*, discourse analysis is the most appropriate tool to explore the ways that the representation of masculinity has found a perfect partnership with the market of consumer goods. The text inscribes itself within a multiplicity of meanings that both reinforce and challenge popular conceptions of hegemonic masculinity.

Consistent with current notions of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexual males are depicted in *Queer Eye* as unconcerned with fashion, hygiene, domesticity or sophistication. Hegemonic masculinity is often represented as rough, boorish, and even in some cases brute. Although the main character and the object of the transformation, in most cases, share the same sex, masculinity in *Queer Eye* is associated with heterosexuals, and it is presented in direct contrast to being queer.

Men are made over because they don't know how to manage their natural smells, they have general problems cleaning their homes, and have particular difficulties managing their laundry. Moreover, cleaning and folding laundry are especially challenging for heterosexual men, thus often their clothing appears to be piled up on the floor. In the area of home design, men don't know how to choose wall colors, decorations or discern proper ways to use space. Their clothing is not sophisticated and they have limited wardrobes. Finally, men need help in the area of romance, because most amazingly they tend to view evenings of tailgating, a trip to the diner or a night at the sports bar as acceptable date plans for women.

Jane Pilcher reviews the development of domestic labor, and shows that for centuries women had had primary responsibility for the management and performance of the household. Not so surprisingly, even with the emergence of "cooperative couples" (where both partners of heterosexual couples contribute to the household) woman still spend more time on domestic tasks than men. Virginia Valian quotes data that shows that in most heterosexual marriages, there is an unequal division of labor at home. Moreover, Valian explains that most married men and women see nothing wrong the unequal division and perceive it to be fair even when "the wives do close to 60 percent of the work" (40).

Not so surprisingly then, *Queer Eye* represents heterosexual men as uninvolved and uninterested in domestic tasks. In the show, straight men lack fashion sense, cooking skills, cleaning habits and decorating taste, thus they need a gay aesthetic to be more desirable to prospective mates or more successful in their current marriages. The show proposes that gay men can understand a feminine aesthetic that heterosexual men can't. It was this premise that originated the show. David Collins in an interview for *Adweek* explains,

It's actually a Boston story. I was at South End open [artists'] studios two years ago. My buddy and I were there, and I went into a gallery where a woman was completely destroying her husband. She was criticizing his outfit, and she kept pointing to three guys drinking wine in the corner who were completely decked out. Before I knew what had happened, they went over and surrounded the guy and protected him from [his wife]. They came to his defense and started to make him over and give him advice—they were trying to help him! As we were walking down the stairs, laughing, I said "That was kind of like the queer eye for the straight guy!" Kind of like *Reservoir Dogs* meets *Charlie's Angels*. It was from that line that I went back to Scout and developed the idea for the show (Lisa van der Pool 36).

Interestingly, Collins story reflects the implicit misogyny present in the show. In Collins story the woman is “completely destroying her husband” by giving him fashion advice. Thus she is condemned for it. But the guys in the same story are perceived positively as protectors, the saviors, the “*Charlie's Angels*.” Collins anecdote is particularly revealing because the same premise carries over into the overall concept of the show. The advice is taken seriously because it is men (not nagging wives or girlfriend) providing it.

For the creators of the program, the goal of *Queer Eye* is to introduce straight men to a new perspective, one they lacked. In many ways the show is conceptualized as part of a commentary of hegemonic masculinity. For *Queer Eye* straight men are unclean, unsophisticated and in need of serious help. Thus, let's start by discussing some of the general themes observed in *Queer Eye's* representation of hegemonic masculinity.

Cleanliness, Personal Hygiene and Smells

In the program heterosexuality is depicted as being synonymous with bad smells, dirtiness and messiness. During Episode 120, Kyan comments, “Look at this, (bathroom) is filthy. This is a blanket of filth.” Also, on Episode 101 the Fab Five feel repulsed by the conditions of Brian’s apartment. Thom, the designer is particularly vocal, “Oh my grossness...it looks like if you were to sit here, other than getting crabs, you would get scoliosis.” Later he tells Brian that his apartment suggests he is nuts and adds, “If you were not here to represent yourself I would think that ok we pretty much we found it and I will call the police.”

Masculinity and untidiness are treated as synonyms in the show. Often in the show the straight character’s expectation is that females, not males, are responsible for housekeeping and cleaning. For Example, during Episode 127, the program portrays the inability of the Twins – Brandon and David- to keep the place clean. At the first stage of the show, when the Fab Five are evaluating the house for the makeover, all of the main characters articulate their disapproval of the conditions of the apartment.

TED. This is a big place, it’s just really dirty. You don’t need me to tell you that this is really dirty?

DAVID. Yeah, I am just trying to get Helen [the girlfriend] to do it.

TED. (*laughs*) You should wrestle her for it.

Later in the Episode, after Thom discovers that David has a plastic bottle full with urine next to the bed to avoid walking to the bathroom, the following dialogue ensues.

THOM. Do you know that your brother pees in his room?

BRANDON. He is an animal.

THOM: (*to Jai*) I can’t do anything for these people.

JAI. It’s just gross.

And later, as the Fab and the twins drive to the furniture store, they continue.

THOM. Let me ask you a question. What does your family think about the [living] standards of your house? They are at the very minimum for human survival.

DAVID. My mom said my room was nice.

CARSON. Does she have a German Shepherd and a cane?

(Episode 127 “Taking on The Twins: Brandon and David,” June 1, 2004)

Also related to cleanliness, masculinity is also associated with bad smells. In some cultures to overcome body odors, especially for men, is considered unnatural; however, for *Queer Eye*, the natural body odor of men is characterized as something negative that must be addressed as part of the makeover. Carson complains about Brian’s odor (also known by his nickname Butch) on Episode 101, “I am starting to smell like Butch, my clothes are taking up his fragrance.” During Episode 119 several comments are made in regards to the smell of Warren and his apartment. Jai comments, “There is a really distinctive strong man scent in your place” in reference to Warren’s bedroom. In both examples, the Fab’s nonverbal gestures indicate that absorbing and smelling the odors is an unpleasant experience. Also, when discussing James’ clothing during Episode 123 Carson says, “Your house smells because you had the dog poop everywhere, but also because your shirts are gamey.” Kyan later confirms Carson’s observation by noting, “Something in here smells really bad” (Episode 123). The fivesome also noted a distinct "dirty laundry" smell at the Twins home on Episode 127.

KYAN. What is that smell?

BRANDON. It’s the old house smell

KYAN. No. It’s the dirty sheets, dirty laundry, I never take a bath, smell.

(Episode 127 “Taking on The Twins: Brandon and David,” June 1, 2004)

This representation of masculinity as unclean and inept is indicative of a perceived antagonism between masculinity and domesticity. The Fab Five reinforce the expectation that straight men are unconcerned with cleanliness, and the Fab are surprised when straight men do domestic chores. For example during Episode 127, Ted in admiration notes, “They are wiping up the sink. These are straight men wiping off the sink.” Beyond disregarding the need for housecleaning and personal hygiene, the straight men are also incompetent in a variety of household chores that range from ironing to selecting dinner plates. Thus, reinforcing the idea that straight men don’t clean or engage in domestic tasks. Consider this exchange in Episode 123, Carson asks,

CARSON. Do you launder these wrinkled old shirts?

JAMES. No.

CARSON. Do you wear them wrinkled?

JAMES. Yeah. I have no idea how to iron.

(Episode 123 “Training Day: James M.,” March 23, 2004)

During Episode 220, the Fab help Joe and Laura plan nuptials and get married. In the Episode, Thom and Ted, with help Joe and Laura, select the serving plates and dinner ware for the party. Even though they ask Joe for his opinion, his choice is not very well received. Ted and Laura reject Joe’s recommendation and accept Thom’s advice. Ted, acknowledging the irony of the situation, comments, “We gave Joe one very important decision, the desert fork!” Later when Carson asks the bride, “Are you doing most of the work?” she responds, “Well on his defense most of the work is women’s stuff.” During Episode 220 the narrative of the show continuously reinforces the notion that tasks can be divided by gender and men are unconcerned and incapable with household chores and wedding planning. Even though Joe is present when the Five make decisions about the wedding, his opinions are ignored because his masculinity makes him inept in this area.

Unsophisticated and Boorish

Heterosexual men are also represented as being unsophisticated. Consistent with the narrative mentioned in the previous chapter, straight and gay men live in separate worlds. Straight men need help with their style choices as well as their manners. Often, Carson’s goal as a stylist, and self identified fashion connoisseur, is to bring more sophistication to the men. In Episode 119 Carson states, “There is your next costume.” Thus, there is an acknowledgement that the style of dress, including accessories, is imposed and correspond to the style of another person. The transformation gives cosmopolitanism to a very primitive masculinity that is often represented.

A great example of this barbaric, primitive masculinity is Episode 127. The Twins like to use wrestling, as opposed to dialogue, to resolve conflicts and express affection. During the Episode they wrestle with each other on several occasions and even include the Fab in some of their fights. This form of expression is so removed to the Five that they struggle relating to the twins. This is evident when Jai asks the twins, “Let’s see some wrestling moves... Oh wait don’t kill each other (nervously) you are both pretty.”

Or when Carson while shopping for the twins new wardrobe comments, “Oh my god, you can’t wrestle in the store...Please don’t wrestle while wearing couture.” The twins wrestling is a representation of a crude masculinity that is consistent with the ideal that men are tough.

Repairing Masculinity

Importantly, the fivesome identify a heterosexual masculinity that is in need of repair. Although the program reinforces male privilege--in their representation of straight men disengaged in unpaid household work—the Fab Five’s characterization also challenges hegemonic masculinity in the way they establish areas that must be transformed. The problem, however, is that the subversiveness of their actions ends after they successfully identify the need for change. The Five highlight the incompetence of heterosexual masculinity by presenting images of dirty living spaces, bad hygiene, and poor cooking skills; however, their solution is usually destruction and consumption, as opposed to ethical environmental solutions or a critical evaluation of the way men are socialized. The Five’s answer to the undesirable characteristics is always disposal and materialism. For example, in Episode 119 Warren takes off his sweater to try on new clothing, Carson’s smells it and throws it away; the solutions to bad smells is immediate disposal, as opposed to cleaning the garment. During Episode 123 James’ gamey smell is also alleviated when the Fab purchased a new wardrobe, again disposal. The Fab’s response to a rough, boorish, or brute masculinity? New furniture and a visit to the spa. The Fab’s solution a filthy kitchen? All new stainless steel GE appliances.

Yes, for the Fab Five, reconstructing this rough and tough masculinity means introducing straight men to new products and services. On Episode 213, the Five throw David a bachelor party that includes a fashion show on how to buy lingerie for your partner, a lesson on how to make a real Martini, a beautification kit that includes a manicure set, and accessories for shaving and skincare. Or consider Episode 119 where Kyan’s mission is to get Warren relaxed and ready for the showing of his play and to do something about his unsightly nails and cuticles. First, Kyan takes Warren to a spa for a hot stone massage. Back in the apartment, Kyan introduces a whole new line of products Warren has to incorporate to his routine: an exfoliating cleanser, a moisturizing cream

and a product to help him stop biting his nails. The Fab solutions never include brainstorming over a problem at hand. Thus in this episode Kyan never discusses a range of possible solutions to Warren's stress. Indeed uncostly solutions are never offered. Instead, the Fab Five consistently offer one solution, consumption.

Undeniably, the Fab Five are driven by corporate interests. Instead of articulating ways men can help with unpaid household work the Fab replace all the objects in their environment. Thus, the quintet reinforces hegemonic masculinity by presenting consumption as an alternative to domesticity.

The Problem is Masculinity, not Biological Sex or Sexuality

During Episode 302, Miles, a FtM transsexual, asks for a makeover that will help him learn how to dress and groom his new body. In the description of the show on the *Queer Eye* website, the producers comment, "Isn't it ironic that when Miles needs to learn how to be a real honest-to-goodness man, five gay men come to his rescue?" This episode helps demonstrate that it is gender – the social construction of heterosexual men- and not the biological male sex that needs repair. In the episode, Kyan rifles through Miles bathroom toiletry and notes, "Oh my god this is as sloppy as most." In this Episode the Fab Five must come to the rescue because the products in the bathroom cabinet suggest that Miles' performance of heteronormative masculinity is too good and therefore like straight men, Miles' masculinity is in need of repair.

During the Episode, the Five give insight into what it means to be a man. For example, Kyan, in Episode 302, explains to Miles the importance of grooming, "Most guys haven't had any training from their fathers so I got you everything you need to get you started. In terms of shaving, your beard is your trophy so you don't want to shave it off so I got you a trimmer." Later, in that same Episode, Carson explains the basics of style, "What I wanted to go through is everything a guy needs in his wardrobe. It's wardrobe 101." During his lesson, Carson explains the importance of cashmere and jeans in men's lives, "Jeans are like the UPS men they should always give you a nice package." Carson closes his lecture by adding, "The beauty of men's wear is that is not really complicated. Keep it simple and look for quality."

In the case of Jeff on Episode 218, a gay man who needs a makeover, the goal of the Fab Five is to help him reconstruct his identity, as he is too masculine for his sexuality. Ted pointedly articulates the problem “We have Jeff. He is a gay men trapped in a very straight world.” According to the Fab, Jeff lives in a straight world because he lives with four straight guys in a straight neighborhood, he likes politics and sports, he wears collegiate T-Shirts and his culinary skills come from a microwave cookbook. On Episode 218 the Fab Five’s mission is to bring out the inner Fab in Jeff.

In both cases Miles and Jeff needed the help of the Fab for their incorporation to everyday life. For Miles, his masculinity, represented by his disregard for details or adornment, makes him a perfect candidate for the makeover. For Jeff, his masculinity is an impediment to his adaptation to gay life, thus reinforcing the distinction between masculinity and homosexuality.

The Representation of Femininity in the Show

For Judith Butler, gender is a performance, an interpretation, a representation of the social understandings and roles associated with one’s sex. Drawing on Butler, this section looks to establish the homologues between how sexuality and femininity are established in the show. In the program being queer and being feminine are analogous.

Julia Wood explains that there are two distinct notions of femininity in 21st Century America. Wood argues that while one version associates femininity to nonsexist environments, professional success and egalitarian marriages, the cultural expectations of femininity reinforce a thin ideal, the importance of appearance and beauty, the role of the caregiver, a devaluation of women’s contributions and an expectation to balance homemaking, motherhood and a career. Virginia Valian also notes that the cultural expectation is for femininity to be associated with being nurturing, expressive and concerned about others (13).

In *Queer Eye* the makeover is usually a result of the interest of a wife or a girlfriend, however, the women are rarely present or consulted. The show argues that gay males and feminine women share similar aesthetic values. However, women lack the authority to address them. Even though females often see the same problems as the Fab

Five (e.g. bad hygiene, bad grooming, messy house) they are rendered incapable of solving the problems or advising men.

Interchangeable Concepts, Queer and Feminine

In the program the presence of the Fab Five replaces the need for biological women because the sexuality of the Fab gives them insight into femininity. For example, in Episode 213 when the Five are planning a wedding for David and Maria, Carson chooses a fuchsia dress for the bride without any input from her.

In the area of domesticity the Five are able to identify the messiness of a house, the bad odors of a room and the need for better skills in the kitchen. Ted's effeminacy and domesticity becomes useful when participants need to choose new dinnerware (e.g. Episode 119), need to choose new pots and cooking utensils (e.g. Episodes 218 and 302) or have to learn how to cook (e.g. Episodes 120, 127 and 151).

Additionally, gay men understand the way women feel, hence they claim as experts in the art of courting women. As in the case of Episode 123 when Jai explains to James, "Women often long to be touched in a sensual way rather than sexual. I am a big fan of the thumb on the lower back." Thus, implying that he knows what women like because homosexuality somewhat inexplicably gives insight into female arousal, the fivesome can also provide advice on the areas of grooming and style. As in Episode 151 when Kyan helps the participant choose a new fragrance. In this example, Kyan's femininity makes him an expert in the type of fragrances that women are attracted to.

Queerness helps men understand how females use space and therefore gay man can redesign living areas. This last point is best illustrated by Thom when he says, "I think this is where Taebee wants you to go." Thom's femininity also gives him insight into feminine preferences, hence he can choose wall colors, and furnishings. In sum, straight women are represented as passive beneficiaries of the makeover; their presence during the makeover is not needed because the Fab's performance of femininity is accurate. However, this last point is complicated further by the quintet reactions to strong women who defy hegemonic gender roles.

The fivesome often are intimidated by matriarchal figures. In Episode 213 David's mother Joyce voices concerns about the spiritual path of her potential grandchildren if her son pursues an interfaith marriage. Joyce is not apologetic or

particularly polite in expressing her opinions. Jai comments on David's mother Joyce, "That is Joyce. That is whom I am scared of." Later Ted confirms, "Jai is afraid of Joyce."

Virginia Valian notes that culturally women are perceived negatively when they are too confident. The author explains that women are expected to be cooperative, polite and participative, rather than assertive or demanding (134-135). Thus, Valian explains Jai's fear of Joyce as well as the Five fear of Mildred in Episode 120.

CARSON. Who is this Mildred person?

TED. Mildred is his godmother, she is very protective.

KYAN. Here is the deal, his mother died when he was young and she probably feels a great responsibility to look out for him she is very critical of the women in his life.

KYAN. She is clearly the matriarch of the family.

TED. I would not mess with her

(Episode 120 "Meeting Mildred: Rob M.," March 23, 2007)

Any females showcasing masculine characteristics (e.g. assertiveness in *Queer Eye*) are seen as an oddity or an intimidating figure because the main role of the Fab is to come to the rescue of women who have been reduced incapable of reforming masculinity.

The Superheroes of Bad Taste

The program representation of the Fab as well as Collin's description of the show suggests that straight women are incapable of addressing the "problems areas" of straight men. Females must rely on *Queer Eye*. Thus, the primary roles of women in the show are to call for help and then later to admire results. For example during Episode 127, the women in the show identified some of the same problems of the Fab. In the Episode the Fab explain that the twins need a makeover because their house is filthy, they have holes in the walls from wrestling, and they have horrible hygiene. The sister and mother of the participants point out the same problems in the confessional bits.

SISTER. They are very gross... In terms of style they have none.

MOTHER. What can I say; I have failed as a mother.

And later in the Episode they add,

SISTER. The place has an eternal “frat boy” feeling.

MOTHER. They make an attempt to keep it [the apartment] neat but it just doesn't happen.

(Episode 127 “Taking on The Twins: Brandon and David,” June 1, 2004)

A similar occurrence can be seen in Episode 212, when Danny's sister complains, “His style is polyester... definitely eccentric” (Episode 212). Of course, unlike Danny's sister Carson is able to actually rid Danny's closet of the offensive peach color polyester suits. In both examples the women in the lives of the participants can identify the same problems, but the show comes across as nagging wives, sisters and girlfriends. The Fab are needed to come to the rescue of these families. The Five become the superheroes of bad taste because of women's incompetence in achieving results. This last point, I believe, reinforces why the Fab are more comfortable with passive women than matriarchs. Passive women admire the Five's work while assertive or strong women implicitly question the need for the Fab Five's intervention.

Heterosexual Reproductive Romance

An overwhelming majority of the all *Queer Eye* episodes support a romance plot as opposed to professional advancement. In two thirds of the episodes in my sample, the goal of the makeover is to make the straight men more desirable to women. The Fivesome help straight men: find a date with a girlfriend (e.g. Episode 101), plan a romantic date (e.g. Episode 123), propose (e.g. Episode 151), get married (e.g. Episode 213), or have a second honeymoon (e.g. Episode 226).

The presence of a heterosexual romantic interest is a key part of the overall narrative of each episode. For example, in Episode 123 James says, “Whenever I see her my heart melts” when talking about his girlfriend Taebee. *Queer Eye's* heavy reliance on a romance plot can be seen in the characters' continued fascination with the rituals and narratives of romance, most evident in the season three, the wedding season.

Season three is characterized by the mysticism of heterosexual marriage. Matrimony is represented as an ethereal event. For example, during Episode 220, the cameras zoom into the faces of fascination of the Fab Five as they enter the church. In Episode 206 the Fab helped Joe proposed after 10 years in a committed relationship and

later in Episode 220 the Five organized the wedding. During Episode 205, the five coordinate a surprise wedding for a couple. In Episode 213 they put together an interfaith wedding. In Episode 235 the quintet organizes a ceremony in Las Vegas. In sum, throughout the season the Fab celebrate heterosexual unions and even jokingly Thom in Episode 220 proposes to the bride that at the next makeover “we will be doing your baby shower.”

In keeping with the romance plot, *Queer Eye* episodes focus on dating or wedding planning, only on rare occasion do viewers see the next step of the heterosexual storyline, children. Indeed, only two of the episodes studied included children in the makeover. It is worth noticing that in a program with such strong heteronormative agenda there is a general absence of children. Perhaps this is because the typical understanding of the romance plot is that it ends with marriage and alludes to a happily ever after.

Interestingly the Fab Five only have experience with marriages from a theoretical level. In most states homosexual couples can't get married. Thus, the idea that gay men are experts in weddings is of course not a personal but rather professional experience. As noted earlier, Susan Sontag's characterization of camp relies on artifice, aestheticism and exaggeration. In *Queer Eye*, dates and weddings are fun, depoliticized rituals. With the exception of Ted toast at the end of Episode 220, “Here is to a wonderful marriage for Adam and Steve one of these days,” civil right issues like gay marriage are never alluded to.

Discussion

In the show straight men have unpleasant odors, bad hygiene, no cleaning knowledge and no style. Men are made over because they have difficulties with domesticity and romance. Women, however, are almost invisible in the show and are expected to conform to hegemonic gender roles. The Fab Five are portrayed in roles traditionally associated with femininity. The show assumes that gay men are effeminate and therefore they have insight into women's preferences. In general heterosexual men and heterosexual women embody hegemonic gender roles, the Five play an important role in supporting heterosexual romance.

Importantly, not only the main characters help men perform the appearance of wealth, they also instruct them on how to perform the appearance of domesticity. This domesticity is not real, as the Five fails teach self improvement skills to participants. Instead, the Fab guide men into using the consumption of goods and services to perform the appearance of domesticity.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION: WE ARE HERE TO MAKE YOU BETTER

“*Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye* might thoroughly bore me, but their persistent presence on the air endows them with significance and allows me to think that progress has occurred...”

John D’Emilio, “Progress and Representation” in *Media Queered*

The first time I heard about the program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was in the summer of 2003. I was working in an advertising agency and my creative team was having a conversation in the hallway about a new show that featured five gay men. Months later, I started a doctoral program, and on a sleepless night I watched a promotional interview on PBS’s *Charlie Rose* that peaked my interest in the show *Queer Eye*.

My feelings toward the show were then and still are quite ambivalent. Very quickly I became drawn to a show that made no excuses for blatantly aligning products to characters. My background in advertising made me think of the numerous ways brands could capitalize from this program; thus my initial critical reading of the show was far from progressive. Once I was conducting the study, a sense of fascination grew while disentangling the multiple layers of texts encoded in the images. A false sense of intimacy developed with a television program that scrutinized the body of adult men while simultaneously representing brotherly relationships among five self identified gay men and a heterosexual man. A political economic framework gave me the language to articulate my concerns about the show. My background in advertising was useful when making sense of the data. As a feminist with progressive political positions I was completely mortified with the show. What a dilemma, to be mortified and charmed at the same time.

The primary objective of this chapter is to elaborate on the significance of the study by establishing links between the findings of the research and the theoretical issues.

With this in mind, this chapter is divided into four major sections. First, I discuss the significance of the study in the realm of commercial television. Second, I review the main theoretical issues presented in earlier chapters in order to summarize the answers to the original research questions and underscore where my study is breaking new ground. Next, I examine the limitations of the study. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented.

Significance of the Study

The television program *Queer Eye* has had an enormous influence on television, advertising and popular culture. *Queer Eye's* low cost of production made it a particularly profitable property for Bravo. It became a cultural phenomenon because it revolutionized product placements, changed media buying techniques, had a local and international reach, and affected society's discourse on masculinity in the United States.

As mentioned in chapter two, Annette Hill and Anna McCarthy explain that reality television became an important genre because of its cheap cost of production. The authors contend that the genre should be seen as the network's strategy to maximize revenues by bypassing major labor costs. *Queer Eye* combined elements from reality makeover shows with the aggressive strategies of product placement originally seen in gameshows (e.g. *The Price is Right*). This innovative but low cost combination helped *Queer Eye* become a particularly profitable property for Bravo.

Queer Eye is filmed in the living space of the participant, with limited camera angles. Scenes are also shot in a sports utility vehicle (SUV), but the vehicle serves as a form of transportation and a set. The main characters meet at a New York loft that is located in the offices of the production company. Additionally, all of the elements of the makeover, including the wardrobe of the Five, are incorporated into the plot line in the form of product placements. However, the cost of production associated with *Queer Eye* most likely includes additional staff to negotiate the product placements and additional crew for moving, storage and handiwork (e.g. painting, installing equipment, etc.). Thus, while *Queer Eye* most likely has more costs than many cheap reality television shows, like *COPS* and *Cheaters*, it is still less expensive than sitcoms and a good value for the networks.

The program gives an innovative spin to an already established advertising strategy, product placement. The show proposes a plotline that links products to a lifestyle and creates multiple promotion opportunities for the characters, producers, products and network. *Queer Eye* helped marketers explore the full potential of product placements by showing that incorporating a product into the story line is not enough. Instead, the producers were able to demonstrate that brands can use television content to demonstrate where to buy products, how to use them, as well as showcase the perfect consumer for these products and the lifestyle associated with their consumption. Additionally, *Queer Eye* showcased advertisements during the program that encouraged their viewers to learn more about the brands which were shown in the program by visiting the show's webpage which suggests the inclusion of more revenue streams for producers.

Queer Eye also positively affected the attractiveness of cable as an alternative to the networks (e.g. NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX). The success of *Queer Eye* resulted in the production of original programming for the cable station Bravo. Viewers were drawn to original programming for its entertainment value, while media buyers were encouraged by the high ratings and the lower cost of ad time that the medium provided.

The original version of the show was distributed in over a hundred countries. Additionally, franchises of the show were sold and over 13 countries developed local versions of the program. Like *Big Brother*, *American Idol*, the *Queer Eye* franchise was sold internationally with great success. The international distribution of media content is extremely profitable for the companies and it seriously affects the media landscape in three important ways. First, it affects creativity as companies are compelled to reduce the risks associated with the production of new programming. Second, it negatively affects the media and media content by eliminating diversity, promoting western values and consolidating identity. Third, it helps consolidate the power of international media giants.

The Fab Five had an enormous effect on popular culture. The show helped institutionalize the concept of the metrosexual. As noted in chapter two a metrosexual is a term used to describe men concerned with their appearance and image. Terms like “zhushing” and “manscaping” became popular. The five main characters became an instant hit and made personal appearances on shows like *Oprah*, *Regis and Kelly*, *The*

Tonight Show with Jay Leno and many others. The popularity of the show among audiences and the critical responses contributed to a discussion of masculinity in popular culture. In many ways the show's conception of masculinity, even if superficial, marked the significance of the show in popular culture. A less progressive contribution of the program is that *Queer Eye* played a key role in the reinforcement of common stereotypes about the gay community. Moreover, it gave marketers and networks evidence that the continuous representation of such stereotypes is profitable.

All the reasons listed above – whether seen as progressive or as problematic- are evidence of the significance of the show and make a case for the value of studying *Queer Eye*. Then, the question that remains is, how is this particular study significant?

This study conducted a critical examination of the program informed by queer theory and a political economic analysis. The combination of those lenses makes the study noteworthy. This study is particularly significant in two additional ways. First, this study conducts a comprehensive examination of the show and the dialogue in order to establish links between the structural aspects of production and its effects on content and distribution. The study reviews the relationship between the changes in ownership of General Electric, NBC and Bravo and the production, promotion and distribution of the show. Additionally the study looks at the crosspromotion strategies used to solidify the position of the conglomerate and ensure the economic success of the show.

Secondly, this study interrogates the use of queer and examines the representation of sexual desire. This study is unique in that it incorporated economic elements to highlight reflections on gender and performativity. Following the theoretical tradition of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, I claim that identity is, in a sense, performative and in the case of *Queer Eye*, the performance of queer is a result of the economic interests of the producers of the show, advertisers and the Bravo network. I look at the representation of gay males in the media and then draw parallels between such representation and the portrayal of the Fab in *Queer Eye*. Then I examine the implication of such representation for the gay community and the queer project.

In sum, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on the representation of sexual desire in contemporary American television and gives insight into the cultural understandings of queer. Ultimately, this case study contextualizes

Queer Eye within the broader political project of queer studies, LGBTQ activism, and the larger dialogue on reality television. This study argues that the representations of queer culture in the show reinforce the binaries of sex and gender.

Review of the Research Questions

As mentioned earlier in the manuscript, Ruth Wodak explains that critical discourse looks at texts by also examining their cultural and historical contexts. Wodak also recognizes that critical discourse is useful to understand how power relations and ideology are constituted through discourse. Julie D'acci developed a model for the study of gender and television. D'acci's model is used in this study to gain insight into the production of the show, the representation of the Fab Five, the social and historical context in which the representation takes place. Using a political economic review of data as well as a critical reading of the dialogue and images in the episodes, the study explores general themes that affect the representation of gender and sexuality in television.

More specifically, this study examines the way that the program sustains structures of power in the corporate capitalist media system to promote consumerism; exposes the role of advertising in the negotiation of identity and the representation of sexual desire; questions the representation of queer in relation to the goals of the queer project; and documents the questionable narratives of masculinity and femininity presented in the show. These major themes are inherent in the next section which reviews responses to the study's four research questions.

First Research Question

In what way is the program sustaining structures of power and the corporate capitalist media system to promote consumerism?

General Electric's NBC acquisition of Bravo network in the year 2003 impacted the content and production of *Queer Eye* is well documented in this study. For the cast, the changes gave them more media exposure, higher salaries, a book deal and a series of sponsorships. For the producers, it resulted in new business ventures and sponsorships. The resources of GE's NBC Universal were useful for the development of commercial

intertext. As noted by Michael Gilz, “with NBC’s muscle behind them, a massive PR campaign began” (44). Also, the popularity of the show made it a profitable venture for Bravo in more ways than one. The model of *Queer Eye* was used for the development of additional reality shows, and it affected the ad buys of media buyers in the field by generating a real interest in cable. The content of the show was also affected. The producers were able to book high profile guests (e.g. Olympics medalists, Kevin Beacon) and they started showcasing NBC stars (e.g. Donald Trump, Jay Leno) and GE products (e.g. refrigerator, oven, microwave).

The impact of conglomeration in *Queer Eye* is quite evident. Once the show gained support of the media giant, the producers were able to saturate the markets with messages about the show. By ensuring the success of the show GE not only secured more advertisers and sponsors for the show but another venue for promoting their own artists, and material products.

Synergy strategies were created as well to increase *Queer Eye*’s presence in the market. As a result of the success of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, the production company Scout negotiated a DVD release, extended episodes, aired holiday specials, a line of merchandize, a series of books and a spin-off entitled *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*. Importantly, none of these efforts enriched the story line of the original program; however, they did create more revenue for the producers. Also, additional outlets for cross promotion and cross references were created when all of the cast members and producers received endorsements deals from brands in their areas of expertise (e.g. Kyan, L’Oreal). Moreover, not only conglomeration helped secure revenue streams for the network, it also saturated the market with images of the Five making them into celebrities. The celebrity status of the Fab Five allowed them get involved in new projects while referencing back to the original show and thus appealing the loyal viewers of *Queer Eye* (e.g. Carson’s *How to Look good Naked*).

There are several themes represented on *Queer Eye* in regard to consumption: disposable consumption and waste, consumption as a form to construct one’s identity, and consumption as a desirable skill that one must learn. For the Five, being wasteful is often seen as a pleasurable act. Functional goods are often discarded because they don’t meet specific aesthetic guidelines. Goods become an intrinsic part of creating an identity,

creating an image and telling a personal narrative. Personal choices in the various categories (food choices, attire, fashion, living space and design) are conceptualized as being a reflection of one's inner being. Moreover, the Fab Five are presented creating a personal identity and narratives through the use of objects (e.g. untucked shirts for the artist).

In the program consumerism is depicted as a form of self-discovery. The Fab Five serve as normative agents of the institutional power in charge of altering and guiding the selection of goods. Products form an essential part of the narrative and help shape the identity of the participants by presenting specific brands that are associated with an idealized lifestyle.

The combination of all of these elements made *Queer Eye* a profitable property but in the process it encouraged despicable consumption and waste and materialism. *Queer Eye* also became part of the General Electric machinery. The show served as an outlet to promote other GE properties (media properties as well as material goods and kitchen appliances), thus serving to reinforce and strengthen the position of the media conglomerate.

McChesney states that while capitalism rests on the rhetoric of a free market, pure competition and different sources battling to provide the best price and service, the reality is that the market place is highly monopolistic and concentrated. He also recognizes that media content is driven by profit and not by the interests of the audience. McChesney further argues that the market will give people what is more profitable to produce and not what they want (*Corporate Media*). *Queer Eye* served as a model to follow for future programming by blatantly presenting commercial messages as the plot line and reinforcing audience expectations to consume advertisements as content. Thus, *Queer Eye* is a great example of media content that is driven by profit and not by servicing the interests of audiences.

Second Research Question

What is the role of advertising in the negotiation of identity and the representation of sexual desire?

Advertising was studied to better understand the program *Queer Eye*. The brands advertised during the commercial breaks, reveal the demographic profile of the audiences watching the show. In *Queer Eye*, the advertisements target two important audiences of the show. Friedman and Linnett explain that the primary target for the show is women 18 to 49, with a secondary target of gay men. The program showcases ads for minivans, beauty products and family vacations, and for investment companies, luxury vacation spots and cars. Additionally, over a dozen high end and luxury brands have product placements in each episode of *Queer Eye*. Thus, this combination of marketing strategies supports the characterization of gay males as affluent trendsetters.

Research by Gillian Oakenfull and Timothy B. Greenlee suggested that heterosexual audiences respond more negatively to content with explicit homosexual imagery. Also, the researchers claimed that audiences are more adverse to gay males than lesbians. This particular aspect, I think, explains the tendency of the *Queer Eye* producers to exclude sexual desire from the content of the show and represent a stereotypical image of gay male sexuality. The effects of the role of advertising in the show are seen when one examines the representation of queer in the show. The incorporation of commercial interests and the representation of queer as an asexual trendsetter are intrinsically linked.

Importantly the distinctiveness of *Queer Eye* relies on its use of the format of reality TV and the advertising practice of product placements to have audiences consume commercial messages as part of the plot line of the program. *Queer Eye* offered brands the opportunity to promote their products by including a demonstration on how to properly use it, where to buy it, provide general information about the merchandise in that store and showcase the lifestyle associated with its consumption. The use of product placements in the show took this commonly used advertising strategy to a new level. Although it has become a common practice to incorporate brands to the general plot of a program, *Queer Eye* made commercial messages their story line thereby blurring the distinctions between content and advertisements. Advertising is protected under the First

Amendment under that claim that consumers need commercial information (*The Problem 172*). However, I would argue that this is problematic because the goal of advertisements is to create needs, stimulate brand preferences and increase sales, thus presenting commercial messages as information promotes irresponsible hyper-commercialism.

Additionally, the inclusion of advertisements as media content weakens a democratic system as producers will avoid messages that are critical of the brands advertising in their shows. McChesney explains that the commercialization of the media and life limits the democratic system to the “‘freedom’ to pick from commercial options provided by marketers” (*The Problem 167*). Moreover, networks and producers respond to the needs of their business and avoid content that is critical of the brands advertising in their shows.

Finally, the inclusion of product placements negatively affects the representation of groups in television as well. McChesney explains that advertisers prefer programming that reaches their target market and does not affect their sales pitch (*The Problem*). Thus marketers will shy away from programming with political or controversial content that could affect their brand or draw attention away from their products. In the case of *Queer Eye* commercial messages reinforced the stereotype of queer. As a result of the product placements the show represented queer as vain (e.g. they use Crest White Strips, and skin care products provided by Eshave), apolitical (e.g. they are environmentally irresponsible as they pitch old clothing or furniture when they don’t like the fabric), and wealthy (e.g. they drink wine from EROICA and dress from high end designer Roberto Cavalli).

The program was also unique in the way it created cross promotion opportunities between unrelated brands and products. *Queer Eye* created synergistic relationships between product categories by represented a lifestyle that included designer clothing and furnishings and thereby associating high fashion brands to designer furniture stores. The show also advocates how conspicuous consumption can create one’s personal identity as a successful professional, boyfriend, husband or father.

Additionally, the Fab Five served as celebrity endorsers for several products, both outside and inside the format of the show. Each of the characters was hired by companies for paid endorsements outside of the 60 minute content of the *Queer Eye* show. For example Thom, appeared in ads for Pier One. As stars of the show the Five also became

celebrity endorsers of the products they handled in the show. All the products were seen by the audience as endorsed by the Five.

Third Research Question

Does the representation of queer in *Queer Eye* help undermine or reinforce the goals of the queer project?

Queer Eye is not revolutionary as it reinforces society's ongoing narrative that associates gay males with urban spaces, a high socioeconomic status, cultural centers and high fashion. *Queer Eye* also falsely solidifies sexuality as a foundational identity by claiming that there are real differences between straight and gay men. The program reinforces the notion that straight and gay men live in separate worlds by showcasing a world where gay men are cultured, wealthy and fashionable and visit the straight world to teach men "valuable" skills for social mobility (e.g. how to wear a bow tie) and to give lessons in consumerism (e.g. the solution to a dirty refrigerator is all new GE appliances for the kitchen).

The media landscape is driven by a need to maximize revenues for producers and brands. Advertising, in its many forms, plays an important role in the success and historical significance of the show. The importance of the commercial relations and the brands, as well as the centrality of their integration into the plot, influenced the representation of queer and of the Fab Five. The representation of sexual desire in the show was never meant to be explicit or progressive; instead, in *Queer Eye*, sexuality becomes another commodity and is used as a marketing gimmick to create novelty for the show.

In the program sexual desire is rarely addressed, yet the title of the show identifies the main characters as queer. The term queer has had an important historical evolution; however, its current usually refers to the multiplicity of sexualities outside of monogamous heterosexual procreative intercourse. The supporters of the queer project maintain that the political efficacy of queer depends on its resistance to definition. Thus, queer must remain a place that challenges binaries of sex, gender and sexuality, and dismisses the essentialist discourse. However, contrary to the queer project, *Queer Eye* identifies the quintet as queer and forces a definition of homosexuality by representing queer as male, wealthy, asexual, consumerist, fashionable, cultured, rather than

identifying queer as an unstable or fluid; and supports the binaries of sex, gender and sexuality with their representation of masculinity and femininity. In sum, this reality television program highlights the social importance of codifying queer as a differentiating category and an object of scrutiny.

Fourth Research Question

How is the program constructing narratives of masculinity, femininity and heterosexual romance?

Queer Eye identifies masculinity that is in need of repairs. Unlike the 2007 films *Knocked Up* and *Super Bad* that celebrate boorish masculinity *Queer Eye* showcases men that are seeking to change the same rough masculinity. Although the program fails to challenge male privilege, the fivesome propose that domesticity, as well as gender and social class is performative. Every week the fivesome proposed new ways in which aesthetically challenged men could purchase their way into a new lifestyle and acquire services that would facilitate their interactions with their wives and girlfriends.

Straight men are depicted as masculine and being unconcerned with fashion, hygiene, domesticity or sophistication. Straight men need help with their style choices as well as their manners, and their crude masculinity. This representation of masculinity is consistent with the stereotypical ideal that men are tough. Moreover, the show's answer to the undesirable characteristics is always disposal and materialism.

In *Queer Eye*, the presence of the Fab Five replaces the need for biological women because the sexuality of the Fab gives them insight into femininity. The show argues that gay men understand the way women feel, understand female arousal, understand how females use space. When biological women defy hegemonic gender roles in the show, the Fab voice their discomfort. Consistent with the cultural expectations, women are perceived negatively when they are too confident, assertive or even demanding. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that *Queer Eye* reflects an implicit misogyny.

While women are perceived negatively by the straight men when they identify men's problem areas, by contrast the Fab are represented as protectors and saviors. Indeed, the Five are heroes of good taste as they come to the rescue of distressed females. Even though, biological females are often the catalyst of the makeover, their solutions are

ignored. Females can identify the problem areas just as well as the Five, yet they lack the authority to fix the problems. The Fab are needed to come to the rescue of these families because biological women need the validation of men to criticize or reform masculinity.

Interestingly an overwhelming majority of the all *Queer Eye* episodes support a romance plot. The Fab Five are seen as experts in the area of romance, yet this is only professional expertise given that gay men are not allowed to marry in almost all states.

The presence of a heterosexual romantic interest is a key part of the overall narrative of each episode. Marriage is represented as ethereal. Ultimately, *Queer Eye*'s heavy reliance on romance plots works to attract and appeal to heterosexual sensibilities while protecting the branding of advertisers.

As mentioned earlier in the manuscript, Jaap Kooijman explains that Bravo removed an ad for the male dating site mygaydar.com from the *Queer Eye* lineup because the content was considered inappropriate. Moreover, one of the producers of the show, David Collins, has stated repeatedly that the program is not about sexuality but is a forum for commercial information about products. In many ways, such a goal is consistent with the characterization of the Five. The camp performance of the main characters depoliticizes their sexual desire and represents gay male homosexuality as an asexual sexuality. The performance of the quintet helps solidify a narrative that associates sexuality to popular culture, aestheticism and consumerism.

Limitations of the Study

This study largely employed a discourse analysis approach to understanding the negotiation and representation of sexual desire, commercial success, consumption, and gender. In the course of doing the research several limitations became apparent which should be considered in future studies of this kind.

First, my study is undoubtedly influenced by my personal demographics and experiences. I am a non-native English speaker who grew up outside of the Continental United States. Hence, the numerous references on the show to American popular culture presented an important obstacle for me. Often, my friends and colleagues reviewed segments of the show with me to help me clarify the meaning of the expressions. Without a doubt, I probably still missed popular culture references that Native English speakers

raised in the US would have picked up. Moreover, my analysis of *Queer Eye* has been influenced by my gender and sexual identity as a straight woman. For example, during Episode 218 I learned along with Jeff what is involved in going “cruising.”

Second, and of greater significance this study does not take into account the audience responses to the cultural phenomenon of *Queer Eye*. In this study I assert that the show’s representation of queer negatively affected the queer project. However, in order to fully understand the effects of the show, a comprehensive analysis of the audience is needed. Additionally, looking at general audiences and their response to the show could serve as a tool for understanding the reception and attitudes of individuals to homosexual imagery on television.

Third, this study used queer theory and political economic analysis to study and contextualize the discourse of sexuality. Although the theoretical framework is useful and relevant, there are some limitations that must be acknowledged. Queer theory focuses on the rejection of the categorization of sexuality. The queer theory project has been scrutinized by those who argue that queer theory is inaccessible and denies the reality of identity markers like gender, race and sexuality. While some groups argue for the importance of identity politics, queer theorists reject the categorization of identity. My analysis argues that contrary to the goals of the queer project, *Queer Eye* reifies queer as an identity category. For me, that is a step backward, but gay and lesbian activists (e.g. Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLADD) would probably see it as a step forward.

Moreover, queer theory researchers have been criticized for their heavy reliance on textual analysis as means of creating a connection between the representation and creation of meaning. Relying on one researcher’s textual analysis ignores the complexity of reception - multiple readings and levels of interpretation in every text. However, although this work is mostly textual, this work goes beyond the study of representation and incorporates the socioeconomic context and the constructed meaning of sexual desire.

Political economist insists that a thorough examination of the circuits of production, distribution and consumption is vital to comprehending culture. Political economists also look at the role of structural aspects and policies in the process of

creating cultural artifacts. However, this method does not always account for the agency of audiences in the process of consuming media and their role in affecting the production of cultural artifacts. This study suggests that capitalist corporate interests had a great influence in the characterization of the Fab Five as asexual and effeminate. Although I am skeptical that audiences have great agency over the cultural products they consume, it is a possibility that I chose not to explore.

Finally, in the course of this study a few articles came out addressing some of the research questions posed in chapter on. For example Katherine Sender in her article “Queer for a Day: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the Neoliberal Project” explains with evocative detail the way consumption is represented in the show. For Sander the show proposes that the commercial realm is used to facilitate upward class mobility and to negotiate gender and sexuality. While we arrived independently at similar conclusions, the new essay does not simultaneously incorporate political economy, queer theory and discourse analysis.

Future research

Suggestions for future research can be made for scholars interested in further exploring the impact of *Queer Eye*. The show attracted audiences from all areas yet it was not able to keep these audiences as the show matured. Even as it tried to present more compelling narratives, the show was not able to maintain the same levels of initial excitement. Thus, the natural evolution of this project would start with the examination of audiences. More specifically two audience demographics could be analyzed: LGTBQ and heterosexual audiences.

In terms of the former, insight can be gained by interviewing queer habitual or occasional viewers of the show. For example, in September 30, 2003, the *Advocate* published the results from an online pool that asked readers, “Is *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* a step forward for the Gay rights movement?” The results of the informal online study revealed that 67% of respondents believed that the show was a step forward while 22% said no and 11% were undecided. This online survey seems to contradict my argument that the representation of queer in the show is a step backward for the queer project in that its representation of queer reinforces common stereotypes about gay men,

reifies the male bias of the use of the term queer and identifies sexuality as a foundational category of identity. However, more research is needed to better understand the perception of advancement reflected in the online survey. It would be important to understand whether participants prioritize visibility over type of representation, or simply if they agree with the characterization of queer as affluent, asexual, wealthy men. Also, the response of LGBTQ groups that oppose the commercialization and commodification of sexuality should be explored in more detail.

Future researchers might also examine straight audiences more closely. Several researchers have suggested that heterosexual viewers with homophobic attitudes have negative reactions to messages that showcase explicit homosexual images. The goal of such research is to guard the interests of brands and guide the decisions of advertisers. However, exploring the response of heterosexual homophobic audiences to *Queer Eye* could complicate or clarify the question: is the show a step forward for the LGBTQ movement? As mentioned earlier the representation of queer as an asexual form of aestheticism helped Ted negotiate his coming out experience with his conservative family. Similarly, Jai's "born-again Christian" mother used the show to rethink her son's sexuality. Jai explained during an interview with *AfterElton.com*

My family, is very religious, and when I told them [that he was joining *QE*] my aunts and uncles were very supportive. It was really my mother that was the one who had the problem with it. And then at some point her dentist, and the people at the library... Once she saw the rest of the world being accepting, suddenly it was easier for her to deal with it.

Thus, the social significance of the show can be explored by studying straight audience reactions to the program's representation of queer.

Another area for future research is programming beyond the confines of the show. Raised but not fully explored in this manuscript is the effect of spoofs and spin-offs of the show. The study suggests that spoofs and spin-offs create cross promotion opportunities for the show, help maximize revenues, lower the risks associated with the production of new material and reveal the popularity of the show. An extensive examination of general themes represented on the individual parodies would be important. Much like the previous points, the goal of this angle would be to further explore the impact of the show.

To better understand the effect of the show, I would look at the way these parodies support or contest *Queer Eye*'s representation of gender and sexual desire.

As mentioned earlier, the producers of the show sold the concept internationally and local versions of the show were produced in over 13 countries. However, the term queer has no direct translation because it specifically describes an American experience. The term reflects the historical tensions in the acceptance of sexual desire in American Culture. For example, both the Italian and Spanish adaptations of the show avoided using the term queer in the title, (e.g. *Fantastici Cinque*, Italy and *El Equipo G*, Spain). Thus, it would be interesting to examine each country's negotiations in the use of the term queer. This is an area of study that has not yet been explored and yet an important area of analysis.

Also, it is important to study the long term impact of the commercialization of queer, a term that once was seen as derogative and now is represented as a niche market. The effects of the continued use of consumption as a source of empowerment for marginalized groups will continue to be an important research question for years to come as will the evolution in the representation of sexual desire, sexuality and queer in television.

Finally, future researcher might look at the Bravo's recent programming that attempts to commodify professional development. Chapter five identifies as one of the themes of consumption the development of identity, both personal and professional. Bravo's audiences have been described as affluent professionals. Coincidentally, most of their original programming features characters or situations in professional development, such as *Top Chef*, *Work It*, *Flipping Out*, *Queer Eye*, *Project Runway*. In all of the shows professionals are featured in positions of experts and in aspirational situations. The impact of this trend should be looked at in an effort to understand the relationship between corporate interest and professional development.

Going back to the Fab Five's claim that motivated my interest in the show, "We are not here to change you; we are here to make you better," I ask, how did the Fab Five change the media environment? The show capitalized on stereotypes of the gay community and used five self identified gay men to represent domestic expertise. *Queer Eye* certainly did not change the type of representation of gay men presented in

Contemporary American media. Moreover, the producers used the commercial machinery of capitalism to package and repackage sexuality as a product available for consumption. The producers of *Queer Eye* were successful at creating a formula that established stronger bonds between brands and content. Although the show did little to positively affect the queer project, it represented nonviolent relationships between gay and straight men. What remains clear is that *Queer Eye*'s legacy will be as an effective marketing tool and an advertising phenomenon.

APPENDIX A
EPISODE SELECTION

I. Randomly selected Episodes from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003 to 2005)

1. Episode # 101 Hair Today, Art Tomorrow: Brian S.

Mission: To get him a gallery opening.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Single- 30's- Aspiring artist

This episode tells the story of Brian/Butch a white straight single man in his 30's. The mission for this aspiring artist is to get him a gallery opening. For the *Queer Eye* guys his problem areas consists of having a dirty and messy house, old and unfashionable clothing, long hair and a lack of space in his house for entertainment or overnight guests. During the show, the Fab gave Brian a haircut, new clothing, and organize his home. The makeover comes to an end after the successful presentation of his art pieces in an art gallery.

2. Episode # 120 Meeting Mildred: Rob M.

Mission: To help Rob organize a dinner party for his godmother, girlfriend and friends.

Demographic Profile: Black-Male- Girlfriend- 37-Telephone engineer- Aspiring Photographer

Episode 120 is the story of Rob a 37 year old Telephone Engineer and aspiring Photographer from Brooklyn. According to the show Rob's problem areas are that his apartment reflects the taste of his ex-girlfriend, he has no dining room and has limited seating on the apartment. In terms of his appearance the Fab 5 believe that his dreadlocks are not properly kept and that his scalp is too dry, furthermore, his wardrobe consists of t-shirts, tie-dyes and dashikis. The Fab help Rob organize a dinner party for his friends and Godmother.

3. Episode # 123 Training Day: James M.

Mission: To make a sports fan into a gentleman.

Demographic Profile: Korean- Male- Girlfriend- 24- Science Teacher/Grad Student

James, a 24 year old science teacher is made over during Episode 123 in order to become a better boyfriend. His girlfriend Tabee, nominated him for the makeover, the Fab Five helped him plan a romantic date for her. According to the show his problem areas consist of: a limited wardrobe, his limited cuisine consisting mainly of noodles and the food his mom sends from Korea. Also, the Fab 5 found problematic that he had grown to be too comfortable on his relationship and his dog is untrained. In fact, when describing the mission Ted comments “so this guy is a jock and we have to make him more independent, cool and stylish.” This episode concludes with a romantic date between James and his girlfriend Tabee.

4. Episode # 119 Compose Yourself: Warren L.

Mission: To help Warren, an Oklahoma City native, meet and network with some producers, actors and directors in New York.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Girlfriend- 24- Musical Theater Composer

During Episode 119 the Fab Five give Warren, a musical theater composer living in New York a makeover. Warren’s problem areas consist of: an unpleasant smell in his home, laundry on the floor, an uncomfortable seating arrangement in the living room, primary colors on the walls, a nail biting habit and old food in his kitchen. In order to achieve the goals for Warren, the Five make changes to his wardrobe, style and apartment. Thom redecorates his living room and bedroom and added new accessories. Warren learns new recipes and gets new dinnerware. As part of the makeover Warren’s play is produced for a small audience, he is introduced to Broadway producers and gets feedback on his play.

5. Episode # 127 Taking on the Twins: Brandon and David B.

Mission: To help twins Davis and Brandon, grow up and improve their style.

Demographic Profile: Puerto Rican- Male- One single the other dating- Straight- 27- Computer analyst and Poet

The Fab Five make over Brandon and David, two fraternal twins of Puerto Rican descent in their late 20's, to help them attain a more mature style. The goal of the episode is to help the brothers throw a birthday party for their 80 year old grandfather. In order for the makeover to be successful they need to overcome some problems. Among their bad habits the Five identify a "dirty laundry" smell in their house, lack of style in their home and a few walls with "butt" holes in them from wrestling. The Fab Five, clean and redecorate their home, get the Twins new furnishings and appliances, shop for new clothing and teach them two cooking recipes. The Episode ends with images of the party and a special poem David writes to honor the quintet.

6. Episode # 153 A Home to Come Home To: Ray S.

Mission: To organize a memorable wedding for Ray.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Married- 37- Soldier

This episode tells the story of Private First Class Ray S, a newlywed that is made over before his departure to Iraq. The mission is to organize a wedding, because their original marriage took place in his wife's native Colombia and it is not recognized by the Armed Forces. The goals of the Fab Five are to makeover their apartment and make it into a nice home for his return. During the episode Ray and his family get new furniture for his apartment, clothing for the baby and supplies for two years from several stores and chains. Additionally, the *Queer Eye* guys prepare a package with equipment, clothing and entertainment for his deployment. Also, the Fab coordinate a new wedding ceremony for the couple that includes a bridal gown, makeup and hair for the bride, clothing and accessories for the groom and his family as well as decoration and catering for the event.

7. Episode #151 A Pigskin Proposal: Brian M.

Mission: To take her to the End Zone.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Divorced-38- Small Business Owner

Brian, a football fan, gets to enact a fantasy marriage proposal to his girlfriend. According to the fivesome, the makeover is needed because Brian's haircut is outdated, he wears almost exclusively plaid and khakis, his home office is a mess, he has old furniture and wears too much cologne. During Episode 151 the Fab Five redesign his living space so that Brian and his girlfriend can enjoy their space together. Also, they give the couple new tailgating equipment. The episode comes to a successful end when Brian proposes to his girlfriend. The Five help him organize an on field proposal and announcement during halftime of a football game.

II. Randomly selected Episodes from *Queer Eye* (2005 to 2007)

1. Episode # 212 Trump-ed To Triumph: Danny K

Mission: To give him a makeover and give him a second chance.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Married- 30's- Business Owner

During Episode 212 the Fab Five make over Danny from NBC's show *The Apprentice*. Their mission is to give him a "second chance," to create an opportunity so that Donald Trump would redeem him as an entrepreneur. Danny's problem areas are: wearing long hair, looking too young, an informal dressing style and deficient organizational skills. During this episode the Five help Danny organize a fundraising event for his charity. With the help of the quintet, Danny is shown negotiating deals with several suppliers to contract the locale, catering, furniture and public relations firm for the event. This episode comes to an end in the board room of the NBC show *The Apprentice* where Donald Trump reviews the event and evaluates the performance of all the characters and the success of the fundraiser.

2. Episode # 220 From the Doghouse to the Altar Part 2: Joe

Mission: To throw them a full on glamorous New York wedding.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Engaged- 30's

During Episode 220 the Fab Five coordinate a wedding for Joe and Laura. The wedding comes after 10 years of dating and Carson, Kyan, Jai, Ted and Thom get St. Bartholomew's Church ready for the wedding, prepare a reception, and choose the food and the attire for the ceremony. This episode is titled *Part 2* because the Fab had a dedicated a previous episode to help Joe coordinate the engagement. According to the five some of the challenges for this episode are: to book St. Bartholomew's Church, to organize a great reception, to get Joe and Laura a wedding, choosing an appropriate menu and find a wedding dress for Laura. The episode ends with images of their wedding reception at the New York Public Library.

3. Episode # 213 When two worlds Collide: David P. and Maria

Mission: To help interfaith couple get married.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Engaged- 27- Podiatrist

Episode 213 tells the story of David and Maria, two podiatrists looking to have an inter-faith wedding. The problem is that their families wanted traditional weddings and the Queer guys have to incorporate Catholicism and Judaism into the ceremony. In addition, according to the Fab Five, their floors and furniture has to be updated. The makeover includes coordinating all aspects of the wedding and redecorating David and Maria's apartment. During the Episode the Fab meet with both families and discuss the concerns of an interfaith relationship. The quintet decides to invite both families to a surprise wedding, by the end of the episode the couple is married and have a newly decorated apartment.

4. Episode # 215 Expose the Moose for Charity: Stephen G.

Mission: To expose the Moose for Charity.

Demographic Profile: White (One Black Man)- Male- Married-30's to 70's

The Moose Lodge contacted the Fab Five in order to get help in coordinating a fundraiser for the charities they support. The *Queer Eye* guys make over their club by making changes to their furniture and color pallet. They help the members of the lodge make a nude calendar to raise money for a scholarship fund. This is one of the most provocative and interesting *Queer Eye* episodes because in the process of creating the nude calendar straight men are seen nude taking beauty and artistic direction from the Fab Five. The quintet advise the straight men in topics such as: body waxing, tanning and thong underwear. The show came to an end when the members of the club revealed the photos of the calendar.

5. Episode # 218 Bringing out the inner Fab: Jeff B.

Mission: To bring out a gay man's inner Fab.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Single- Attorney-30s

The Fab Five come to the rescue of what they call a "new breed of gay," a guy that enjoys sports and having heterosexual friends and roommates. The goal of the makeover is to introduce Jeff to circles where he could meet gay men. Also, the Fab create a new look for him, his living room and his kitchen. During the makeover the Fab Five help Jeff throw a party that incorporates his gay and straight friends in one location. Part of the mission includes taking Jeff "cruising" and getting him a new table that can be used for dancing. The quintet get new furniture and kitchen equipment, and redesign his apartment and wardrobe. Also, the fivesome set him up on a blind date.

6. Episode # 302 Trans-form the Trans-man: Miles G.

Mission: To Trans-form this Trans- man.

Demographic Profile: White- FtM Transsexual- Single- 20s

Miles a transgender (female to male) is made over on Episode 302. The Fab Five mission is to help Miles find clothing that fit his frame, get him established in his new New York apartment, and address some of the dietary needs of his transformation. The goal of the episode is to throw a party where old friends and family members can see him as a “changed” man. The Fab Five teach Miles new recipes, how to dress and take him to get a new haircut. As a result of the makeover Miles gets furniture for his apartment, cooking supplies, an internship Gender Public Advocacy Coalition and clothing. The episode ends with images of the party.

7. Episode # 229 Getting Kicked out from the Garden of Eaten: Adam and Steve

Mission: To help friends Adam and Steve loose weight.

Demographic Profile: White- Male- Divorced/Married- 30s & 40s-Business Owners

This episode marked yet another evolution for the *Queer Eye* guys. During Episode 229 the Fab get to make over straight guys and friends Adam and Steve. The makeover took several months and included a weight loss element to it. Adam and Steve, business partners and friends, competed for several months and got advice, training support and equipment from the Five in order to get lean. Their problem areas included drinking lots of beer, eating hoagies and smoking. The result, Adam and Steve have a combined weight loss of over 70 pounds. The makeover also includes a gym membership, personal trainers, workout outfits, electronics and cooking lessons. Adam and Steve lose weight the *Queer Eye* way, with the support of corporate sponsorship and by investing a great amount of money.

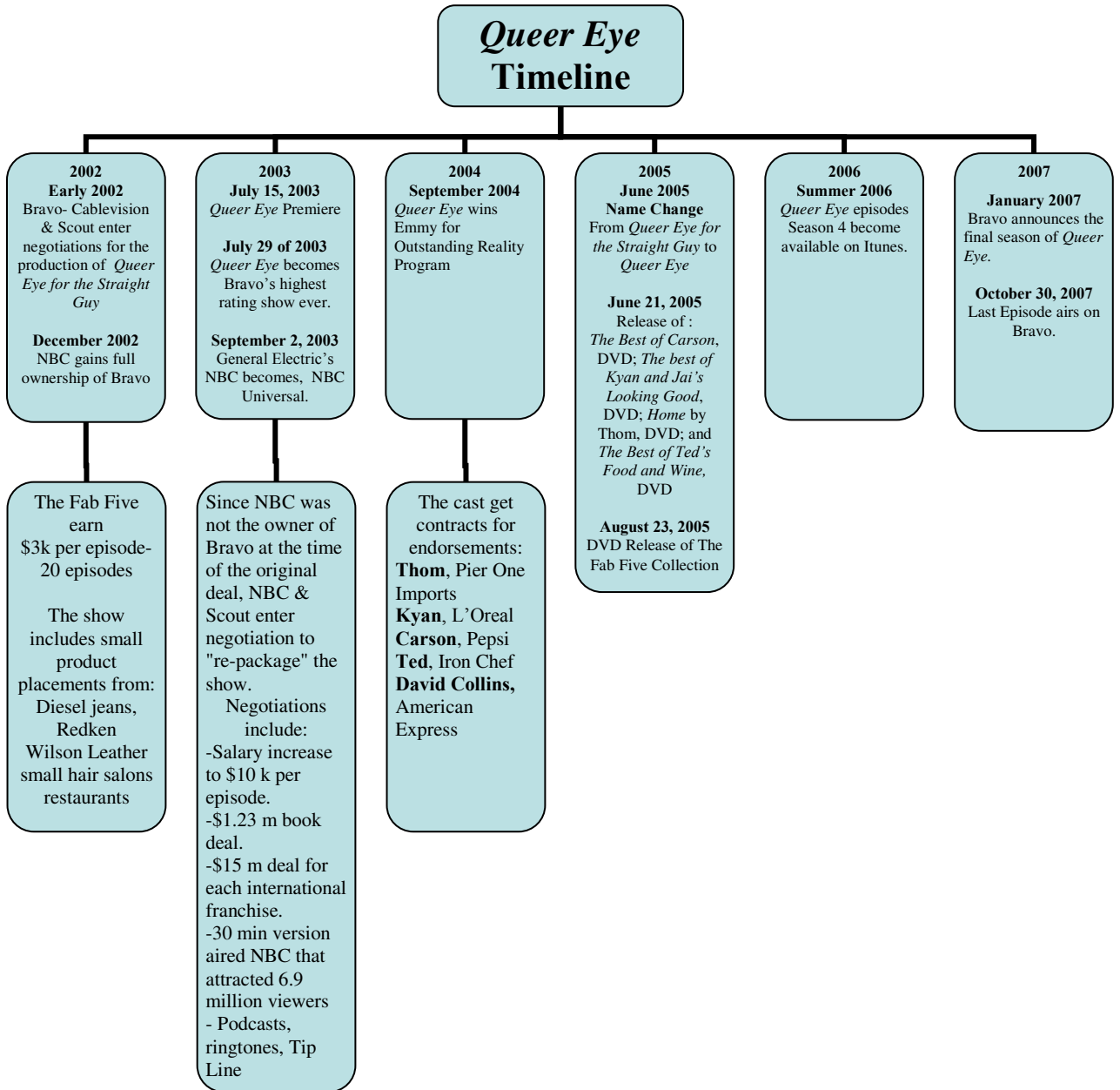
APPENDIX B

LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR CODING EPISODES

1. What is the Fab Five's particular objective for this character?
2. According to the Fab Five why is the transformation needed?
3. What are the specific objectives of each of the five main characters for the protagonist?
4. What are the unstated themes of the episode?
5. What is the demographic profile of the protagonist?
6. What types of products are used during the program? And how are they associated to an improvement in the character's life?
7. How is queer represented in the episode?
8. What type of comments do the main characters make in regards to consumption?
9. How does the dialogue represents race and class in the episode?
10. What type of comments do the Fab Five make about their own sexuality?
11. What type of brands are included in the product placements?
12. What product categories and brands advertise on the episode?
13. What types of appeals do the advertisers make?
14. What references to "family" do the characters make? (e.g. Fab Five as a "family", Fab Five's "family" outside of the show, "family" participation during the interviews or conclusion of the show)
15. How are femininity and masculinity represented?
16. How do the Fab Five describe the style of the main character?
17. What comical interventions do the Fab Five have?

APPENDIX C

QUEER EYE TIMELINE



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