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“MY JOB IS TO LIVE MY LIFE, NOT SAVE YOURS”: THE ORDINARINESS AND EMOTIONAL LABOR OF QUEER MASCULINITY IN NETFLIX’S *QUEER EYE*

by

Cameron Lynn Brown

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To my parents, my sisters, and the wonderful Queer support network who encouraged me through this process.

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Abstract

The current study examines contemporary understandings of Queer masculinity through a textual and audience analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye: More than a Makeover*. I begin by situating this project within the context of media studies. From there, I engaged with literature surrounding the representations of differing genders and sexualities in reality television shows. Using the theory of ordinariness (Cavalcante, 2018) and the theory of reflexivity (Sender, 2012), I argue that Netflix's *Queer Eye* represents a subtle shift in the representation of Queer men in television as ordinary and "everydayness." Audiences understood this presentation as Netflix's Fab Five ordinariness as confidence and through reflexive engagements with the series, came to expect the Fab Five to perform emotional labor on themselves in order to construct an actuated self. Audiences also deploy reflexivity to complicate their engagements with Netflix's *Queer Eye* through believability, queer representation, and anti-fandom.

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Introduction

The words “A Netflix Original Series” flash onto the screen introducing a new, signature, rainbow-inspired format for the logo and screen titles of this new addition to Netflix’s production resumé. Viewers then see alternating close ups of five men sitting in a chair with just their busts in the shot. Instructions are coming from the directors, the on-set assistants are marking the filming footage, draped in the electrical cords and chargers, wearing them like they were scarves or academic cords. These shots, shifting between each man, catching them smiling, rehearsing, trying to reduce their confessed anxiety, are the viewers’ first look at the new “Fab Five,” which can only mean one thing: *Queer Eye* is back. After these endearing vignettes, the Fab Five are filmed greeting each other on a corner in Downtown Atlanta, Georgia and strutting across the Rainbow Crosswalks, removing their sunglasses in unison while the theme song, “All Things (Just Keep Getting Better)” by Elizabeth Pha, starts to play in the background. The pinnacle moment of the opening credits comes in the form of Tan France, a member of the new Fab Five, setting the tone for the new series: “The original show was fighting for tolerance. Our fight is for acceptance” (Collins, “You Can’t Fix Ugly,” 2018). And with that, we move on to meet the rest of the new cast members and are officially introduced to Netflix’s *Queer Eye: More Than A Makeover*.

When *Queer Eye: More Than A Makeover* (hereafter referred to as “Netflix’s *Queer Eye*”) aired in February of 2017, it was not a new project. In the first episode of Netflix’s *Queer Eye*, viewers are immediately made aware that there has been another iteration of the series that preceded this one, *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* (2003-2007). Airing in 2003, *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* (hereafter referred to as “the original *Queer Eye*” or “Bravo’s *Queer Eye*) deployed traditional stereotypes of gay men as gurus of consumerist-driven coolness and

expertise in fashion, style, interpersonal relationships, interior design, and personal grooming to accredit five gay men with the authority to makeover a heterosexual man. The premise of the show is straightforward: each week their mission is to transform a style-deficient and culture-deprived straight man from "drab to fab" (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 12). In one day, the gay men, collectively named the Fab Five (for clarity's sake, when referring to the different sets of cast mates, I will refer to the original *Queer Eye*'s Fab Five as the originals, and Netflix's *Queer Eye*'s Fab Five as the new Fab Five), drag their straight "project" around completely overhauling his wardrobe, redecorating his living space, and offering lifestyle, grooming, and cooking advice, challenging the traditional form of the makeover genre by calling their show a "make better" show. Furthermore, from a representational perspective, the show was invaluable; the "visibility of openly gay men, the positive way they are represented, and their easy fraternization with straight men [were welcomed] additions to the television landscape" (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2005, pg. 12). The original *Queer Eye* was groundbreaking for all of these reasons: the hypervisibility of gay men, their interaction with straight men, and showcasing what was touted to be Queer excellence in their areas of expertise.

All of these contributions, however, might not have been possible without the specific temporal and social context of the original *Queer Eye*. For each version of the series, the context within which they were produced is a crucial part of the facilitation of a show that featured five gay men being so publicly flaunted on television. Any of the programs, also called texts, at the focal point of Television or Media Studies "are all situated, of course, historically, spatially, and in relation to one another, and thus a proper study of television…requires [inquiry] into the many contexts that surround these other agents, that give them meaning, and that play a key role in creating and nurturing them" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, pg. 114). Regarding the history of LGBT

activism, the term "Queer" was originally derogatory and weaponized against the Queer community, however, it was reclaimed by LGBT activists like Queer Nation, an activist group in the early 1990's whose mission was to address homophobic violence and Queer representation (Rand, 2014; Dry, 2018). In fact, Queer Nation, in conjunction with other newly-formed activist groups like Gay Men's Health Crisis, ACT UP, Sex Panic!, the Pink Panthers, and the Lesbian Avengers, among others, drastically changed the face of lesbian and gay activism during the 1990's (Rand, 2014). Where the original *Queer Eye*'s context was one emerging with the permission of recent activism, Netflix's *Queer Eye* seems to be responding to areas where activism can be utilized. Every member of the new Fab Five engages with social and political conflicts arising from the intersections of their identities (including race, culture, gender, gender performance, and religion) and seeks to resolve these conflicts through honest conversation (Goldberg, 2018). Without the foundation laid by these activist groups, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* could not have had the opportunity to exist, and, consequently, the new Fab Five could not address the social conflicts they have.

As previously stated, the show attempted to do great things for the Queer community by increasing visibility; however, in actual practice, the series failed in three major ways. First, the original *Queer Eye*, while "groundbreaking," was not "very 'Queer.' Not in the 2003 sense of the word, and certainly not in the 2018 sense of the word" (Dry, 2018). To clarify, the "Queer" part of Queer identity is used by some people as an umbrella term to describe a person whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual, including those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, and asexual, for example (GLAAD, 2016). As a result, a show that places members of the Queer community should highlight, celebrate, and be marketed for the community as a whole. On the contrary, Bravo "marketed the show to women 18 to 49 with a secondary target of gay men"

(Friedman & Linnett, 2003, p. 4). So, the question remains, if the target audience was (presumably) heterosexual women first and gay men second, why use Queer (read: gay) men in the first place? By positioning the Fab Five as "experts" in their given fields, they become a source of divine intervention for the men they makeover (Poniewozick, 2018; *Reductress*, 2018; Goldberg, 2018). Vargas (2008) takes it one step further, describing the original Fab Five as "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'" (p. 2). At first glance, this does not seem like such a bad way to frame some of the first and biggest Queer representations in mainstream media. However, by taking a closer look, it becomes apparent that whether or not these men were actual experts, their identities as gay men signify that they are "arbiters of cool" (Poniewozick, 2018). So not only was the original *Queer Eye* intended to satisfy a presumably heterosexual female's entertainment needs but the Fab Five were summoned whenever there was "a straight guy in need, [so they could] rush to his rescue" (Allen, Douglas, Filicia, Kressley, and Rodriguez, 2004, p. 8). These Queer bodies were being commodified to serve heterosexual desire.

Second, not only did the original *Queer Eye* commodify the Fab Five and gayness, but it dangerously reduced the concept of Queer identity. This is accomplished through the presentation of gay men through a heteronormative lens. For example, Bravo positioned the Fab Five as "homosexual men through the lens of a heterosexual guy" (Goldberg, 2018). Goldberg (2018) goes on to qualify that the series never attempted to judge or "other" gay men, but the original Fab Five were devoid of anything personal. They were simply there to do a job, teach a lesson, and throw in a sexually suggestive joke or two while they promoted an ideal of

metrosexuality, lending itself more to relevant trends in fashion instead of trying to find something unique to that week's subject (Goldberg, 2018). Rarely did the original Fab Five portray or expose anything about personal relationships, their personality, or anything that promoted individualism or the historical struggle members of the Queer community have faced.

Perhaps if the original Fab Five were allowed to expose anything about their personal lives, the third and final failure of the show could have been avoided. The show drastically reduced Queer identity, yet again, to white (or white presenting), cisgender, male gayness. That alone cannot suffice for an all-encompassing understanding of Queer identity; marking five cis-gender gay men as the represented torchbearers of Queerness, in 2003 or in 2018, is neither progressive nor is it productive (Dry, 2018). Dry (2018) continues to challenge the institutions in charge of producing *Queer Eye* by providing other options for representation:

> Netflix couldn't find a transgender guy with a flair for pattern mixing and bow ties? Or a butch lesbian contractor to do the heavy lifting on the home makeovers? How about a non-binary person who pairs fabulous heels with their five o'clock shadow? If Queerness at its core aims to decenter whiteness, "Queer Eye" took minor strides there. Up from the original singular Latino Jai Rodriguez, there are now two men of color this time around: Tan France and Karamo Brown.

By including only cisgender, gay men as the cast, the series presents Queer identity as unidimensional, ignoring the vast majority of other identities existing under the umbrella of Queerness. According to Gerbner and Gross (1976), a lack of representation in mainstream media serves as "symbolic annihilation" (p. 182). In other words, if Queer identity is being reduced to an oversimplified version, it completely erases the existence of anything else.

Literature Review

The current project is situated within several different bodies of existing literature. First, I offer a short history of television studies, leading up to the "post-network era," within which institutions like Netflix have the ability to thrive (Lotz, 2007). Second, I discuss the genre of reality television, specifically engaging with Katherine Sender's (2012) *The Makeover: Reality Television and Reflexive Audiences*, where she marries two methods—textual analysis and audience studies—in order to examine four reality makeover shows including, the original *Queer Eye*. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of gender and media, specifically, the presence of Queer masculinity represented in media generally and television specifically.

Television Studies

When it was first introduced to the home, there was significant pushback against television from academic and upper-class society. "Television, like any new invention, entered societies that had established norms of social relations. It also entered societies that had experience with other media and art" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 6). Even though the invention of the television provided an in-home mediated source for entertainment, the new addition to daily life was not totally well received. Because the television served as a popular medium, many critics defined it as low-brow, oversimplified, and, in the United States, offensively commercial (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Due to this, there were several debates over whether it should even be considered culture in the first place (Gray & Lotz, 2012). John Hartley (1998) even posited that people in the upper-middle and upper classes intrinsically hated the television, perhaps even before it officially existed, based solely on traditional fears of any new and popular medium being an attack on high culture. Even though the television was widely overlooked in middle- and upper-

class society, scholars of media studies found the value in seeing and studying television as a cultural product.

Those scholars and activists who did not see the television as a threat began to form what we today call "television studies," which is characterized by a unique and diverse history. This discipline was influenced greatly by scholars from three different approaches: social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies. Influences from the social sciences are indicative of "the empirical research done in psychology, sociology, and budding communication departments" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 8). Usually, research from these fields focused on trying to identify the effects of media or how media influenced audiences and societies (Gray & Lotz, 2012). This approach saw the television as a medium of popular communication, similar to radios and newspapers. However, as it developed, the methods and theories associated with the social science approach to studying television changed. Elihu Katz (1977) noted how media researchers began to argue that media content was being filtered through interpersonal networks, based on? individual need, and by selective exposure and perception. Alongside Katz, George Gerbner became known as one of the leading social science television scholars and developed methods to examine the consequences of television violence (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Gerbner was often described as the foremost authority on the amount of television violence and, from that research, the father of cultivation theory and analysis (Fowles, 1999). Fowles (1999) argues that the "main tenet of Gerbner's cultivational analysis is that those who view the most television are subject to a 'cultivation' effect, whereby their outlooks measurably draw closer to the distorted world of television content" (p. 39). George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli's (1986) formation of cultivation theory not only positions television and television

narratives as paramount cultural storytellers but is also representative of the social science influence in television studies.

The second approach to television studies, which comes through the humanities, had a tumultuous beginning but identified the television as a major asset to cultural storytelling. From the humanities, there were two main, preexisting disciplines that influenced contemporary television studies: literary studies and film studies (Gray & Lotz, 2012). The influence of literary and film studies, particularly their inclusion of semiotics—were well suited to television studies, especially when regarding television as a cultural storyteller. However, despite fitting so nicely within the discipline, this did not mean that it was immediately successful. Due to resistance to acknowledging the television as something worth studying, the humanistic approach to television studies was slow to start (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Because literary and film scholars were so steeped in the mindset that the best has already been thought and said, critics attacked the television as something devoid of any cultural relevance (Arnold, 1978). Similar to the social science approach, there was a shift in critical theory that "transformed what could be done with art, literature, and media…[and] notions of what was appropriate or inappropriate to study" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 12). In other words, with this shift identifying what could and could not be studied, television programs became acceptable for analysis and were finally appreciated for their rich content in the daily lives of those who consume them. In general, the humanistic tradition developed in unique ways that diverged from what would become television studies by paying close attention to art, literature, film, and other cultural products, without giving much thought to audiences, contexts, and conditions of production" (Gray & Lotz, 2012). As the humanistic approach to studying television developed, the television programs were solidified as cultural storytellers and, in some cases, mythmakers.

The final approach to television studies, influenced by cultural studies, introduced theories and methods to analyze the implications of television, specifically within the context of power in society. This third approach finds its roots in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the early 1960's, but the most notable contributions from the CCCS come from work produced in the 1970's (Gray & Lotz, 2012). According to Gray & Lotz (2012), Stuart Hall and the rest of the CCCS were so important to television studies that, even though cultural studies are not the sole influence, many of the methods and models of analysis used by television scholars came directly from this point. For example, Hall (1980) developed the encoding/decoding model, one of the first considerations of the possible incongruity between producers' intended messages and audiences' received messages. As I will discuss in detail later in this project, this model shifted focus from a wholly negative view of television audiences, detracting from their autonomous interpretation of media texts, to a more inclusive and positive view of and interaction with them (Gill, 2007). Ethnography and qualitative methods became the CCCS's most popular contributions to the discipline (Gray & Lotz, 2012). For example, Gray & Lotz (2012) discuss Charlotte Brundson and Dorothy Hobson's audience analysis of the British soap *Crossroads*, Angela McRobbie's study on young girls' understandings of magazines, and Dick Hebdige's study on how punk culture's production of a subculture refashioned dominant culture. While these studies represented a move toward ethnography and qualitative methods, they also represented the CCCS's efforts to examine media as it relates to class, nationalism, gender, youth, and race. Perhaps the most important contribution cultural studies made to television studies was that it became characteristic of a way to discuss signifiers of "identity, power, and the media, but…also represented a move beyond the humanistic…[and] political economic determinism that the [text and] structure of the industry answered all the relevant

questions, and the reduction of audience behavior to quantifiable effects" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 15-16). This becomes especially apparent when it came to the media effects approach in the United States as has been previously mentioned (Gray & Lotz, 2012). In conclusion, this third approach to television studies paid particular attention to the methods often used today by television scholars, introducing or encouraging ethnographic and audience-centric research alongside textual analysis.

Understanding the messages that have been encoded into media texts involves a thorough critical textual analysis of the artifact. The current study engages with Stuart Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding. Hall's (1980) essay suggests that "encoding" and "decoding" are two separate moments of equal importance in a text's existence. Introducing encoding/decoding, Hall (1980) critiques the accepted understanding of communication research:

> Traditionally, mass-communications research has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit…This model has been criticized for its linearity—sender/message/receiver—for its concentration on the level of the message exchange and for the absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations" (p. 90-91).

In opposition to this style of communication research, Hall (1980) claimed that it was useful to think of the communication process in the terms of a structure created and maintained through the related but unique moments of production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction. Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model focused on balancing out the 'encoding' and construction of messages with the 'decoding' of them, which involves how audiences actually interacted with them and shaped meaning for themselves (Gray & Lotz, 2012). The process of Encoding/Decoding relies on two specific concepts: the polysemic nature of media

texts and the separate moments involved in the encoding and decoding steps. First, the theory of polysemy argues it is impossible for any specific text to promote just one meaning (monosemy), but instead, every text is open to interpretation in a variety of different ways (polysemy) because it contains more than just one meaning (Gray & Lotz, 2010). In other words, because audiences find varying personal meanings in consumed texts, those texts are personally interpreted by the audiences and begin to take on specific meaning for each viewer. Second, the encoding and decoding steps are separate moments in the same model. According to Hall (1980) the data produced from encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. To put it differently, there is no guarantee, due to the polysemic nature of media, that what is put into a text will ensure what is taken out of that same text. For this reason, a multi-layered approach to analyzing the current artifact is not only beneficial to understanding the cultural and social implications of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, but necessary to ensure the audiences' voices and perspectives are taken into consideration when exploring those implications.

While the three aforementioned influences—social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies—are all integral to the identity and characteristics of television studies, they do not exactly detail the necessary systematic mindsets for the birth of television studies. Since television scholars are aware of their own position in the research process—as fans, as influencers, or (perhaps especially) as researchers—they intrinsically become part of the artifact being studied (Spigel, 2009). For example, "television studies takes on a specific television—particular shows and genres, not an abstract television, as in the 'television' invoked in concerns that 'television will rot your mind,' and it also willingly implicates its researcher as someone who watches television" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, in reference to the actual introduction of television studies, Charlotte Brunsdon (1998) posits that two prerequisites—the

television being worthy of academic attention in general and the television being granted autonomy as a medium—were paramount to the development of the discipline. Research previously published by scholars in the humanities discipline, specifically in film and cultural studies, did most of the work to accomplish the first prerequisite, that television was worthy of being studied. A key part of this second prerequisite came to be during the 1970's when scholars began to think about television as having its own specific attributes instead of just looking at it as an extension or mutation of existing media like television, radio, and newspapers (Gray & Lotz, 2012). This new interaction with the television served as a new paradigm of studying television, recognizable as the current approach to television studies, and was characterized as qualitative and interpretive. In order to further distinguish television studies, Brunsdon (1998) argues:

> there is nothing obvious about the television of television studies. This television, the television studies, is a production of the complex interplay of different histories—disciplinary, national, economic, technological and legislative—which not only did not exist until recently, but is currently, contestedly, being produced even as simultaneously, the nationally regulated terrestrial broadcasting systems which are its primary referent move into convulsion (p. 95).

It is this loose definition of television, married with the broad definition of media in the introduction to this section that allows for the systematic mindsets that make up the identity of television studies.

The introduction of streaming and on-demand availability, characteristics of Amanda Lotz's (2007) "post-network era," changed the way viewers respond to and interact with the fan-object, in this case Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Lotz's (2007) *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, engages with specific eras of television and institutions from which television is produced. Lotz

(2007) argues that television can be divided up into three time periods. The first existed from approximately the early 1950's to mid-1980's. The 'network era' allowed for a particular experience and interaction with television that characterizes much of the medium's history (Lotz, 2007). This uniformity though, was broken in a twenty-year period starting in the mid-1980's that Lotz (2007) called the "multi-channel transition." This era of television introduced various but gradual changes that did not push the television industry far out of its comfort zone. The final era, and the most important to this study, is the "post-network era." According to Lotz (2007), what "separates the post-network era from the multi-channel transition is that the changes in competitive norms and operation of the industry have become too pronounced for old practices to be preserved," and goes on to punctuate her definition with the fact that "different industrial practices are becoming dominant and replacing those of the network era" (p. 7-8). Lotz (2007) argued that these changes included every part of the production component from technology (DVR and VOD were being introduced, as well as viewing on portable devices) to distribution (content was now available anytime and anywhere) and creation (there were more opportunities for amateur production and a variety of financing norms). While Lotz (2007) was writing more about DVR and Video-On-Demand, the same year her text was published "Netflix launched the then-revolutionary concept of delivering movies directly to customers' computers, eliminating the wait time and hassle of receiving and returning discs via post" (Rodriguez, 2017). The distinctions of the post-network era, all of the changes in production, advertisement, and distribution, have only become more cemented as Netflix's streaming services have grown and become more readily available. With the changes to the media product, Netflix's *Queer Eye*, fans and viewers now have the opportunity to engage with the show and the characters in different

ways including access to the show, promotion through YouTube videos, and access to the entire season once it has been distributed.

In conclusion, with Brunsdon's (1998) understanding of television, television studies draw from a rich history. Traversing social scientific, humanistic, and cultural studies influences and building itself on qualitative and quantitative methods, the discipline of television studies has had, and will continue to prove its worth and earn its home in academia. The current study is nestled within the history and influences of television studies, married with Lotz's (2007) description of the post-network era of television, where such dramatic difference in the institutional aspect of television are taking place.

Reality Television

Reality television, as a genre, has garnered significant academic and popular attention. Hill (2005) found that reality television has become one of the highest rated television genres in many countries including France, Spain, Australia, and several more. In the conclusion of their chapter about the study of television programs, Gray & Lotz (2012) state that television studies should conduct more work looking at the medium's various genres. They go on to claim that genres are "industrial constructs" and that they provide simple "mechanism[s] by which meaning is constructed across and between texts" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 124). Importantly, Gray & Lotz (2012) also note that genres are incredibly significant to audiences as they construct identities and arrange their viewing in accordance to genres they are drawn to. However, before discussing the unique aspects of the reality makeover sub-genre, I will first engage with the genre of reality television as a whole, including literature about the production and structure of reality television, the genre's consumeristic and capitalist nature, the sub-genre of makeover shows and self-

reflexive audiences, and conclude with representations of gender and sexuality in reality television.

There are several characteristics of reality television that make up the structure of shows existing within this genre. Jennifer L. Pozner (2010) describes reality television shows as "'unscripted' (but carefully crafted) dating, makeover, lifestyle, and competition shows [that] glorify stereotypes that most people assume died forty years ago" (p. 8). As with any genre of television, there is an almost formulaic pattern to the structure and the value of reality television. First, and probably most important is that reality television shows are significantly less expensive to produce than their dramatic counterparts (Pozner, 2010; Vargas, 2008). As Annette Hill (2005) notes, the approximate cost of producing a one-hour drama is about $1.5 million whereas the production cost for a reality television show of the same length of time is around $200,000. Second, according to Mark Andrejevic (2004), reality television is founded on three main promises: (1) the idea that audiences have the opportunity to surpass spectator and become participants, (2) reality television promises a high return on the emotional investment, and (3) the structure of the show allows for submission to comprehensive surveillance. Each of these aspects or "promises" constitutes the unique structure of reality television.

Andrejevic's (2004) first promise involves both the genre, overall, and the audience specifically. The first component of reality television's structure posits that the audience transcends a simple spectator and becomes participants in the shows, sometimes even becoming some of the main characters. This transcendence manifests in the viewers participation as the guest or as the host of the program. First, by being engrossed in schadenfreude, a German word indicative of taking pleasure in someone else's misfortune, the viewer can transcend mere viewership, thus turning themselves into an extension of the preexisting host(s) (Pozner, 2010).

Pozner (2010) continues to discuss the importance of schadenfreude by arguing that often "it makes us feel superior: No matter how bad our problems may be, at least *we* aren't as fill-in-the-blank (pathetic, desperate, ugly, stupid) as those misguided enough to sign up for such indignities on national TV" (p. 16, emphasis in original). This sense of superiority is the first step in evolving from viewer to host. Katherine Sender (2012) described how some of the respondents to her surveys about *What Not to Wear* used their interactions with the show as a way for them to demonstrate their own fashion expertise from regularly watching the show. The second way viewers transform into characters is by inhabiting the guest's role. Sender (2012) analyzed the self-reflexivity of reality television show audiences. She defines self-reflexivity as being able "to see a phenomenon…[like the self] in context; to consider the possible influences this context has on the phenomenon; and to be attentive to processes, not only outcomes, because phenomena are always contingently situated in time and space" (p. 19-20). Sender (2012) notes that much of traditional media scholarship sees the viewers of reality television shows as ideological dupes who fall into a consumeristic trap. What she discovers, though, is that while her participants may maintain the shows' imperatives of self that should be explored and expressed to others, they identify and are critical of the manipulative editing, commercial tones, and the institution of reality television as a whole. Due to the fact that these audiences can see themselves as a phenomenon reflected in the guests of reality television, specifically makeover shows, they then have the ability to learn from the show, thus fulfilling the role of the guest themselves.

The next promise reality television extends to viewers is a high return on any emotional investment (from either participants or viewers). Both Sender (2012) and Pozner (2010) mention a specific moment in any given episode of reality television that delivers on this promise of

emotional satisfaction. Borrowing from pornographic cinema, the "money shot" usually involves male ejaculation. Within the context of reality television, the "money shot" involves a hyper-emotional reaction (Pozner, 2010). Sender (2012) states that the "production of the money shot, the moment of raw feeling, is predicated both on the guests' ordinariness as the guarantee of genuineness, and their extraordinary ability to transcend cultural taboos on emotional expression" (p. 31). Here, Sender (2012) associates the "money shot" of reality television as an overt, over the top, expression of emotion that, due to the guests' apparent normality, is perceived as genuine. In reality dating shows, the money shot comes when cameras zoom in on a female contestant, tear-stained and heartbroken by romantic rejection, or on reality makeover shows like *What Not to Wear* (2003-2013) or both *Queer Eye*'s when guests confess through soft sobs that they really did lose themselves and are so thankful for the host(s) for their help (Pozner, 2010). However, the emotional reaction does not always have to be a negative one. In her research, Sender (2012) adds that the surprise in moments like weekly weigh-ins on shows like *The Biggest Loser* (2004-present), the first tour of a new home in *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003-2012), or the first time a guest sees themselves in a mirror after makeovers from shows like *What Not to Wear* or *Queer Eye*. In any of the examples just listed, viewers are rewarded for their investment in the guest, stemming from their transcendence to main character/expert from mere spectator, by either basking in the schadenfreude of a crying contestant or cooperatively celebrating another success story.

The final promise from reality television is that due to the way each episode is structured, the guest of each episode is subjected to intense and constant surveillance. This can actually reinforce viewers' haughty host mentality or self-reflexive guest identity. It could be the hidden cameras following some poor, unsuspecting guest on *What Not to Wear*, bio-clips where viewers

learn about whatever hardships contestants on *American Idol* (2002-present) or *So You Think You Can Dance* (2005-present) have come from, or the 24-hour surveillance on *Big Brother* (2000-present) and *Survivor* (2000-present), reality television's foundation is in watching people positioned as "normal." While it is important to understand that constant surveillance is something promised (and delivered) by reality television, if analysis of this element of the genre stops here, the strategies behind the surveillance go unattended to. Using Michel Foucault's (1991) process of "governmentality," Sender (2012) posits that "reality television [is] a vehicle for neoliberal values of disciplined, self-monitoring, responsible citizenship…[it proposes] 'technologies of self'—ways of appraising and caring for the self—that audiences are expected to adopt" in order to achieve a certain model of citizenship" (p. 8). Similarly, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008) claim that reality television teaches viewers that in order to be good citizens they must submit to being watched just like the guests on reality makeover shows. This surveillance is paramount to the formation of a normative self (Sender, 2012). Consequently, the love and empowerment in reality television shows is predicated on writing normative gender, race, and class congruence on a body in ways that can be visually policed and affirmed by a collective group of like-minded citizens (Weber, 2010). Pozner (2010) echoes this claiming that television not only shapes our social and cultural perceptions, but also influences what should be considered our proper place in society. Basically, through surveillance, reality television—whether it is constructing narratives about certain people groups in competition shows, dating shows, or makeover shows—teaches viewers how to identify bad citizens and, more importantly, how to correct their own behavior to adhere to a hegemonic performance of "good" citizenry.

If reality television constructs a narrative of what it means to be a good citizen, the question remains, how does a viewer achieve good citizenship? When Hill (2005) discussed the

‘learning opportunities’ available to the viewers of reality television, she was specifically referring to the subgenre of makeover reality television. However, these “learning opportunities” apply to viewers of reality television, in general, in two main ways: consumerism as the path to self-improvement and the formation of individual and social identities. According to Terry Toles Patkin (2003), reality television is a way of building and understanding both our individual identities and other societal identities. Characters and guests in reality television shows are intended to perpetuate stereotypical stock characters like “The Weeper,” “The Bitch,” and “The Angry Black Woman” (Pozner, 2010). Graeme Turner (2010) describes the contemporary media landscape as having unprecedented opportunities for the construction of identity: “Where the media might once have operated as a mediator or perhaps a broadcaster of cultural identities, its contemporary function is closer to that of a translator or even an author of identities” (p. 3). Mediated representation, according to Fiske and Hartley (1978), does not necessarily come from a manifestation of contemporary social reality, but instead is indicative of the structure of values in contemporary society. So, if this pattern of stereotypical typecasting continues to serve as a central part in the cast selection process for reality television, different or marginalized identities will continue to be dangerously reduced to an oversimplified fragment of its true self in order to fit into a dominant narrative, effectively erasing the history and current reality of those marginalized groups.

The second “learning opportunity” afforded to reality television shows also has to do with the construction of an identity. Except, in this example, the identity is not intrinsically written and performed for the viewer. Instead, producers leave a rather conspicuous trail of sponsored bread crumbs to serve as the path to the construction of the viewers’ identities. According to June Deery (2004), the primary goal of the reality makeover genre is to sell

commodities. Vargas (2008) echoed this, stating that the “main premise behind makeover shows is that consumption is the route to self improvement” (p. 20). Additionally, Pozner (2010) notices that makeover shows often promote consumeristic overtones, suggesting to viewers the best way to make and investment if yourself is to spend money, all the while conflating self-worth with net worth. What Deery (2004), Vargas (2008), and Pozner (2010) are all arguing is that reality makeover shows offer consumerism as the way to construct self and societal identities. “The makeover is…a vehicle through which experts communicate with the public directly as advocates of the power of consumer-based lifestyles to fulfill people’s needs” (Redden, 2008, p. 490). Sender (2012) argues that these shows are suggesting that solutions to the problem of the self are contingent on consumption. Invoking postfeminist themes of empowerment through capitalist activity, the makeover is not just buying, but specifically knowing the rules on how and what to buy. In conclusion, “learning opportunities” in reality television shows demonstrate to viewers how to be good citizens through consumerism and through the mediated construction of different and marginalized identities.

It is an unfortunate reality that reality television, in general, but specifically makeover reality television, oversimplifies and misrepresents femininity and feminine performance. This is especially unfortunate because this genre fits perfectly within what Lauren Berlant (2008) calls “women’s culture.” Women’s culture describes cultural products through which women are organized as a market but exist as part of an affective community (Sender, 2012). As a way of fully explaining “women’s culture,” Sender (2012) provided further explanation of her definition:

> As with other women’s genres, these makeover shows are not exclusively about women or for women audiences alone. Rather, they prioritize historically feminine

> concerns, including self-presentation, consumerism, and an intimate relationship with the self produced through interiority, affect, authenticity and the everyday. Like other cultural forms, the shows produce gendered norms and priorities through class assumptions, including the impetus toward upward social mobility, and implicitly raced norms, valuing white standards of appearance and behavior over others (p. 28).

These themes and elements of makeover reality television engage with managing femininity through the transformative process. According to Louise Woodstock (2002), self-help books in the early years of the United States touted that the individual, the usual audience being men, must align himself with the divine, then the commercial in the 1950's, and finally, a shift towards in 1990's. While there is nothing blatantly feminine about self-transformation, the focus on interiority has been societally constructed as a traditionally feminine sphere. The reality makeover genre sacrifices relatable femininity and feminine performance to its overarching tradition of consumerism.

Despite the association of makeover reality television with the feminine and "women's culture," there is still significant pushback to the genre as a whole. Pozner (2010), for example, claims that reality television is the most prevalent example of pop cultural backlash against women's rights and social progress. She goes on to describe reality television as an industry that infantilizes women, takes away any form of agency, preys on naïveté, and restricts feminine identity to a heterosexual, cisgender body. "Reality TV isn't simply *reflecting* anachronistic social biases, it's resurrecting them" (Pozner, 2010, p. 25). If the misrepresentation and commodification of women in the reality television genre is any indicator, it will not come as a surprise to find out that women of color, members of the Queer community, immigrants, people

belonging to a different socio-economic class, even men struggle for accurate representation in television.

In summation, within the genre of reality television, there are several integral parts that make up the structure and purported value of the genre. First, Andrejevic (2004) lists the promises each reality television series contains, including the promises of opportunity for audiences to surpass spectator to become participants, a high return on the emotional investment, and submission to comprehensive surveillance. Furthermore, the genre is characterized by what Hill (2005) calls "learning opportunities" which include consumerism as the path to self-improvement and the formation of individual and social identities. Having established some of the existing conventions of the reality television genre, I now focus on gender performance, specifically within television. In the following section, I engage with literature surrounding mediated representations of Queerness, Queer masculinity, and, to begin with, masculinity as a performance. As the current study interacts with more specific representations of Queerness, masculinity, and television, literature becomes more and more sparse suggesting that both the original and Netflix's *Queer Eye* are the only consistent representations of Queer masculine in makeover reality television.

Gender and Queerness in Media

Before delving into the existing literature about mediated masculinity, there are two theories that are integral to navigating this research. First, it is crucial to understand what gender, specifically masculine, performance is. Judith Butler (1990) developed the theory of performativity as a way to demonstrate that gender is constituted as performative and "the effect of reiterative acts with a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). In other words, gender is constantly

constructed through repeated rituals of performance. Second, R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity is a key concept in many of the studies conducted surrounding this topic. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity argues that there is a set of behavioral patterns that society at large understands as normative masculine behavior. In reality, these are performed by a small portion of the male population and exist as a way to maintain masculine dominance over women. Still, it should be acknowledged that, while the primary objective is to exert dominance over women, hegemonic masculinity also enforces its dominance over varying forms of masculinity.

Some of the richest areas of televisually mediated masculinity can be found in commercials and scripted programing. In each of the studies featured, the commercials are deploying depictions of hegemonic masculinity in response to what Fauldi (1999) and Kimmel (2006) call the contemporary "crisis in masculinity." Melissa Click, Holly Wilson Holladay, Hyunji Lee, and Lars J. Kristiansen (2015) provided a little more insight by defining this crisis as having risen "at the close of the twentieth century" and being "an unstable form of masculinity, conflated with and perpetuated by mass consumerism and mass media, [that] had a firm grasp on American culture" (p. 404). Be it buying a car, eating red meat, or buying a specific brand of deodorant, each actor in the commercials featured in these studies perpetuates the idea that men find themselves in a world where the worth of the man is solely tied to his participation in celebrity-driven consumer culture purporting that buying into hegemonic masculinity (literally and figuratively) is the only way to successfully be a man (Duerringer, 2015; Rogers, 2008; Kluch, 2015; Fauldi, 1999). However, performances of hegemonic masculinity are not limited to commercials focused on the consumerist aspects of masculinity.

Televisual representations of hegemonic masculinity are subsequently reinforced through their presence in scripted television programs. In the situation comedy, *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014), one character, Barney Stinson, is cited as one of the most excessive performances of masculinity in the show, flaunting his singlehood and sexual adventures while simultaneously discrediting the masculinity of his married and hyper romantic friends (Thompson, 2015). Similarly, in a different sitcom about two brothers living in Los Angeles, *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2015), viewers see the controlling and aggressive interpersonal encounters between Charlie, the eternal bachelor, and his brother, Alan, whose masculinity is depicted as subordinate, personifies the way in which hegemonic masculinity exerts power over different performances of masculinity (Hatfield, 2010). Both Thompson (2015) and Hatfield (2010) engage with the ways that hegemonic masculinity is enacted via characters in their respective studies, both of which include performances of hypersexuality and lack of a committed romantic relationship. Hegemonic masculinity is consistently reinforced and perpetuated by reductive televisual representations of contemporary masculinity.

Yet another form of masculine identity constantly reduced and oversimplified in media is Queer masculinity. Beginning with *Soda Squirt* in 1933 and continuing on into Disney movies released in the 1990's, a very distinct archetypal character was utilized in the media (Thorpe, 2014). According to Richard Barrios, a film historian, the "pansy was always…a short hand for gay men without having to spell it out. The visual short hand was the first thing, the voice almost always followed it up" (Thorpe, 2014). Barrios continues to describe "the pansy" as a wise and knowing character, almost always upper class, and usually well educated. This character archetype continued, unfortunately, well into current representations of Queer men in the media. Contemporary interaction with Queer characters mirrors this tradition, relying on Queer

stereotypes (Vargas, 2008). For example, the central performance of gayness in *Will & Grace* (1998-present) stems from the production of camp humor and is conflated with being wealthy (Keller, 2002). In each of the iteration of *Queer Eye* and in *Will & Grace*, the gay men are identified as privileging "a bourgeoisie orientation" (Vargas, 2008, p. 67). Mediated Queer masculinity is far too often reduced to different versions of the antiquated "pansy," an identity that could be argued to be the oppositional to Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity.

Film and scripted television are not the only settings for the egregious representation of Queer identity. Reality television, specifically reality dating television, has contributed extensively to the misrepresentation of Queer people. "Among broadcast and widely viewed cable networks…[there have only been] four high-profile Queer-themed reality TV dating shows...two starring gay men and two staring bisexual women" (Pozner, 2010, p. 49). All of these shows portrayed Queer existence through the lens of heterosexual male gaze, like in *A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila* (2007-2008), MTV's show featuring a publicly bisexual, female, social media personality by the stage name of Tila Tequila (Pozner, 2010). Hypersexualized and forced to "choose" whether she was homo- or heterosexual, *A Shot at Love* often reduced bisexual identity to a sexual performance for the viewing pleasure of heterosexual male viewership. The offenses do not stop there, as Fox touted their show *Seriously, Dude, I'm Gay* as a straight man's worst nightmare: turning gay overnight (Pozner, 2010). In the show, straight men would move into a gay man's apartment and participate in what was constructed as a gay lifestyle; at the end, if the straight man convinced "a jury of their Queers," usually comprised of friends and family, that they were actually gay, they would win a cash prize. Even though this idea failed, due to the efforts of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Fox tried again with *Playing It Straight* (2004), where "a straight woman had to guess the sexual orientations of her

male suitors based on whether they ‘acted gay’ or seemed to behave like ‘normal’…guys,” if a gay man fooled her, he won a million dollars and she left with nothing but if she picked the straight man, they both split the prize money (Pozner, 2010, p. 49). *Playing It Straight* was predicated on the gay contestant’s ability to return to the closet and the straight contestant’s ability to flamboyantly enact gay stereotypes. Pozner (2010) notes that, despite being characterized by homophobic caricatures of Queerness, *Playing It Straight* did cement that cultural expectations of masculinity, be that any point on the spectrum of masculinity, were all performance based. Neither the original nor the Netflix version of *Queer Eye* are unique in their representation of Queer masculinity, but instead are participating in an established tradition of commodifying and reducing Queer masculinity into something palatable for a heterosexual audience.

In summation, reality television habitually reduces its characters’ identities to caricatures of what they really are. Pozner (2010) discusses the narrow ways in which women are allowed to participate in reality television, being restricted to roles similar to princesses in fairytales: only interested in romantic relationships but being heartbroken when she realizes she has been rejected or deceived. Furthermore, Pozner (2010) and Vargas (2008) engage with the offensive way in which (reality) television represents Queer identity. Characters within the LGBTQ+ community are either diminished to fit within unfair stereotypes or paraded around for the enjoyment of a heterosexual audience. Still, there is an important voice missing: the fans’. Sender (2012) highlighted this missing link in her study of reality television audiences. By including the fans’ perspectives and interpretations of the text, Sender (2010) moves away from textual determinism and gives attention to the polysemic nature of television.

Post-Object Fandom and Television Reboots

Out of the many iconic moments throughout television's short history, perhaps some of the most memorable come at the end of a beloved series and these televisual endings can garner significant viewer attention. Whether it was the 52.56 million viewers who took one last walk out of Chandler and Monica's apartment in *Friends* (1994-2004) or the 11.9 million fans who were left hanging by *The Soprano's* (1999-2007) abrupt end, the close of a series holds a unique and specific gravity (Williams, 2015, p. 8). Heartbreaking though they may be, the end of a series produces two potential phenomena for television audiences: the opportunity for post-object fandom and the hope for a remake (Williams, 2015). In the following section, I will engage with literature surrounding what makes a series a remake (Klein & Palmer, 2016) and (post-object) fandom (Williams, 2015).

Before a television viewer can participate in post-object fandom, there is one important step that must be accomplished: becoming a fan. According to Williams (2015), the process of becoming a fan occurs at a juncture of a fan's life where they experience significant turning points that reshape the foundation of their identities. The formation of a "pure relationship" between a fan and the fan object exists solely for the rewards that the relationship can offer (Giddens, 1991, p. 6). The pure relationship between a fan and the fan object yields two specific rewards: "(1) the reflection of a desirable and appropriate self-identity and self-narrative; (2) a sense of ontological security or 'trust'" (Williams, 2015, p. 21). To elaborate, the first reward of fandom comes in the form of a self-identity through self-narrative—the consistent integration of external events into an ongoing story about oneself—that fits within the fan's perception of themselves (Williams, 2015). This reward is fundamental to the existence of the second reward, ontological security. In other words, this second reward is a comfort or confidence in the self-

identity created through fandom (Williams, 2015). Once a viewer goes through the process of becoming a fan, during a time of transition and change in their identity, they experience an appropriate self-identity and develop a confidence in that identity through their fandom.

Since the process of becoming and the rewards of being a fan are so significant and so personal for television viewers, whenever the fan object, or central figure of a fandom, in question ends via cancellation or when characters leave a show, there are significant consequences. At the conclusion of a fan object, the loyal fan must go through a time of identity renegotiation (Williams, 2015). The amount of self-identity and self-narrative negotiation that fans go through at the end of a fan object is comparable to the identity renegotiation that goes into a break up in a romantic relationship (Williams, 2015). Consequently, Williams (2015) argues:

> Following a [fan object] onto new projects means that the fandom does not entirely cease; instead, aspects of it can be carried onwards via familiar writers, directors or producers. One fandom is thus not replaced by another. Rather it allows overlaps and commonalities to be discussed in relation to both the new and the previous fan object (p. 138).

Commonalities in fan objects can be found in producers, directors, or writers, like Williams (2015) argues, but also in the form, brand, and familiarity of the different versions of the fan object. For example, remakes of reality television shows as exemplified by Netflix's *Queer Eye* have the opportunity to maintain connection with the original *Queer Eye* through the structure of the show, the jobs the Fab Five perform (i.e. grooming, culture expert, etc.), and even by using the same theme song modified to fit current popular music conventions. Thus, though the

consequences of the closure of fan objects can be heavy and, in some cases, traumatic, there is room for the fandom to carry over into an extension of the fan object.

The extensions of fan object can take many forms, the most common being remakes. According to Lavigne (2014), remakes are pervasive in contemporary pop culture. But what exactly constitutes a "remake"? Within the context of television, Gil (2014) argues that "remakes occur when one television show is made again," as opposed to an adaptation which usually switches media, like a television show being made into a comic book series or a book being made into a film (p. 23). This is particularly important because, traditionally, texts are understood as successions of distinct singularities or individual texts, but these do not exist in a vacuum and are always engaging with the other episodes in a series and sociopolitical climate at the time of production (Klein & Palmer, 2016). With specific attention to Netflix's *Queer Eye*, each iteration of the series is viewed as its own entity and are discussed (sometimes in episodes of the remake) as being separate but successive texts responding to the aforementioned cultural contexts. This understanding of a series being a text elevates it from the micro level (episodes or seasons of a program) to the macro level (entire series of programs) for analysis.

There are several characteristics and internal functions of remakes that work together to ensure the success of a rebooted series. The first aspect of remakes involves transtextuality, or links that connect one text to another (Genette, 1982). By focusing on the similarities, viewers and scholars alike can find contiguous elements of the two texts. One of the most integral parts of a remake is the necessity for it "to maintain continuity and familiarity" with the original series (Woods, 2016, p. 241). This, in turn, makes it easier for fans experiencing post-object fandom to overlap their fandom over the two separate productions, the original and the remake. The dialectic tension between an original and new version of a text responds to the media industry's

necessity for both regularity and originality (Klein & Palmer, 2016). This necessity for regularity and continuity reinforces the importance of branding and brand authenticity to remaking a television series (Woods, 2016). The perceived authenticity of these remade shows lies in the characters' combining the performance of themselves as people with themselves as characters on a reality makeover show (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Cunningham & Craig, 2017). In the context of the current study, an example of this dialectic tension between originality and brand authenticity being resolved would be like having the same areas of expertise (Food/Wine, Design, Culture, Grooming, and Fashion) for the Fab 5, but assigning those areas to new characters who have to opportunity to revamp their approach to their respective fields.

Considering the literature in television studies, Queer representation in (reality) television, and post-object fandom and television reboots, outlined above, this project asks:

RQ1: How is Queer masculinity represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*?

RQ2: How do audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* understand Queer masculinity?

RQ3: What do the symmetries and asymmetries between messages represented in the text and the audience's interpretations of Queer masculinity reveal about our current cultural context?

Method

As exemplified in Sender's (2012) work, the data collection for the current study came in two sequential parts: a textual analysis of the two existing seasons of Netflix's *Queer Eye: More Than a Makeover* and an audience analysis of participants who have viewed at least one season. In her research, Sender (2012), in the tradition of the CCCS and audience studies, completed a textual analysis on four makeover reality shows: *Starting Over* (2003-2006), *The Biggest Loser*, *What Not to Wear*, and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. After she completed her analysis, she

participated in extensive conversations with the audiences of these shows about their engagements with makeover television (Sender, 2012). This is particularly important because, as she notes, “audiences’ response to these programs were far more nuanced and compelling than textual approaches alone could count for” (Sender, 2012, p. 5). The following section will include a brief overview of textual analysis, followed by an overview of audience studies, and will conclude with the current study’s method.

Textual Analysis

Performing a textual analysis involves analyzing television programs as storytellers and cultural products, looking at the different layers of dominant ideology influenced by the social, cultural, and political context they are produced in. Newcomb (1974) encourages scholars to ask “how does television tell its stories?” and “what is the relation of television’s stories and storytelling strategies to American—and, by implication, any other—society and culture?”, all while illustrating “the multifaceted ways that examinations of television programs might explore the politics and the culture of the worlds they represent without explicitly focusing on matters of power or ideology” (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 40). According to Fiske & Hartley (1978), since television directly responds to the context within which it exists, its job is a product of human choice, cultural decisions, and societal pressures. Performing a critical textual analysis on the artifact in question, the current research will begin to peel back the layers of dominant culture that contextualize this program, analyzing how the text and context interact to expose the underlying influences of (and potential resistance to) power and hegemony. In other words, I looked at the ways the series interacts with and operates within the current social, political, and culture climate in the United States.

For the current project, I conducted a close reading of the existing two seasons of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. In total, the two seasons consist of sixteen episodes with a total run time of 738 minutes (12.3 hours). During the analysis, I looked specifically for the way that the series represents the members of the Queer community featured (specifically the Fab Five, but also Heroes—the title the show gives to the weekly guests receiving the makeover—who belong to the Queer community) and how they interact with and relate to their Heroes. Is the show repeating the reduction of Queer identity? Or are there examples of intersectionality being featured? How does this represent the Queer community? Additionally, I looked for ways that the series adheres to or diverts from traditional reality makeover genres. In what ways might a loyalty to the genre's form demonstrate commodification of Queer identity? How might the divergence from traditional norms represent a form of resistance? By focusing on the representation of the Queer community and how the Fab Five interacts with their Heroes, I engaged with conventions within the text that perpetuate stereotypes or transcend cultural understandings of the Queer community.

In order to fully understand television as an active part of our cultural and social environment, Fiske & Hartley (1978) and Gerbner (1970) argue that scholars need to pay attention to the four dimensions of televisual messages: existence, priorities, values, relationships. In the current study, I performed a close textual analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye* and the discourses present in the series (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 59). These discourses demonstrate the best possible approximation, from my perspective as a critic, of the encoding step of Hall's (1999) Encoding/Decoding process. From this set of data, I then turn to analyze audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

Audience Studies

At this point in the research, the current study begins accounting for the ways audiences decode meaning from the messages from my textual analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. In the same mentality of Sender (2012), I pluralize the concept of an audience to acknowledge that there is not one coherent, homogenous, or singular audience of reality television. Originally spurred by an intense interest in the success of government messaging and propaganda, as well as an intense fear of the dangers of mass-media, original studies of media reception represented audiences as "cultural dupes" (Gill, 2007). However, audiences were not blindly consuming everything exactly the way that the messages' creators intended (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Sender (2012) echoes this idea by noting that even while there are textual factors at work, audiences are also actively making meanings for and by themselves. She notes, "audience research must tread a treacherous path between textual determinism, which usually assumes that the texts do terrible things to people (especially women and children), and the excesses of active audience theory, which celebrates people's freedom to make what they like of the texts they consume" (Sender, 2012, p. 7). It is this idea of active audiences making their own meaning or constructing their own realities that the audience analysis stage of my project explores.

There are several steps and characteristics of the methods involved in deciphering audience interpretation of a text. Following the semi-structured interview questions in Appendix B of this document, I conducted one-on-one interviews, lasting an average of 45-60 minutes, that will take place either over the phone, via Skype, or in-person. Recruitment for these interviews consisted of online recruitment, using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. My participants were 18 years or older who self-identify as viewers Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Being familiar with the Netflix version of *Queer Eye* ensured that participants are able to discuss

aspects of Queer representation in reality television. Before I contacted the participants, they filled out a short survey (Appendix A) including demographic information like age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, profession, and estimated income, in order to contextualize their responses to mediated Queer representation and the consumeristic nature of reality makeover shows. Once I made initial contact with the participants, I employed snowball sampling methods (Creswell, 2007) in order to ensure saturation.

The interviews were characterized as conceptual interviews, focusing on participants' conceptions of phenomena (in this case, mediated Queerness and Queer masculinity), as well as narrative interviews, that "emphasize the temporal, the social, and the meaning structures" being discussed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 176-179). I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews as opposed to focus groups due to "the subjectivity and rich description that participant interviews provide" (Merrigan & Huston, 2015, p. 118). Utilizing the conversational and informal aspect of interviews, I attempted to replicate everuday conversations about media consumption so that my participants would be more encouraged to participate in honest conversations and storytelling during the interview process that they would otherwise self-censor in a group setting (Merrigan & Huston, 2015). Using an audience studies approach, my goal is to understand the ways audiences decode the messages in *Queer Eye*, following Hall's (1999) Encoding/Decoding. After producing verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, I analyzed my participants' responses to Netflix's *Queer Eye*, with an eye toward reoccurring themes from the interviews, as a way to understand the structure of discourses present in contemporary culture, broadly speaking.

Conclusion

By using a layered method like critical textual analysis and audience studies, the current project seeks to contribute to discussions about the implied messages delivered through the makeover reality television genre, while at the same time, exploring the polysemic nature of media by engaging with audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Following Hall's (1999) Encoding/Decoding, I analyzed recurring themes of Netflix's *Queer Eye* through textual analysis. Then I conducted approximately 30-35 one-on-one interviews with audiences of *Queer Eye* about the show's themes. Finally, I employed an audience studies approach to the data gathered from the interviews, analyzing them for the audiences' constructed meanings and understandings of self and societal identities.

I position this research as part of the detailed and complex history of television studies, landing neatly in Lotz's (2007) post-network era. Pulling influences from the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies, this study is situated within the television studies paradigm over the course of its introduction to academia until its permanent settlement as a discipline of study. Engaging with literature about the reality television genre, specifically the makeover show sub-genre, I engage tendencies for the genre to sexualize, gender, and radically reduce identities to stereotypical caricatures of individuals' true selves.

"My goal is to figure out how similar we are": Ordinariness, Queer Masculinity, and Netflix's Fab Five[1]

Introduction

In July of 2003, television screens were lit up with Hollywood-style spotlights with the letters "QE" inside of them. Disco-inspired music pumped out of the television speakers proclaiming that "all things keep getting better." One-by-one, five men seen on a monochromatic background answered a text message with the same letters: QE. The five men, who we now know as the Fab Five, left their work stations, which had been carefully constructed to represent their areas of expertise. After meeting at the corner of Gay Street and Straight Street, the Fab Five strut down the road, passing buffoonish heterosexual men who change into gods of metrosexuality as the Fab Five walks by them. As Carson Kressley, the resident fashion guru walked "into" the camera, he removes his glasses revealing, in the most literal sense, a Queer eye, and thus *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007) was introduced to Bravo's program lineup. Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* featured five openly gay men, under the moniker the Fab Five, each of whom brought expertise in a different field. Carson Kressley was the fashion guru, Kyan Douglas focus on grooming, Ted Allen excelled in food and wine, Jai Rodriguez was the cultural expert, and Thom Felicia was the master of interior design. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (hereafter referred to as Bravo's *Queer Eye*) quickly became a very visible representation of Queerness in America. Almost twenty years later, Netflix announced they were bringing *Queer Eye* (2018-present) back. In February of 2018, after much anticipation and expectation, five men strutted across Atlanta, Georgia's Rainbow Crosswalks, walking to the

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[1] I would like to thank Dr. Christi Moss for permission to use the term paper I wrote for her seminar in Rhetorical Criticism as the foundation and inspiration for this chapter.

beat of a contemporary pop remix of the original theme song and introducing themselves as the new Fab Five. This time Tan France is taking over Fashion, Jonathan Van Ness picks up Grooming, Antoni Porowski inherits the role of Food and Wine, Karamo Brown tackles Culture, and Bobby Berk makes his mark on Design.

Netflix's *Queer Eye* was burdened with the responsibility to atone for the sins of its predecessor. Goldberg (2018) says that, "The new *Queer Eye* fixes the flaws of the original and, as they point out in the first episode, the new version is about moving from tolerance to acceptance." Many critics thought Netflix's *Queer Eye* would right the wrongs of the original series. Laguaite (2018) echoes similar sentiments as she states, "the 2018 version will be a bit of a contrast to the 2000's-era series," characterized by the new Fab Five "discussing topics like marriage, wanting children, fatherhood and the stigmas behind ethnicity, race and sexuality." However, not all reception of the new series was as positive as this. People critiqued the homogony of the Fab Five, calling for a more diverse representation of Queer identity, and feared that a reboot would reignite regressive stereotypes about gay men (Dry, 2018; Fallon, 2018). As a result, the discourse that characterizes the new Fab Five members as synecdoche's for contemporary Queer masculinity deserves further scrutiny.

I engage with the study of reality television through Andrejavic's (2004) promises of reality television and Hill's (2005) learning opportunities from reality television. According to Andrejavic (2004), reality television promises viewers three things: the potentional to suprass viewer and become a participant, a high return on emotional investment, and submission to complete survellaince of the episode's guest. Hill (2005) additionally adds that reality television provides two distinct learning opportunities for its viewers. The first opportunity, supported by the research of Turner (2010) and Fiske & Hartley (1978), revolves around the formation of

individual and social identities. This formation is accomplished through highlighting stereotypical representations of stock characters like "The Angry Black Woman," "The Frat Boy," "The Slut," and "The Flamboyant Gay Guy" (Pozner, 2010). Finally, Hill (2005) argues that one of the learning opportunities found in reality television is how to construct a personal identity through consumerism. The promises and learning opportunities are the foundation to the genre of reality television.

When interacting with representations of gender and Queerness in reality television, the current project grounds its history in two theories of gender and gender performance and in the previous representations of Queerness in reality television. As the foundation for the current study, I engage with Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. Additionally, I employ R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. These two theories inform my approach to the representations of masculinity and Queerness in reality television. Together, Butler's (1990) theory of gender performance and Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity inform my approach to the way gender and sexuality is constructed n television. Mediated representations of hegemonic masculinity can be found in both commercials and scripted television like primetime dramas and sitcoms. In an effort to utilize non-hegemonic masculinity, for example Queer masculinity, as an entertainment source, reality television dramatically reduces the representations of Queer masculinity to flamboyant accessories and dramatic side-attractions, often leaving Queer men in emotionally and physically dangerous situations.

As I will argue in this chapter, in Netflix's *Queer Eye*, portrayals of non-hegemonic masculinity are often articulated through the lens of the "ordinary." Through my analysis, I argue that Netflix's *Queer Eye* is framing Queer masculinity as "ordinary" (Cavalcante, 2018) and by means of this ordinariness, they are perceived as being their "most authentic self" (Collins, "To

Gay or Not Too Gay," 2018). This perception of authenticity, the second aforementioned theory, gives them the opportunity to be the torchbearers of authentic self for their Heroes (the guests being made over in each episode).

Literature Review

Origins of Dangerous Queerness

Often identified as the first example of Queer masculinity in film, a character archetype the Pansy characterized Queer masculine characters and established a pattern of representation still present today. In the 2014 documentary, *Do I Sound Gay*, by David Thorpe, Richard Barrios describes the Pansy as a sort of cinematic shorthand that can be read onto the character's body as a way of idenfitifying Queerness without having to explicitly name it. He further argues that the "physical shorthand was the first thing, but the voice almost always followed it up" (Thorpe, 2014). The elements that created this visual (and then verbal) shorthand included men who were well-educated or "witty," "aristocratic," usually thin, always white, often considered "peripheral" or "harmless," and sometimes included men with "high-pitched" or "lisping" voices (Thorpe, 2014; Benshoff & Griffin, 2006). Most of these stereotypes "reinforced (and grew out of) notions of homosexuality as gender inversion" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006). While early depictions of Queer masculinity were often portrayed as nonthreatening and tangential to the story line, Richard Barios describes a turning point in which gay characters like actor Clifton Webb who played a killer in *Laura* (1944) and began the tradition of adding evil and dangerous connotations to the Pansy archetype. This in turn started to demonize characters who looked, acted like, or sounded like the Pansy. While the archetype of the Pansy was first introduced as early as in films like *Syncopation* in 1929, their controversial legacy reaches into contemporary constructions of Queer masculinities. Characters like ad executive Brian Kinney in *Queer as*

Folk (2000) or lawyer Will Truman from *Will & Grace* (1998) embody many of the characteristics indicative of the Pansy. The specific, dangerous portrayal of Queerness exemplified by Clifton Webb has bled into such movies as the classic Disney films to characterize villains like Shere Khan from *The Jungle Book* (1967), Captain Hook from *Peter Pan* (1953), and Jafar from *Aladdin* (1992). The influences of the dangerous Pansy are represented in these Disney villains through their inherent evil characterizations and their physical and vocal presentations of being thin, aristocratic, and well-educated. The foundation of Queer representation laid by the Pansy started a tradition of Othering and demonizing mediated representation of Queer men.

Progressing through history, gay men continued to be Othered through mediated representations, specifically through the destructive engagement with news headlines. After a public hearing of a subcommittee of the U.S. Senate, a government official announced that ninety-one State Department employees had been fired with ambiguous justification as to why (Streitmatter, 2009). When asked to clarify why, the spokesperson replied, barely whispering, “They were homosexuals” (Edwards, 1950). According to Streitmatter (2009), “That comment pushed the nation’s elite new organizations across a historic threshold because, having been heard by several Capitol Hill reporters during the public session, it could not be ignored” (p. 8). This forced the hand of many news organizations who were fearful that their audiences would be offended seeing the word “homosexual” printed in their newspapers while being even more afraid that other news organizations would have the lead in covering this story. The story became referred to as “Perverts on the Potomac,” which “communicated several negative messages about homosexuals, thereby consistently demonizing such men. Specifically, the articles portrayed ‘perverts’ as a threat to the nation’s well-being…and as posing a grave danger to young boys”

(Streitmatter, 2009, p. 6-7). Similar to the way that the Pansy was at first tangential and harmless then portrayed as a threat to the main characters, gay men specifically were dragged out of the metaphorical national closet where the country had left them to be ignored and immediately characterized as a threat to national identity. Because of this perceived threat, gay men were being called things like “perverts,” “degenerates,” and “deviants,” but, more importantly, newspapers like *The New York Times*, used headlines like “Federal Vigilance on Perverts Asked” to frame gay men as so Othered that the efforts to expunge them deserved federal attention. Further Othering gay men, the call to action for the federal government to be vigilant about these “perverts” created a dangerous dichotomy of good citizen and threat to the nation. As the gay man is pulled from the margins, be it in the way of the feminized or gender-inverted Pansy or through news headlines targeting them as “perverts” or “fairies,” he is continuously painted as dangerous. The inclusion of the slur “fairies” in the 1950’s news attack on Queer men is particularly important as it connotes a type of dehumanization that is divorced from reality and characterized as other-worldly, supernatural, and otherwise non-realistic by nature.

In the early 2000’s, Bravo’s *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was released and, while it increased the representation of gay men and specifically their relationship with straight men, it brought with it damaging dichotomies and framing strategies that contributed to the Othering of gay men. Where shows like *Will & Grace* (1998-present) or *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) provided (some) representation of a “broader look at gay men,” Bravo’s *Queer Eye* “crossed yet another threshold by exposing TV viewers to an entirely new category of gay men: The real thing” (Streitmatter, 2009, p. 137). For example, Streitmatter (2009) discusses an interview in which Thom Felicia, the interior design expert, and Kyan Douglass, grooming expert, both commented on how their own performances of self were connected to the core of who they are

and how they identify. This contextualization of gay representation is particularly problematic when considering the way that Bravo's Fab Five were framed and discussed throughout their time on air. David Metzler and David Collins, executive producers of Bravo's *Queer Eye*, wrote about the Fab Five, describing them as a type of larger than life superheroes armed with impeccable fashion, conventionally attractive appearances, and expensive cosmetics (Allen, Douglas, Filicia, Kressley, and Rodriguez, 2004, p. 8). Vargas (2008) continues the trend of describing Bravo's Fab Five as superheroes by comparing their black SUV to the "Batmobile," ready to swoop in and save "the 'challenged' straight man" (p. 2). The imagery of superheroes does not stop there, though, this "theme is also made evident in all advertising and promotion efforts. The five men are portrayed … in James Bond poses, using hangers and hair dryers as their weapons of choice" (Vargas, 2008, p. 2). By creating images of Bravo's Fab Five as superheroes, the portrayal of Queer masculinity is shifted from its history of dangerous Other to a contemporary commodifiable Other. Bravo's Fab Five were expected to drive around New York City "combating the style horrors of the world" (Vargas, 2008, p.2) or "transform a…straight man from drab to fab" ("About Us," 2004). In other words, Queer men moved from being a danger to society into an era where they were tasked with the challenge of fixing it through their own expertise. Lacroix and Westerfelhaus (2005) engages with the "make-over prowess" of Bravo's Fab Five, describing them as "connoisseurs," "savants," and "gurus" to emphasize their occupational (p. 12). Focusing on the last two descriptions, the superhuman and supernatural narratives around the Fab Five are reinforced by the spiritual connotation of "savant" and "guru" which, in turn, reinforces an Othering of Queer masculinity.

Queer Masculinity in Bravo's *Queer Eye*

When Bravo's *Queer Eye* premiered in 2003, it provided a shift in the way Queer masculinity was represented on television. Streitmatter (2008), argues that unlike shows like *Soap* (1977), *Will & Grace* (1998), and *Queer as Folk* (2000), Bravo's *Queer Eye* offered a new venue for the representation of Queer masculinity. This new category characterized gay men in three ways: disruptive, helpful, and oversimplified. When discussing the format of the show, Streitmatter (2008) describes the plot as swirling around the touted expertise of five gay men who converged on a heterosexual client. Providing more detail, Vargas (2008) says that when the original Fab Five arrived at their clients' homes, they would rummage through their space making comments about the interior design, choice of fashion, contents of kitchen, or their grooming regimen. Often times, this initial surveillance of the person being made over was accompanied by dramatic reactions to the shortcomings in any or all of these areas of living. Streitmatter (2008) states that this initial interaction began almost immediately upon meeting the client and was characterized by a cacophony of critical remarks. Under the guise of being for the benefit of the guest, the "radically and rapidly" (Lacroix &Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 12) accomplished transformation that characterized each episode was accomplished in one day and often described as "life changing" (Vargas, 2008, p. 3). The complete overhaul of the guests' lives, accompanied with the initial dramatic interactions, created an overwhelming sense of disruption from the original Fab Five.

Along with being characterized as disruptive, the original Fab Five helped shape the perception of Queer masculinity into a group of people who were eager to help. Vargas (2008) claims that the original Fab Five were "depicted as five superheroes traveling through the streets rescuing males from bad taste" (p. 2). She continues to argue that the original Fab Five reinforce

the superhero theme through her description of "the mission of the day, reminiscent of Charlie's call when assigning missions to his angels in the series, *Charlie's Angels*" (p. 2). After the disruptive introduction to their guest for the episode the original Fab Five would stop their criticism and jesting and would start directing their energies and own individual expertise to the main goal of the episode (Streitmatter, 2008, p. 140). In other words, after they had the opportunity to invade their guests' living spaces and spew critiques, the original Fab Five were tasked with the responsibility of helping fix that person.

For Bravo's *Queer Eye*, the role of consumerism and capitalism played a definitive role in the transformation process. Sender (2012) argues that reality make over shows are "unapologetically commercial; they are…dependent on revenue from advertising, ratings, [and] product placements" (p. 6). Said differently, Sender's (2012) argument is that makeover reality shows are founded on capitalist behavior as a way to monitor and improve the self or to find the most "authentic" self; these shows reach past teaching you just to buy something and model the rules of what to buy to attain the personal transformation. Lisa Henderson (2003) challenges this argument by acknowledging that while capitalism may be a cornerstone to reality makeover shows, Bravo's *Queer Eye* highlighted one of the only areas that Queer men can be seen working and openly gay. In other words, while Henderson (2003) highlights the importance of showcasing professional spaces where Queerness can openly exist, doing so within the context of reality makeover television appropriates those spaces for capitalist and consumerist goals (Sender, 2006). Even though a series like Bravo's *Queer Eye* may be a stepping stone for the positive visibility of Queer men, it does so at the expense of using those Queer bodies as arbitrators of capitalist behaviors.

Finally, Bravo's *Queer Eye* drastically oversimplified Queer masculinity. Lacroix and Westerfelhaus (2005) argue that the "show unquestioningly reaffirms [a] straight/gay dichotomy" (p. 12). By representing Queer, specifically gay, men as opposite of heterosexual men, this drastically reduces the chances to see the intricacies of everyday Queer living. This holds in tension Streitmatter's (2008) argument that Bravo's *Queer Eye* represents a "real" version of Queerness. For example, because of the drastic oversimplification of Queer identity there was no room for the original Fab Five to discuss their personal lives or careers even though they were not playing fictional characters but representing themselves within the dissonance between authentic and fictional genres indicative of reality television (Sender, 2012). Furthermore, Bravo's *Queer Eye* ended each episode with the original Fab Five seated in the "Loft," the apartment-style space where the original Fab Five congregated after their work was finished to watch recorded footage of their client executing their advice. Lacroix and Westerfelhaus (2005) argue that the Loft is an extension of the Closet which "serves to contain Queers, and especially Queer sexuality, in order to protect the social mainstream from the supposed danger posed by [Queerness]" (p. 12). In other words, outside a few campy jokes from Carson Kressley, the original Fab Five did not have an opportunity to discuss their romantic or sexual identities at risk of being distracted from the main goal: using their Queerness to improve straightness.

In conclusion, the Pansy laid the foundation for reductive and dangerous representations of mediated Queer masculinity that illuminates the context of Bravo's *Queer Eye*. Starting with the character archetype of the Pansy, moving to perverts in the 1950's, and finally, oversimplified superheroes whose goal lies in facilitating the romantic success of their heterosexual clients. In Bravo's *Queer Eye*, characterization surrounding neoliberal values of

self-transformation into a better citizen cement the original Fab Five's image as disruptive and oversimplified replications of Queerness as dichotomous to straightness of Queer identity whose primary goal was to work in servitude of the heterosexual dominant culture. Newer to the canon of Queer masculine representation, however, is representing Queer men as ordinary or authentic.

Queerly Ordinary

Cavalcante (2018) takes up this idea of being ordinary through his discussion of Queerness in media and lived experience. In his argument he uses "the word 'ordinary' strategically to move away from the clinical, diagnostic, and deeply moralistic connotations of the word 'normal'" (Cavalcante, 2018, p. 20). Cavalcante (2018) approaches the concept of "normality" or "normalization" through a Foucauldian lens claiming that normalization operates under strict rules and guidelines meant to distinguish people based on their adherence or divergence from dominant norms. This creates hierarchies based on a person's identity, thus creating unrelenting boundaries of what is and is not socially acceptable (p. 18). The rules and hierarchies of Foucauldian normality produce what Bartky (1997) identifies as a "docile body" (p. 94) which is created through consistent, societal force being directed toward any bodily activity. In other words, by way of "normalization," docile bodies are disciplined due to their Otherness to dominant ideology. The bodies of non-hegemonic gender and sexual identities are policed in the construction of what is "normal."

With that being said, Cavalcante (2018) deliberately uses the word "ordinary" to focus on the "taken-for-granted" aspects of everyday life which is constructed through the relationship between Queer impossibilities and possibilities in media. The current study engages with the theory of ordinariness in the same way; it centers around being a part of cultural rituals based in relationships that foster community and a connection to something greater than the individual

(Cavalcante, 2018). Everyday aspects of life like being members of romantic relationships, or engagements with politics and religion, or even belonging to friendships constitute the current engagement with "ordinariness." Additionally, the everydayness of Cavalcante's (2018) ordinariness is constructed through mediated representations of Queerness as they relate to Queer impossibilities and possibilities. For his participants, media represented both an obstacle and venue to imagining Queer ordinariness (Cavalcante, 2018). This is exemplified through impossibility interpreted through the destructive and harmful representations of Queerness, "not only because they frequently appear in media, but also because [the participants] are fundamentally at risk" in their everyday lives (Cavalcante, 2018, p. 24). Contrarily, Cavalcante's (2018) participants use "meaningful interactions" (p. 24) with images and stories on the Internet as a way to explore the emergence of Queer possibility. Mediated representations of Queerness generate the potential for Queer (im)possibility through audiences' engagements with the content. In summary, the everyday aspect of ordinariness represented in the media influences Queer peoples' ideologies of what is and is not possible.

Additionally, the construction of Cavalcante's (2018) ordinariness lies within the everyday aspects of intersectionality. When it was first introduced, Crenshaw (1994) used the term intersectionality in a legal context to discuss different sites of oppression. Since Crenshaw (1994) introduced the theory of intersectionality, it has become what Collins & Bilge (2016) describe as an analytical tool to help people solve problems, they or people around them encounter. According to Collins & Bilge (2016) these problems usually revolve around "social divisions of class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability" (p. 2). In other words, Collins & Bilge (2016) interact with intersectionality as a way to highlight the relational aspect of the intersections of peoples' identities; the ways that the cruxes of identity exist and function

together in society. Creating complex identities by focusing on intersectionality reveals the intricacies of everyday life which Cavalcante (2018) describes as a "space of *living*: living with, living in, living in-between, and living against power" (Cavalcante, 2018, p. 7, emphasis in original). Paying specific and deliberate attention to the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and gender is essential in establishing ordinariness.

Methods

In the current study, I will be conducting a textual analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye: More than a Makeover*. This study will focus on the two existing seasons of the show which both contain eight episodes averaging 45 minutes per episode. Since the start of this study, Netflix released a third season which will not be included within the scope of this analysis. My analysis of the 738 minutes (12.3 hours) of the series resulted in 90 pages of notes from which I extracted recurring themes from across the span of the sixteen episodes. Through more than 50 hours of screen time, I first engaged with the series to familiarize myself with the structure of and characters in the show, then through the lens of the genre of reality television, and finally, by focusing on the way that Netflix's *Queer Eye* characterizes Queer masculinity. This final lens framed my approach to coding the notes taken on the series. An abundance of literature has already been published on Bravo's *Queer Eye* (Lacroix &Westerfelhaus, 2005; Sender, 2006; Streitmatter, 2008; Vargas, 2008; Sender, 2012). Consequently, I do not repeat that scholarship, but rather use the claims of this published work to contextualize Netflix's reboot. In depth comparisons between Bravo's *Queer Eye* and Netflix's *Queer Eye* are beyond the scope of this project, but the context of the reboot is important. Therefore, I am reliant on peer-reviewed scholarship on the program to offer that context.

Analysis

As the identities of Netflix's Fab Five are complicated through a focus on intersectionality, their identities are being defined as ordinary. In the first episode of season one, Antoni Porowski, the Food and Wine expert, claims, "[His] goal is to figure out how we're similar, as opposed to how different we are" (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018). In theory, this sentiment actively rejects the role of the Fab Five in Bravo's *Queer Eye* as disruptive superheroes sent to save the day and focuses the shared identities between Netflix's Fab Five and their Heroes. Netflix's Fab Five performs ordinariness by focusing on, or sometimes simply revealing, intersections of their identities as Queer men and their performance of sexuality, involvement in politics, role as (metaphorical) fathers, participation in romantic relationships, and existence as Queer men of color. By performing these aspects of their inner selves, Netflix's Fab Five are represented as ordinary. As I will argue in the following sections, Netflix's *Queer Eye* engages with ordinary authenticity constructed by a focus on intersectionality through an interaction with the identities of the Fab Five as homosexual men and people who express their sexuality, advocate their political ideologies, who are husbands, men of color, fathers, and men who have and nurture friendships.

Sexuality

One aspect of the performance of sexuality in Netflix's *Queer Eye* indicates that the Fab Five, and Queer men in general, are participating in sexual activity. Usually, an acknowledgment or mediation of Queer sex is removed the story lines of television shows and films featuring Queer characters (Tirado, 2019). In Netflix's *Queer Eye*, however, the presence of Queer sexuality is apparent and celebrated. For example, while getting to know AJ, one of the Heroes who identifies as gay, Porowski and Tan France, the Fashion expert, find a leather harness in the

closet. Upon finding the harness, Porowski states, “I think that’s for a leather daddy sexy party type thing,” to which AJ shyly agrees with him (Collins, “To Gay or Not Too Gay,” 2018). In the makeshift fashion show that characterizes the end of the transformation process in each episode and after working to embrace more of his Queer identity, AJ comes out of his room wearing a pair of jeans and the leather harness, without a shirt. The inclusion of the leather harness—and the reaction from the Fab Five—serves as a tool to candidly engage with the featured Queer men’s sexualities (Peters, 2005). A similarly candid exchange happens between Karamo Brown, the Culture expert, and Hero, Jason, in the second season. After Van Ness finds Jason’s Magnum sized condoms, Brown observes, “Clearly he’s got a big penis. These are the ones that I use” (Collins, “The Handyman Can,” 2018). While this conversation started about the sexuality of the Hero, Brown’s comment quickly grounded it in Queer sexuality. In these examples, the Fab Five practice sexuality that is not just for show but something that they relate to in everyday life. By engaging with these performances of sexuality in a candid and understated way, Queer sexuality becomes part of the ritualistic everydayness of ordinariness.

Another aspect of Queer sexuality manifests in the interactions between the Fab Five and the Hero of the episode, which usually occur near the end of the episode, during or after Van Ness’s grooming tutorials and France’s lessons in style and fashion. In the case of Netflix’s *Queer Eye*, the new Fab Five do not shy away from expressing attraction to the Hero or their friends. While coaching a barber through his vision for Hero, Remington, Van Ness confesses, “I know, I said I’d swear to not be attracted to you and not make you uncomfortable, but I just don’t know if I can, like, really keep to that promise anymore” (Collins, “The Renaissance of Remington,” 2018). Van Ness’s unabashed confession of attraction serves as a glimpse into what viewers are to believe is his everyday life. Additionally, Fab Five Design expert, Bobby Berk,

described Hero, Bobby Camp, as “already an attractive guy, but after [the makeover] he’s refined and a total DILF [Dad I’d Like to Fuck]” (Collins, “Camp Rules,” 2018). Berk’s candid expression of sexual attraction through the phrase “DILF” not only invites surveillance into his performance of sexuality but exposes specific aspects of his sexual desire. Finally, Brown is shocked by “how many sexy guy friends” Hero, Neal, had attending the launching party for his app (Collins, “Saving Sasquatch,” 2018). Shortly after Brown’s comment, Van Ness states, “Honestly, Ben [Neal’s nominator] is, like, taking my breath away right now” (Collins, “Saving Sasquatch,” 2018). Ramsey & Santiago (2004) argue that, due to the commodification of Queer bodies as “fairy godmothers” (Vargas, 2008, p. 26) in Bravo’s *Queer Eye*, in historical representations of Queerness, and in contemporary Queer lives under a decidedly anti-Queer administration, Queer sexuality is ignored, and more importantly neutralized to prioritize heteronormative relationships. Van Ness and Brown push back against this narrative by openly talking about the ways in which they find Neal’s friends attractive, practicing radical performances of sexuality that resist hegemonic practices of sexual desire. With this in mind, each example of uninhibited, unapologetic acknowledgement of sexual attraction reveals another intersection of the Fab Five’s identities that grounds their lives in the ordinariness enjoyed by their heterosexual Heroes.

Even though Netflix’s *Queer Eye*’s acknowledgment of Queer sexuality is an important aspect of constructing the ordinary for Queer men, the series is not without flaw, at times positioning Queer sexuality as aggressive and coercive. Depictions of this are scattered throughout the series through actions like giving a sexually charged compliment, nonconsensual touching, and invasive assumptions about the Hero’s sex life. For example, Berk’s aforementioned description of Hero, Bobby, as a “DILF” is indicative of aggressive and overtly

sexual objectification from Netflix's Fab Five. Additionally, these behaviors are represented explicitly in the final episode of the first season where Netflix's Fab Five makes over a firefighter and the fire station. Viewers are introduced to the firefighters through a steamy montage of the firemen lifting weights with an R&B style track repeating the word "sensual" playing in the background (Collins, "Hose Before Bros," 2018). Within a minute of the start of the episode, these men are being sexualized.

This behavior of objectification continues throughout the entire episode as Brown blatantly flirts with one of the firefighters, Micah, who he has renamed "Superman." Essentially, Brown is enforcing the concept of a "docile body," the production of which "requires that an uninterrupted coercion be directed to the very process of bodily activity" (Bartky, 1997, p. 94). Brown creates a docile body by manipulating the odds so that he and Micah have to dance together for the cultural activity of the episode, as well as making Micah cuddle with him on the fire station's new couch. While he physically pulls him back onto the couch, Brown further sexualizes Micah as he says, "Just relax! Just sit back, Superman…You're making 17-year-old Karamo very happy right now" (Collins, "Hose Before Bros," 2018). These interactions between Brown and Micah present two specific problems. First, Brown is using his position of authority as a way navigating around Micah's refusal of consent, similar to the warnings of anti-gay campaigns in the 1990's (Trammell, 2015). Additionally, Brown's creation of a docile body through his insistence on physical contact and flirtatious activity with Micah coupled with Micah's obvious nonverbal expression of discomfort positions Brown's Queer sexual behavior in the same context as the pervert craze of the 1950's (Streitmatter, 2009). Netflix's *Queer Eye* explores Queer sexuality in a more complex and nuanced way that situates Queer masculinity in

an everyday context, but at times, the performance of sexuality breeches the ordinary and becomes aggressive.

Political Activity

Despite Bravo's *Queer Eye* being the product of political activism in the 1990's, the original Fab Five had shockingly little room to explore their political ideologies. The reclamation of the term "Queer," was the product of activism from organizations like Queer Nation, the Lesbian Avengers, and ACT UP, all of which were catalysts for dynamic change in the years leading up to the 2003 release of the original series (Keller, 2002; Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Rand, 2014). Despite the political work done to achieve production of a show like this, the scholarship published on the representation of Queer bodies reflects a pattern of reduction from fully actuated citizen to commodities. This reductive habit restricts Queer characters from actively talking about politics while positioning them as pawns in the governmentality aspect of reality television (Sender, 2012). For example, the original Fab Five were often used as "fairy godmothers" (Vargas, 2008, p. 26) and lacked the opportunity to talk about any aspect of the political climate, further alienating them from citizenship (Turner, 2001; Bennett, 2009). In other words, representations of Queer masculinity, specifically Queer masculinity in reality makeover shows, have excluded Queer men from being considered citizens of the state but forced them to become tutors of sorts on how to be a "good" citizen.

Unlike previous representations of Queer masculinity, Netflix's *Queer Eye* has provided their Fab Five the room to identify their political beliefs and bring awareness to how that impacts their everyday lives. While driving to their new job in the second episode of the second season, Van Ness goes on a short diatribe about the 2016 presidential elections saying, "Oh my God! Every time we get this far out of Atlanta, I just remember the nervousness I felt on election night

2016, just this, like, level of discomfort. Like, where are we going? What's happening?" (Collins, "A Decent Proposal," 2018). This peek into Van Ness's life exposes part of his identity that does not necessarily have anything to do with his job as the Grooming expert on the show. Through the revelation of his political ideology, he is engaging with the ways that he navigates "living with…[and] against power" (Cavalcante, 2018, p. 7), giving insight into the intersections of his identity. While Cavalcante (2018) posits that the everyday life is not essentially Political, Netflix's *Queer Eye*'s focus on electoral politics provides the space to explore the cultural contextualization of power in the United States, as well as the ways that they exist within that power. Two episodes in the series serve as examples of the ways that Netflix's Fab Five entangle their identities as Queer men with their political identities, and by extension their roles as ordinary citizens, specifically, through the performance of resistance and endorsement of political candidates.

The first example of Netflix's Fab Five interacting with their Queer and political identities is displayed through deployment of dissent. While making over police officer, Cory, the Fab Five find merchandise indicative of Cory's conservative voting habits which elicits negative reactions from the Fab Five. While rummaging through the house, Brown walks up to Cory and Van Ness showing off the red "Make America Great Again" cap he found. While Berk stands speechless, jaw dropped in shock, Cory plainly states, "We're all gonna make America great again" (Collins, "Dega Don't," 2018). Shortly after, while the Fab Five and Cory are walking into his garage, Brown is again the one to find a yard sign endorsing Trump/Pence 2016 in the garage. In a comment framed to address the garage as a whole, Berk addresses the presence of the sign by claiming that, "[p]olitically, it's not great" (Collins, "Dega Don't," 2018). Berk and Brown both complicate their identities on the show by pushing past being Queer

and doing their jobs (Design and Culture, respectively) while openly showing dissent for the current administration. Due to the reduction of Queer identity to people who are “eager to help” (Streitmatter, 2008), whose only purpose is to achieve the goal of fixing their client, the original Fab Five were characterized as “fairy godmothers” (Vargas, 2008) who grant wishes and move on to the next project. The original Fab Five did not have the opportunity to explore their political identities because that would get in the way of their real purpose: helping the straight man. In Netflix’ *Queer Eye*, the new Fab Five has more of an opportunity to explore the intricacies of their identities, and thus their resistance to being used as capitalist tools, explicitly expressing the everyday aspect important to their performance of ordinariness.

The second instance in which Netflix’s *Queer Eye* explores the political identities of the new Fab Five is when the team makes over small-town mayor, Ted, not only applauding his progressivism, but expressing support for his political identity and activity. While going through Ted’s house, Tan France (Fashion expert) discovers a yard sign for the Clinton/Kaine 2016 campaign. Upon seeing it, all three members of the Fab Five present start cheering and clapping. Van Ness then runs out into the hall to find Ted as he exclaims, “Stronger together, Ted, we are! I love her!” (Collins, “Make Ted Great Again,” 2018). Even though, according to Sender (2012), reality makeover shows feature themes of neoliberal values as a way to achieve good citizenship, literature surrounding the original Fab Five imply that they did not have the opportunity to express political dissent or support due to their role as fairy god mothers whose sole purpose was to chaotically descend upon an unsuspecting client to “fix them” within twenty-four hours’ time (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2004; Vargas, 2008). In Bravo’s *Queer Eye*, the original Fab Five “quickly invade[d] their clients’ lives and spaces” and were restricted to a liminal status that defined “their otherwise transgressive intrusion into the...[clients’ lives as] tame, temporary, and

ritually situated to serve the needs of the heteronormative mainstream through fulfilment of their well-defined mission" (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2004, p. 13-14). In other words, the liminal status of the original Fab Five allowed them to burst into a client's life and home, fix them, then retreat to the Loft. While there is certainly a liminal status in Netflix's *Queer Eye*, it has been relaxed enough to allow the new Fab Five the opportunity to discuss more personal aspects of their identities, like the expression of political beliefs and the participation in citizenship just like the Heroes they work with.

Netflix's Fab Five are characterized as authentic through their endorsement or dissent from the political climate surrounding their show. Released just a year after President Trump was inaugurated, the series provides the space for the Fab Five to perform citizenship, not just to create good neoliberal citizens out of their guests (Sender, 2012). Historically, citizenship is defined as engagement with social, political, or civil rights, like participation in electoral politics (Marshall, 1964; Bauböck, 2005). In the two examples above, Netflix's Fab Five take advantage of the opportunity to discuss their political ideologies that has been previously denied to traditional representations of Queer masculinity. By acknowledging support for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton or their resistance to the Trump administration, Netflix's Fab Five takes a show meant to focus solely on their Queer identity and brings attention to the intersections of Queerness and citizenship. Netflix's *Queer Eye* highlights the ordinariness of the Fab Five through the intended authentic performance of everydayness by exploring the intersections of their identities as Queer citizens.

The characterization of Netflix's Fab Five as authentic through their performance of Queerness and political activity provides a much-needed venue for the complication of Queer masculinity represented on television, however, that does not necessarily mean that it is wholly

beneficial in nature. According to Fiske's (2011) theory of incorporation "capitalism is strengthened by the elements it incorporates from the oppositional, and by the voices it has robbed from the radical" (p. 39). Fiske (2011) explains this process with the metaphor of inoculation: if the dominant ideology wants to strengthen its resistance to anything radical, it need only to inject itself with a controlled dosage of the radical subject, usually with incorporation happening after radicalism. This, in conjunction with Sender's (2012) engagement with the governmentality of reality makeover shows, infers that the forms of resistance displayed in Netflix's *Queer Eye* are being sanitized and pacified through its inclusion in the narrative of the series. While Netflix's Fab Five being characterized as ordinary through their participation as a political citizen is important, it is also necessary to question to what end. Still, the inclusion of political ideologies, has not been central to television representation of Queer masculinity. Consequentially, the presence of five Queer men openly and frankly integrating their positions on electoral politics into everyday interactions has not been common in mainstream reality makeover television.

Husbands

Netflix's *Queer Eye* highlights the ordinariness of their Fab Five by highlighting their own romantic relationships. In their research on Bravo's *Queer Eye*, Lacroix & Westerfelhaus (2005) argue that the liminal aspect of the Fab Five's interactions with their clients and the manner in which "they are geographically and socio-sexually *separated*" (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 13, emphasis in original) refutes the idea that the Queer men have romantic relationships outside of work. Gallager (2004) argues that the original Fab Five's main goal was to serve as a facilitator of heteronormative romantic relationships. Similarly, Vargas (2008) argues that, despite the presence of "periodic comments [relating] to the sexual attraction

of the main characters," there is "no context or personal details" (p. 23) provided by the Fab Five. Aside from suggestive one-liners about the client, the original Fab Five's intimate lives were neutralized in a manner that excluded them from the romantic and intimate aspects of the heterosexual relationships they were so often sent to fix. In contrast, Netflix's Fab Five discusses personal relationships often. For example, while riding to meet Hero, Tom, the Fab Five question who is at fault when they find out that he has been married and divorced three times; Van Ness then jokingly replies, "All my failed relationships have ben 100 percent the other's fault" (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018). Even though Van Ness's comment is clearly framed as a joke, the suggestion that Van Ness has been a member of a romantic relationship instead of just making sexually charged jokes (Vargas, 2008) provides insight into the Fab Five member's personal life that indicates the ordinariness characterized by "cultural rituals [like romantic relationships] that allow us to feel communion with others" (Cavalcante, 2018, p. 21). As I discuss in this section, Netflix's *Queer Eye* showcases several moments—some, like the previous example from Van Ness, in jest—that reveal their personal relationships as ordinary.

The men of Netflix's Fab Five unabashedly discuss details about their private life, sharing anecdotes and advice as married men. In a talking head segment—footage that features a person talking with little to no other action—France notes the importance he places on a person presenting themselves well for their partners. France freely talks about the fact that he is married (Collins, "Saving Sasquatch," 2018), the amount of time he has been married (Collins, "Hose Before Bros," 2018), and the fact that his marriage has not been the only committed, long term relationship he has participated in (Collins, "Camp Rules," 2018). Whenever France discloses his marital status, the revelation is not expressed with tense music or dramatic story telling, but instead happens in the small interactions with the Heroes, exemplifying the everydayness of

Cavalcante's (2018) ordinariness. In each of these examples, France is providing insight into his own personal life outside of his role as the Fashion expert on the show. This is not only directly oppositional to the pattern established by Bravo's *Queer Eye* (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2004; Gallager, 2004; Vargas, 2008), but it seamlessly aligns with the communal aspect of everydayness that characterizes Cavalcante's (2018) definition of the ordinary. Simply by revealing the fact he participates in long-term relationships like being married, France is portrayed as being ordinary.

Not only do the members of the new Fab Five discuss the fact that they participate in romantic relationships, but they also work to complicate the heteronormative implications of being in a romantic relationship. While driving with Van Ness and Berk, Hero, Tom, asks if either one of the Fab Five members are married, to which Bobby responds that he and his husband have "been together for 13 years, married for five" (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018). After Tom asks whether Berk was "the husband or the wife," Van Ness offers to unpack the heterosexism associated with that way of thinking by claiming that:

> I [Van Ness] that a lot, like, as a gay man when I have been in a relationship it's like, 'Oh who wears the pants?' Even with hetero couples. I think that more and more those lines are blurred. And, like, in whatever role you are, whether it's like moon or sun, moon being more feminine energy and sun being more masculine…I think there's, like, gorgeous strength to be had in both (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018).

In this analysis, Van Ness removes the necessity for heterosexual couplings for romantic relationships by focusing instead on the "energy" of the person, not the sex. This is antithetical to previous research surrounding the original Fab Five's interactions with their identities as partners

or husbands which were “ritually removed” (Lacroix & Westerfelhaus, 2004, p. 14). This is an important step in representing Netflix’s Fab Five as ordinary, although this does not comprehensively represent the Queer community. As Van Ness mentions just two spots on the spectrum of gender identity—masculine/feminine—his comment reinforces the insistence upon of a heteronormative relationship. However, by giving insight into their philosophies on and participation in romantic relationships, Netflix’s Fab Five are situating themselves in the everyday aspect of romantic relationships similar to their Heroes.

Race

Previous scholarship of Bravo’s *Queer Eye* claim one of the major shortcomings of Bravo’s *Queer Eye* manifested in the racial homogony that became synonymous with Queer identity. Muñoz (2005) argues that, the original series’ inclusion of a singular man of color, Jai Rodriguez “is merely a neoliberal injection of a little brownness that is meant to ward off any foreseeable challenges to the overwhelming whiteness that radiates from the increasingly dominant version of Queerness in both TV land and academe” (p. 101). Additionally, Meyer & Kelley (2004) argue that Bravo’s *Queer Eye* reinforced the racialized discourse of Queerness through the discrepancies in airtime featuring Rodriguez and Carson Kressley, the original Fab Five’s flamboyant, white Grooming expert. Vargas (2008) continues, “that while Carson gets more airtime, the contributions and airtime of Jai are minimal” (p. 25). In other words, Bravo’s *Queer Eye* constructed Queerness as something androcentric, gay, and, specific to this argument, white. Netflix’s *Queer Eye*, on the other hand, works to push back against this tradition with the inclusion of Karamo Brown, the African-American Culture expert, and Tan France, the Pakistani-British Fashion expert. More important than simply casting Brown and France, Netflix’s Fab Five members of color actively foreground their racial identities and make

connections with four of their Heroes, as I discuss in this section, by highlighting the intersections of their racial and Queer identities.

For culture expert Karamo Brown, the focal points of interactions with his identities as a Queer man and a man of color occur while he coaches two other men of color. Near the end of Hero, AJ's, episode, Brown encourages him by affirming that he is "the epitome of what it is to be a strong, beautiful black gay man" (Collins, "To Gay or Not Too Gay," 2018). Similar to this, Brown takes a special interest in Myles, who also identifies as a Black gay man, while the team is making over his mother, Hero, Tammye. Despite Brown confessing that he cannot sing, he takes the lead in bringing Myles to The Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Chorus in order to reconnect him with his passion for singing in a choir (Collins, "God Bless Gay," 2018). After the practice, while Myles recounts his history with singing, the choir director, Robert, mentions "there's a lot of people with that story…in [that] room" (Collins, "God Bless Gay," 2018). In these moments of heightened visibility, both Myles and AJ are experiencing the dual nature of Cavalcante's (2018) everydayness. Cavalcante (2018) says that part of "the everyday" includes the "ability to be…someone—to be recognized and affirmed" (p. 21). In these examples, Brown explores his identity as a Queer man of color with the other Queer men of color from the series. At the end of her episode, Hero Tammye affirms Brown by telling him that he represents "a lot of little boys who look like [him]," charging him with the task of being a Queer man of color who is recognized, as well as, a Queer man of color that recognizes the ordinariness of other people (Collins, "God Bless Gay," 2018). Not only does Brown create an "everydayness" for himself, but he facilitates that same everydayness for both AJ and Myles.

Unlike Brown's interactions with Queer, Black Heroes that were characterized by sharing experiences of being Black and gay in the United States South, France's engagements with the

intersections of his identity as a Queer man of color remain on the surface level, lacking in depth. For example, France connects with Hero, Arian, while discussing his failure to tell his mom the truth about not graduating from college. France says, “I get it, we’ve got Middle Eastern parents they’re gonna beat the [bleep] out of you” (Collins, “Big Little Lies,” 2018). In this scene, France implies but does not explicitly acknowledge the ways he navigated through his life as a gay Pakistani man with strict Middle Eastern parents. Similarly, while going through Hero, Neal’s, closet, France finds a dowry suitcase that he says, “pretty much every Indian and Pakistani has” (Collin, “Saving Sasquatch,” 2018). By bringing attention to the differences in cultural performances and traditions, France is complicating his own identity as more than just a “fairy godmother,” but does so without specifically highlighting his actual experiences as a Queer Pakistani man. Fundamental to Cavalcante’s (2018) definition of everydayness is being “someone…and no one” (p. 21). France’s interactions with the Middle Eastern Heroes serve as good example of racial representation but fall short of exploring the intersections of his Queer and Middle Eastern identities. While Netflix’s *Queer Eye* successfully explores France’s identity as a Pakistani man performing everydayness but left out stories that characterize his experiences as a Queer Pakistani man are left out of his characterization. Netflix’s *Queer Eye* sacrificed Tan France’s Queer ordinariness for a neoliberal, additive version of inclusion and intersectionality.

Despite bringing attention to Brown’s and France’s identities as Queer men of color, Netflix’s *Queer Eye* still falls into some of the same traps as its predecessor. According to Muñoz (2005), Bravo’s *Queer Eye* “assigns Queers of color the job of being inane culture mavens, while the real economic work is put into the able and busy hands of the white gays, who shop, to the delight of aesthetically challenged heterosexuals” (p. 102). Netflix’s *Queer Eye* relies on its Queer men of color to do the same thing. For the majority of the series, anything that

deals with race, or the intersections of race and Queerness, is relegated to the Queer men of color. For example, despite Porowski's Polish heritage, being born in Canada, and being an immigrant to the United States, any conversations of immigration or intercultural identity is relegated to Pakistani-born France and the Hero who share his Middle Eastern heritage (Collins, "Saving Sasquatch," 2018; Collins, "Big Little Lies," 2018). Similarly, Brown takes a lead role in the interventions involving (Queer) Black men (Collins, "To Gay or Not Too Gay," 2018; Collins, "God Bless Gay," 2018; Collins, "The Renaissance of Remington," 2018). This is not to say that Brown and France are the only ones working during these makeovers; they are, however, the only ones who appear to take an interest in focusing on the intersections of their identities as Queer men of color and making the connection to the men of color they interact with on the show. Furthermore, Brown and France are required to remind other members of the Fab Five about their privilege. For example, while on the way to see Hero, William, Porowski disclosed that he never felt unsafe after President Trump's 2016 election. France instantly reminded him his racial privilege by responding, "it's because [he is] white" (Collins, "A Decent Proposal," 2018). This pattern is represented once more when a police officer pulls the Fab Five over while Brown is driving, playing on societal tensions between Black Americans and law enforcement. When they get pulled over, France assumes his attempt at the American Southern accent and speculates that they were pulled over be "there's some colored folk up in here" (Collins, "Dega Don't," 2018). By delegating the physical labor of leading the makeover and the emotional labor of bringing awareness to racial privilege to the Fab Five members of color, Netflix's *Queer Eye* seems to be highlighting a more neoliberal, additive approach to discussing race rather than truly engaging with the intersectionality of everyday lives of Queer men of color.

Homosocial Bonding

The final way that Netflix's Fab Five are represented as ordinary is by means of establishing similarities between the Fab Five and the Heroes through homosocial bonding. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Porowski claims that his main goal in participating in Netflix's *Queer Eye* was to explore the ways that the Fab Five and their Heroes were similar and not focus on their differences (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018). Porowski and the rest of Netflix's Fab Five set out to accomplish this goal through fostering friendships by means of homosocial bonding, both within the team and with the Heroes. According to Lipman-Bluman (1976) homosociality is defined as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (p. 16). Thurnell-Read (2012) argue that "male friendships are an important resource for identity construction" (p. 250). Kimmel (2008) adds, "masculinity is largely a 'homosocial' experience: performed for, and judged by, other men" (p. 47). In other words, the way that masculinity is constructed or learned is through interactions with a social group that is exclusively masculine. Thurnell-Read (2012) argues that these homosocial bonds "have a power to define dominant gender ideals of both those within the homosocial group and, through the construction of boundaries, those men…who are excluded" (p. 252). The new Fab Five constantly engage in homosocial bonding throughout the series; with all five of them identifying as male and seven out of the eight featured Heroes being male, homosocial activity was inevitable. Netflix's Fab Five actively work to encourage a pattern of ordinary representation through the ritual of spending time—either one-on-one or within a group setting—with their Heroes as a way to ground themselves in the everyday.

The first area of homosocial bonding comes in the form of jokes with a sexual overtone. According to Thurnell-Read (2012), "[s]exual and sexist joking frequently play a prominent role in establishing male heterosexual identity and facilitating male group bonding" (p. 251). This argument is Queered in Netflix's *Queer Eye* during an exchange between Van Ness and Hero, Neal, when he realizes that eight inches of his hair is about to be cut off. Neal then says to Van Ness, "That's the only time someone said I have eight inches, Johnny" (Collins, "Saving Sasquatch," 2018). Meant as a self-deprecating joke about the length of his penis, Neal invites Van Ness into what Thurnell-Read (2012) describes as "men's talk" which defines "acceptable male behavior" (p. 252). According to Hammarén & Johansson (2014) homosocial bonding is often used as a way to maintain and progress hegemonic masculinity, which excludes Queer performances of masculinity. In his episode, Neal deploys "men's talk" as a way of navigating around some of the discomfort he experienced in beginning of the episode regarding Van Ness's Queer identity and establish a friendship with him reminiscent of traditional examples of male homosocial bonding. Serving as a form of homosocial bonding, Neal's joke helps to ground Van Ness—Queer identity and all—within the context of friendship with a heterosexual man aiding in the construction of ordinariness, and by extension, authenticity.

The final way in which ordinariness is constructed in Netflix's *Queer Eye* is by further Queering the performance of masculine homosocial bonding. Queering, or the act of applying Queer theory to an artifact or subject matter, is the act of placing something in opposition of normativity (Halperin, 1995). In this case, Thurnell-Read (2012) suggests that masculine homosocial bonding is "commonly characterized by emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the objectification of women" (p. 252). Netflix's *Queer Eye*, on the other hand, represents the exact opposite of each of those characteristics. Netflix's Fab Five engages with the taken for

granted aspect of same sex friendship, but positions it not only on Queer bodies, but additionally with discourses traditionally understood as antithetical to masculine homosocial bonding. For example, while watching the results of their work with Hero, Cory, Netflix's Fab Five are joined by Cory's friends, the "Dega Do's," in their Loft to see Cory's transformation. During this segment of the show, both Brown and Cory's nominator, a hypermasculine fellow cop and former Marine, shed tears of happiness, expressing an emotional side of masculine homosocial bonding that is atypical of the process (Collins, "Dega Don't," 2018). Furthermore, there is a significant lack of competition between the Fab Five, despite the abundance of homosocial activity between the five of them. Whenever possible, Netflix's Fab Five take advantage of the opportunity to praise each other for the successful execution of their area of expertise (Collins, "The Renaissance of Remington," 2018; Collins, "Below Average Joe," 2018; Collins, "Sky's the Limit," 2018). The presence of such encouraging discourse is uncharacteristic of what is traditionally understood as masculine homosocial bonding. Unfortunately, the final aspect of masculine homosocial bonding does not change from its traditional discourses to the representation in Netflix's *Queer Eye*. The hyper-focus on fixing heterosexual men in order to successfully participate in romantic relationships (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2018; Collins, "The Handyman Can," 2018) or fixing men that are failing in their romantic (heterosexual) relationships (Collins, "Camp Rules," 2018; Collins, "Unleash the Sexy Beast," 2018; Collins, "A Decent Proposal," 2018) all supports the pattern of objectifying women as something to be won. Still, showcasing a Queered form of homosocial bonding challenges its traditional and emotionally distant performance and reduces the dichotomous positionality of homo- and heterosexuality despite some the shortcomings in Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Through the performance of homosocial bonding, specifically with their heterosexual Heroes, the identities of Netflix's

Fab Five are characterized as ordinary by the everyday ritual of developing and maintain friendships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Netflix's *Queer Eye* proposes a new shift in the representation of Queer masculinity. Research surrounding Bravo's *Queer Eye* descriptions about the original Fab Five—and, as an extension, Queer men—were characterized as disruptive, over-simplified representations of Queer masculinity whose core identity was focused on helping straight men (Lacroix &Westerfelhaus, 2005; Sender, 2006; Streitmatter, 2008). The original Fab Five had just enough time to come into their clients' lives, wreak chaos in their houses, and then fix everything before they got back in into their metaphorical Batmobile and retreated to their Loft (Vargas, 2008; Sender, 2012). Netflix's *Queer Eye*, however, suggests a slightly different approach to the characterization of Queer masculinity. Netflix's Fab Five are characterized as forerunners of ordinariness for their Heroes. In other words, by focusing on the everyday intersections of their personal lives and identities outside of their roles on the series, Netflix's *Queer Eye* prioritizes the Fab Five's performance of Cavalcante's (2018) ordinariness. This "everydayness" is characterized by the engagements with specific intersections of the Fab Five's identities as Queer men who experience sexual attraction, participate in politics, husbands, Queer men of color and, finally, men who encourage friendship. By exploring and complicating their identities, Netflix's Fab Five are removed from the disruptive superhero trope they have previously been restricted to and grounded in a newfound authenticity.

Excellent though this shift may be, some of the habits from Bravo's *Queer Eye* are still present in this one. For example, Netflix's *Queer Eye* still holds true to the form typical of a

reality makeover series. Schadenfreude continues to run rampant and surveillance techniques still to show us how (not) to be a good citizen. More problematic than that, though, is that the Fab Five are still there to fix their clients. Despite claiming that the series is a "make better" show as opposed to a makeover show, Netflix's Fab Five are still out to find "the real" or "true" version of their Heroes (Collins, "To Gay or Not Too Gay," 2018; Collins, "God Bless Gay," 2018; Collins, "The Handyman Can," 2018; Collins, "Below Average Joe," 2018). The main difference between Netflix's and Bravo's versions of the series, however, lies in their characterizations of Netflix's Fab Five as ordinary. To answer the first research question, "How is Queer masculinity represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*?" I argue that the series highlights the ritualistic everyday aspects of Queer ordinariness by expanding the identities of the Fab Five to sexual beings, romantic partners, men of color, and friends. This chapter has explored new characterizations of mediated Queer masculinity, as is exemplified by Netflix's Fab Five. The analysis has yielded a shift in the characterization of Queer masculinity representing Cavalcante's (2018) Queer ordinariness, or the integration of self and life-making that is simultaneously Queer and ordinary. In the next chapter, I engage with audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* and their understandings of and interactions with the Fab Five's ordinariness, as well as their relationships with the series as a whole.

“You just need a happy story”: Reflexivity and the Fab Five’s Emotional Labor

Introduction

As soon as it was released in early February of 2017, Netflix’s *Queer Eye: More than a Makeover* arrested the attention of its viewers. Some fans, like Bob (41, Gay, Pākehā, Male, Web Developer) and Karen (50, White, Straight, Female, Retail Sales/Owner) were drawn to it because they had seen Bravo’s *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and were “curious” about what the reboot would look like. Other fans like, Louise (26, Straight, White, Female, Nurse) said they were interested in watching it because they “had heard about the original Queer Eye before, but…never really watched it.” Louise was not alone in her curiosity about Netflix’s *Queer Eye*; Lindsay (28, Bisexual, White, Cisgender Woman, Student) mentioned that she was particularly interested in watching the series because Bravo’s *Queer Eye* “came out when [she] was quite young” so she did not get a chance to watch it. No matter what the motivation was for trying it, people flocked to Netflix’s *Queer Eye*.

As viewers consumed the seasons, sometimes in one sitting and sometimes over the span of several weeks, Netflix’s *Queer Eye* captured the hearts of its audiences. For example, Denise (34, White, Straight, Female, Professor) said, “Especially given how shitty the world is right now, I needed to cling to the hope that that show proclaimed.” Many more viewers tuned into the perceived positive affect of the series describing it as “uplifting” (Alex, 19, White, Bisexual, Female, Theater Educator), “wholesome” (Vanessa, 21, Black/Afroswede, Pansexual, Female, Student), and “emotional” (James, 26, White, Gay, Male, Nurse Admin). Audience descriptions of Netflix’s *Queer Eye* as positive, uplifting, and even wholesome are directly antithetical to the description of Queer representation in the past.

These descriptions exemplify that audience's use of television can complicate the themes in the text. For example, Charlotte (26, White, Bisexual, Cis Female, Educator) revealed that she watches the show because "it's really about decompressing [from her day]." Additionally, Vanessa began looking to the series for the "advice they give on self-care and self-love," revealing that the show is teaching her "to be more kind to [herself]" and that she deserves "to take care of [herself]." Similarly, viewers often turned to Netflix's *Queer Eye* for "intense therapy where the Fab Five get into deeper issues that are keeping you from being functional and trying to help you resolve them as much as they can" (Denise). For Charlotte, the show is a way for her to relax or to "allow for [her] brain to just chill." In the case of Vanessa and Denise both, watching Netflix's *Queer Eye* served as an emotional booster, a way to learn how to feel better about themselves and establish a confidence and acceptance of themselves. These participants articulate how viewers often approached Netflix's *Queer Eye* as a way to navigate their current or on-going emotional states. These different motivations to engage with Netflix's *Queer Eye* build on the previous chapter's analysis of the Fab Five being characterized as ordinary. In this chapter, I explore the ways audiences use that description to situate themselves in relation to the Fab Five.

In the previous chapter, I performed a textual analysis on Netflix's *Queer Eye* arguing that by highlighting intersections of their personal lives and identities outside the show, Netflix's Fab Five is characterized as ordinary (Cavalcante, 2018). As I argued there, the Fab Five are characterized as ordinary by highlighting the ways they, as Queer men, perform the "everyday" aspect of Cavalcante's (2018) ordinariness through intersectional performances of sexuality, participation in romantic relationships, conversations about race, and through homosocial bonding. These insights into more personal aspects of their identity create a nuance to the

personalities and lives of Netflix's Fab Five that enact a different characterization from traditional cartoonish and damaging representations of Queer masculinities. By characterizing Queer men as ordinary, Netflix's *Queer Eye* complicates the representation of Queer men in a new and refreshing way.

This chapter enhances and complicates the themes I raised through textual analysis by placing them in conversation with audiences' understandings of the show. In this chapter, I argue that audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* expect the Fab Five to perform emotional labor as a way to access a genuine self. Specifically, audiences' expectations of emotional labor came from their understandings of the Fab Five's role as people responsible for helping their Heroes start and finish the process of self-actualization. Furthermore, following Sender's (2012) research on the reflexivity of reality television audiences, I argue that viewers engage with a complex and layered understanding of Queer masculinity. Additionally, audiences deployed reflexivity to explore tensions between the series' believability and previous knowledge of the genre of reality television, representations of Queer identity and its short comings in Netflix's *Queer Eye*, and complexities between viewers' anti-fandom and deliberate engagements with the show. Considered together, audiences' reflexive engagements with Netflix's *Queer Eye* are deployed to allow space for complex and unique readings of the series.

Integral to the foundation of this project is previous scholarship about audience studies. In the following sections, I engage with Sender's (2012) work on audiences of reality television, including Bravo's *Queer Eye*, as well as Martin's (2019) work on Black audiences as a way to frame the interaction of marginalized audiences with (non-)representative media texts. Additionally, I examine literature detailing the definition and history of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 2009), as well as the trajectory of the concept into the culture

industries (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008). Finally, I shift to an analysis of the ways that Netflix's *Queer Eye* viewers engage with and understand Queer masculinity.

Literature Review

Audience Studies

This section of the current study builds on the textual analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye* and situates it within the context of its audiences. The audience-centered approach to media studies stems directly from Hall's (1980) model of encoding/decoding which was one of the first to consider the potential inconsistencies between the producers' intended messages and the ways that audiences interact with them. Additionally, according to Sender (2012), "This approach asserts that there is no single preferred meaning in texts which media scholars are privileged to discern" (p. 9). In other words, while there are certainly textual factors at work like genre conventions (Sender, 2012) and narrative/character archetypes (Pozner, 2008), the audience studies approach to media studies highlights the audience as active meaning makers in the consumption of media. Drawing further on Sender's (2012) work, audience studies holds two competing concepts in tension: textual determinism and active audience theory. Traditionally, textual determinism is grounded in the assumption that media texts negatively affect marginalized audiences like women, children, or, in this case, the Queer community (Sender, 2012). On the other hand, active audience theory highlights audiences' freedoms to create their own meanings out of media texts (Sender, 2012). In conclusion, audience studies can be characterized by representing the manner in which audiences take an active role in creating meaning through engagement with media texts.

Sender (2012) engages deeper with audience studies as she reveals the reflexive nature of reality (makeover) audiences. Reflexive audiences are characterized through their identification of concepts like social hierarchies, consideration of social context, and attentiveness to the processes involved in constructing the self and society (Sender, 2012). Sender's (2012) audiences demonstrated reflexivity by being hyper aware (and, at times, critical) of aspects of the show traditionally understood as "behind the scenes," like casting, production and production teams, editing, and consumerist overtones, but not questioning the credibility of the shows' positions toward education and entertainment. In other words, reflexivity and reflexive audiences feature self-reflection, as well as being aware of and engaging with processes and contexts within which the self is constructed and situated. According to Sender (2012), "reflexivity is fundamental to understanding how audiences engage with [reality makeover television] … as well as how they use the shows to produce a self with depth, authenticity, and voice" (p. 199). When interacting with reality makeover shows, Sender's (2012) participants were "not as obligingly rational and self-monitoring" nor were they "willing students learning useful skills from the texts" (p. 187) deviates from previous research that looked at the text as an isolated entity, thus representing active audience theory and Sender's (2012) theory of reflexive audiences. Additionally, reflexive engagement is explained through reality television's placement between documentary aesthetics and fictional genres (Corner, 2002; Hill, 2005; Hill, 2015). The unique positionality of the reality makeover genre between factual documentary stylings and other fictional genres facilitates the audiences' reflexivity, which is exemplified through their awareness of the process of creating reality television, like a previous knowledge of media production, and the context of the genre's perceived authenticity in reality makeover television.

Audiences in Sender's (2012) study mobilized their reflexive engagements with reality makeover shows as a way to describe and make sense of their own selfhood. Sender's (2012) participants revealed that the makeover shows they engaged with provided the opportunity for them to think about themselves through the lens of the candidates' experiences on the show. Situating themselves within the context of the candidates on makeover shows, audiences employed themes present in reality makeover shows to navigate their own changing circumstances. She argues, "Rather than producing skepticism about the shows and their project in general…audiences drew on this media reflexivity to reaffirm a solid sense of self" while still drawing on their media knowledge to reinforce, not challenge, their investments in "these fundamental appeals to selfhood" (Sender, 2012, p. 189). In other words, audiences' reflexivity did not impact their perception of the narratives of selfhood in reality makeover television as authentic or inauthentic, but instead they applied those narratives to navigate their own understandings of selfhood. Audiences' mobilization of reflexivity as a way to understand their surroundings and selfhood indicate an avenue of discourse for viewers to enact changes in their own lives.

Audiences' self-reflexivity exhibited when engaging with reality television has the ability to influence their behaviors and attitudes. In Nabi & Thomas's (2013) study, participants that "perceived the events in *The Biggest Loser* as more real reported greater motivation to eat healthily and greater confidence to both eat healthily and exercise" (p. 706). These effects were facilitated through programs' foci on personal relationships and narratives, participation in personal contests like losing weight, and resolving personal conflicts (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Godlewski & Perse (2010) contend that the aforementioned foci of reality television aid the audiences to relate to and identify themselves as similar the candidates in the show. Through

identification with the contestants, reality makeover shows have the ability to influence changes in audiences' behavior and attitudes.

Finally, Martin (2019) argues that, specifically for marginalized audiences, the identity and performance of anti-fandom is complicated through motivations of maintaining social ties and establishing the existence of marginalized audiences. In his study on four Black women who both critiqued and consumed films created by Tyler Perry, Martin (2019) argues that "black women's anti-fandom may be even more complex [than previous engagements with the complexity of anti-fandom (Gray, 2019)] with respect to why and how they continue to engage with Perry's films" (p. 168). The participants in the study spoke candidly about their dislike, sometimes even hate, for Tyler Perry films like *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) or *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006) that feature the popular matriarchal character, Madea. Despite their self-professed anti-fandom, these participants continue to engage with and consume Perry's films in order to maintain social ties and prove the existence of Black audiences. Martin (2019) argues that this highlights the intricate ways that social ties and the culture industries come together to characterize anti-fandom in his participants. Since reflexivity entails audiences' complex readings of media (con)texts and knowledge of culture industries, Martin's (2019) audiences deploy Sender's (2012) reflexivity as they indicate a willingness to engage with Perry films due to their dedication to social ties and knowledge of the media industry demonstrated by their determination to represent Black audiences.

Martin (2019) argues that his participants' motivations to engage with Perry films manifested in two unique ways: the obligation to demonstrate the presence of marginalized audiences and the need to sustain social ties. First, Martin (2019) argues that despite the hate for Perry's films, "the black women in [his] study…feel obligated to consume them to demonstrate

that a black audience exists for Hollywood-produced films" (p. 181). In other words, whether Martin's (2019) participants enjoyed them or not, they continued to intentionally engage with the films—sometimes even going to movie theaters to watch the films on opening night—to represent Black audiences and support Black cultural forms. Additionally, Martin's (2019) participants felt pressured to interact with Perry's films "because of a desire to remain connected with family and friends who like Perry's output" (p. 181). The interactions with close social ties who enjoyed Perry's films took precedence over the participants' own opinions about them; often motivated by a desire to spend quality time with a person or group of people, Martin's (2019) participants continued to engage with Perry's films. The conflicting nature of his participants' opinions about Perry's films and their interactions with them provides a unique and integral understanding to the complex and intricate ways that marginalized audiences consume and engage with representative media.

Emotional Labor

Foundational to the current study is the theoretical framework of emotional labor. Emotional labor deals with the "fundamental concern [of] understanding how emotions are regulated by culture and social structure and how emotional regulation affects individuals, groups and organizations" (Wharton, 2009, p. 148). I engage with the concept of emotional labor first through exploring the its origins and definition (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 2009). Next, I examine the manner in which emotional labor "is registered and negotiated" in creative work and the culture industries (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008). Together, this literature informs the way that audiences in this study related to Netflix's Fab Five as emotional laborers.

When it was first formulated in Hochschild's (1983) publication, *The Managed Heart*, two main streams of theory and research characterized emotional labor. According to Wharton

(2009), Hochschild's (1983) text is so foundational to this concept that nearly every contemporary study of emotional labor positions itself in relation to her efforts to comprehend the foundations of emotion and turning a sociological spotlight to this issue. Specifically, Hochschild (1983) focuses on the shift in the United States' economy from one centered around the production of goods to one characterized by the performance of services and how that transition impacts the mechanics, necessities, and consequences of working in what she calls a "service society" (p. 148). Together, these claims combine to explore the concept of emotional labor. In summary, the relationship between the way society understands and deploys emotions and the focal shift in the United States from producing goods to service-based production serve as the introduction to the concept of emotional labor.

Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart* became the fundamental definition of emotional labor. First, according to Wharton's (2009) engagement with Hochschild's (1983) definition, "emotional management (or emotion work) …[refers] to how people actively shape and direct their feelings, and [recognize] that social structure and institutions impose constraints on these efforts" (p. 148). In short, emotional management requires that people consistently appear happy even though the situation warrants a different emotion. The key factor in shifting from emotional management to emotional labor comes when it leaves the private sector and ventures into the public sphere of having to perform emotional management as part of a job (Wharton, 2009). The concept of emotional labor has expanded from being contextualized in "frontline" service jobs like waiting tables or being a flight attendant to include any interactive work from managers and insurance agents to lawyers and doctors (Wharton, 2009). Mimicking the transition of Hochschild's (1983) analysis of emotional management to emotional labor, Wharton (2009) expands the setting for emotional labor to include jobs that are not simply

service related but generally interactive in nature. Hochschild's (1983) research on emotional management and service economies provided the foundation for the concept of emotional labor while Wharton's (2009) engagement with the theory highlights the nuances that broaden its performance from frontline service jobs to any interactive job or profession which grounds the definition of emotional labor while highlighting the versatility and fluidity of its theoretical application.

Reality makeover television shows are characterized by a unique combination of power hierarchies in terms of their positions as experts and their requirement to perform emotional labor. According to Wharton (2009), "Emotional labor refers to the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines" (p. 147). In other words, emotional labor involves the process a person goes through to manage the presentation of emotions for themselves or on behalf of other people in order to appear happy, calm, or kind, whether or not the situation warrants it. For Sender (2012) representations of power structures and emotional labor were presented when audiences in her study of reality makeover television shows understood the advice given by Bravo's Fab Five as coming from a place of "gay expertise" (p. 53). Bravo's Fab Five were described as being experts, satisfying the authoritative and proficient necessities for Wharton's (2009) definition of professional interactive managers as workers who have been trained in techniques for emotional management and to interact with clients; Sender's (2012) audiences additionally replicated societal power hierarchies by requiring that Bravo's Fab Five had to be gay, but not have an obviously gay style. In other words, they had to entertain and perform their own caricatures, but they were not allowed to be too flamboyant or abnormal or else their expertise would be considered too niche or "too gay" and Bravo's Fab Five would lose their status as experts since

their work was no longer valuable to hegemonic social structure of heteronormativity. Both Bravo’s and Netflix’s Fab Five enjoy positions of power through their perceived expertise, but their relationships with the hierarchal and disciplining power structures of gender and sexuality remained intact.

In presenting the nuances of the performance of emotional labor, Wharton (2009) argues that societal power structures influence workers’ emotional management. While Wharton (2009) claims this is not a phenomenon unique to interactive service jobs, “it is assumed to be especially problematic for these workers” (p. 150); when employers try to control or manage their interactions with clients, this directly intrudes on a worker’s agency and creates an active threat to their self and identity. For example, Paules’s (1991) research on waitresses and Leidner’s (1993) study on fast food employees and insurance salespeople yielded that employees self-monitored or routinized their performances of emotional labor, not out of a strict organizational hierarchy, but instead through an awareness of their subordinate positionality to customers and clients. Specifically, within the context of restaurants, employees understood this subordination was reinforced through interactions with clients that represented traditional engagement with and attitudes about domestic service (Wharton, 2009). Wharton’s (2009) engagement with and focus on the societal power structures demonstrates that a thorough analysis of emotional labor would be remiss if it did not also pay attention to the relationships between power and race, sexuality, class, and even the type of work or service being performed.

The previously discussed concepts of expanding the setting where emotional labor can be performed, as well as the power structures involved in emotional labor merge together in relation to the culture industries and perceived expertise. According to Wharton (2009), the study of emotional labor should be further developed to include a wider variety of interactive labor

professions, which she defines as being "characterized by [the workers'] expertise, power, and authority" (p. 152). At this point, however, those workers cease to be just emotional laborers and transition into what Orzechowicz (2008) calls "privileged emotion managers" (p. 143). In other words, privileged emotion managers are professionals who go through thorough training in techniques for emotional management and whose peers and clients are often held in higher regard (Wharton, 2009, p. 152). New settings for and performances of emotional labor continue to expand into areas like the television and creative industries which Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2008) aim to draw attention to. Since the Fab Five have—and currently are—being defined by their superior proficiency in their respective fields, (Vargas, 2008; Sender, 2012; Goldberg, 2018; Poniewozick, 2018; *Reductress*, 2018), they represent Wharton's (2009) characterization of interactive labor as experts. Keeping in mind Sender's (2012) argument that reality makeover audiences deploy reflexivity by relating themselves to participants on the show, featuring the Fab Five as experts of their fields generates an opportunity for audiences to approach Netflix's *Queer Eye* in search of emotional labor performed by the Fab Five. Growing the understanding of emotional labor performed in these industries allows the opportunity to examine the expectations of emotional labor, specifically when the artists or actors are perceived as experts.

The expansion of emotional labor from private to public and worker to professional, with special focus on the nuances of social power structures, converge to inform the structure of reality (makeover) television. Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2008) argue that culture and media should be included in the conversations and research surrounding emotional labor, specifically from the standpoint of the workers on reality television. Additionally, they claim an integral appeal of reality television "is that it involves the power to change people's lives" and that the larger field of culture and media should be "at the center of social change" (Hesmondhalgh &

Baker, 2008, p. 114-115). Their research creates the space to analyze how actors, producers, commissioners, and participants on reality television shows perform emotional labor and are responsible for the potentially life-altering consequences of that labor. Beginning with Hochschild's (1983) introduction and definition of emotional management then emotional labor, the concept has expanded to include any job that involves interaction, not just a service-based job. Wharton (2009) continues the conversation by discussing the ways that societal power structures associated with race, gender, sexuality, and job title all compound on the ways that emotional labor is performed and required in the work place. This is exemplified in Paules's (1991) and Leidner's (1993) studies on waitresses, fast food employees, and insurance salespeople, as well as Hochschild's (1983) original study on flight attendants. Within the context of reality television, specifically both Bravo's and Netflix's *Queer Eye*, a dual relationship with power manifests in the characterization of both Fab Fives as professionals (Wharton, 2009; Sender, 2012) and through their apparent lack of power or disciplined bodies (Sender, 2012; Mulkerin, 2018). In conclusion, through their relationships to societal and organizational power structures, Netflix's Fab Five are situated as emotional laborers.

Method

In this stage of the current study, I add more context and further develop information from the textual analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye* through an audience analysis. I recruited participants between September and December of 2018. A call for participants was posted to the author's personal Facebook page (as well as being posted to *Queer Eye* fan pages), Twitter account, and Reddit account (posted to the subreddit r/QueerEye). After posting the call for participants to my own accounts, it was shared through friends and classmates and even retweeted by William (@SilverLImePhoto), one of the Heroes from the second season of

Netflix's *Queer Eye*, as well as his partner, Shannan (@Treeandshield). The call for participants directed potential participants to a survey hosted on SurveyMonkey to collect demographic information and confirm eligibility for participation (Appendix A). These recruitment strategies curated 30 participants who were required to be over the age of 18 years old and must have seen at least one episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Additionally, participants were asked to provide information on their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and occupation.-After demographic information about the participants was collected, I contacted the participants to schedule an interview through the preferred mode of contact (email or text message) listed in the survey.

As I interviewed participants for this study, I attempted to provide a space that mimics the ways that we discuss popular culture among our friends, families, and social connections. Specifically, I attempted to use the questions for the interviews to create a space that fostered a natural flow of conversation. Interviews were characterized by semi-structured interview questions. These questions were designed to encourage conversation about Netflix's *Queer Eye*, but more importantly to analyze the ways audiences engaged with the characters in the show. For example, interviews started by asking how participants became aware of Netflix's *Queer Eye* and if they could describe a typical episode as a way to establish a conversational tone. In regard to characters, I asked questions like "Who is your favorite Hero/Guest," and "Who is your favorite member of the Fab Five." After a few interviews, I changed the wording to these questions from "Who is…" to "Do you have…" in order to address the possibility that participants may not have a favorite and the question might prompt hasty answers. Additionally, I asked participants questions about their perception of and engagement with the Fab Five through questions like "Do any of the Fab Five possess personality traits that you admire or want to possess?" and "If you

could choose one, which one of the Fab Five would you want to be friends with?" Interviews lasted an average of 45-60 minutes and yielded 371 pages of transcripts which I have analyzed below. After each interview, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant in order to ensure anonymity. A copy of my interview questions and my participant list can be found in the appendices.

Analysis

The analysis featured in this chapter manifested along two separate planes. First, audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* perceived the Fab Five as stewards of emotional labor. These perceptions were characterized by audiences' pervious understandings of media—similar to Sender's (2012) audiences—in that reality makeover shows were characterized by such behavior from the hosts. Furthermore, viewers were highly attuned to the ways Netflix was characterizing the Fab Five as ordinary, detailed in the previous chapter, describing each one of the members as expert performers of their "most authentic self" (Collins, "To Gay or Not Too Gay," 2018). My participants coded these characterizations, though, not as ordinary, but as confident, informed by the Fab Five's ability to stay true to themselves. As a result of staying true to the purpose of the show and their construction of selfhood, audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* expect the Fab Five perform emotional labor in order to help them achieve their most authentic self, as well as to draw out an emotional response from them.

Second, as I will argue in this section, participants in the current study deployed (self-)reflexivity as a way of understanding and engaging with Netflix's portrayal of Queer masculinity. When audiences deploy a reflexive engagement with reality makeover television, they engage with a concept, like the self or Queer identity, while acknowledging the contexts and external influences that construct the concept. Audiences exemplified reflexivity with three main

concepts: the believability of the series, Netflix's *Queer Eye* being an example of Queer media, and anti-fandom. First, audiences were keenly aware of the aspects of media production that typically occurs behind the scenes, like editing, producing, staging, casting, and directing, but still perceived Netflix's *Queer Eye* as believably authentic. Sometimes, this even came at the expense of suspending reality. Additionally, when asked how they define the identity "Queer," my participants tended to give beautifully complex, unique, and nuanced definitions of Queerness. However, when asked if Netflix's *Queer Eye* represented that, tensions between the two sets of answers developed that exemplify complex and intricate understandings of Queer masculinity. Finally, similar to Martin's (2019) study on four black women's anti-fandom of Tyler Perry films, many Queer participants of the current study acknowledged that they felt left out or did not actively like Netflix's *Queer Eye* but watched it anyway with friends or family, or out of solidarity for the community at large. The reflexive nature of reality makeover television audiences informs the different contemporary characterizations of Queer masculinity.

Emotional Labor

I argue that audiences engaged and interacted with Netflix's Fab Five as emotional laborers who are responsible for supplying a product from their emotional labor by helping the viewer access their own emotions or construct an actuated self. For example, Jessica (32, Straight, White, Female, Professor) describes her engagements with Netflix's *Queer Eye* as "emotional porn." She elaborates, "It feels, like I said, in 2018, [with] Trump, you just need a happy story. I want to watch this" (Jessica). Here, Jessica explores her motivations for watching the series as being an emotionally driven escape from the current political and cultural climate. Jessica's experience is not unique to just her. Audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* describe it as making them feel "warm and fuzzy" (Isabel, 26, Straight, White, Female, Social Worker) and

"heart-warming [and] inspirational" (Jordan, 29, Straight, White, Female, Graduate Student). The product of the Fab Five's emotional labor manifests in the emotional reaction from Isabel and Jordan watching the series. Specifically, the positive connotations of feeling "warm and fuzzy" or "heartwarming" represent the necessity for emotional laborers to (make other people) feel happy. Similarly, other viewers watched the series because it is "something [they] can decompress to" (Charlotte, 26, Bisexual, White, Cis Female, Educator). Charlotte's approach to Netflix's *Queer Eye* is characterized by its ability to relieve stress or add positivity to a bad day. The particular emotional responses each of these participants described from having watched Netflix's *Queer Eye* represents the emotional "product" of the Fab Five's emotional labor. Originally displayed in the Heroes, audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* deploy a reflexivity that frames their own experiences through the experiences of the characters, positioning themselves as the recipients of the therapeutic, emotional labor of the Fab Five. Since audiences interpret the role of Netflix's Fab Five as one responsible for the emotional responses of their Heroes, the Fab Five becomes responsible for achieving their viewers' emotional access.

Emotional labor being a foundational aspect of the show's structure was initially represented in the participants' understandings of the show's purpose. For example, Jane (24, Straight, White, Female, Admin Assistant) describes the opening of each episode as viewers learning "about [the Hero's] life story 'cause obviously, it's more than just a makeover show." Here, Jane engages reflexively with the series through her use of language from the show's branding, "More than a Makeover." This type of engagement indicates Jane's acknowledgment of the context and external influences from the show. Jane, however, was not the only person to read the responsibility of the Fab Five as more than simply doing the Hero's hair or giving them a new set of clothes. Other viewers noted that Netflix's *Queer Eye* is "ostensibly about a

makeover but it's really about something else" (Bob). What Jane and Bob both identify here is a perceived responsibility for the Fab Five to help the Hero, and by extension the viewer, with more than the traditional aspects of a makeover like grooming and fashion advice and to dive further into the clients' past or present emotional roadblocks in order to remove them and access their genuine self. Furthermore, she contends that the Fab Five are "just helping improve [the Heroes'] lives" (Jane). In this example, Jane was drawing on the reflexive framework Sender (2012) proposed. For Jane, and many viewers like her, reflexivity is deployed through an awareness of the underlying messages of and focus on self-help, emotional expression, authenticity, and the construction of selfhood that characterizes reality makeover television shows (Sender, 2012). This is further reinforced through Carmen's (28, Straight, African American, Woman, Legislative Assistant) description of Netflix's Fab Five being people who "take someone…on the cusp of greatness that need[s] a little help and encouragement" as to prepare the Hero for "a big moment in their lives." Jane, Bob, and Carmen all identify the show's purpose as drawing out or constructing the true form of each Hero's own selfhood.

Participants of this study continued to identify themes of emotional labor through their understandings of and engagements with the reality makeover genre. Representing Sender's (2012) argument that reality television highlights themes of authenticity and selfhood, viewers described the plot of the show keeping those themes at the forefront of their minds. For example, Hugo (31, Straight, White, Male, Researcher) described the goals of each episode as "a makeover, and a home renovation, and some soul searching." In his response, Hugo identified the ways that makeover shows are traditionally understood to unfold; indeed, those elements of the makeover were highlighted in Bravo's *Queer Eye*, focusing on a capitalist, consumerist road to a fully actuated self. However, Hugo also brings to light the discourses characterizing the

approach Netflix's *Queer Eye* takes in order to access self-actualization: a focus on drawing out an already present self. For example, several participants brought up an episode in the first season where the Fab Five made over AJ, an African American man living in Georgia who wanted to come out to his step-mother, describing the Fab Five's message as being instructions on "how [he] can be happier, not just an appearance but just overall…how to be a better person" (Jane). In this example, audiences recognize the role of Netflix's Fab Five as mentors responsible for teaching their Heroes the way to perform their most genuine or true selves which is coded as being "happier" and "a better person." Further exploring the series premise of drawing out a preexisting authenticity, Mikey (37, Homosexual, African American, Male, Retail Banker) also used AJ as an example of how "it didn't take a whole lot to particularly change him," but the authentic response to and result of the Fab Five's instructions "made him…like a totally different person." Mikey's description of the tearful climax in AJ's transformation is situated within Sender's (2012) argument that reality makeover audiences' relation to the characters of the show is particularly strong when they interpret the emotional display as an authentic and plausible response to the plotline of the show. In conclusion, participants in the current study recognize the genre conventions of finding, exploring, and creating authentic selfhood in both themselves and the Heroes as a job performed by the emotional labor of Netflix's Fab Five.

Participants addressed the construction of the self as a result of the Fab Five's perceived responsibility of emotional labor. Participants engaged with overall responsibilities of the Fab Five as a team through what was described through a metaphor of "pencil sharpening" (Katya, 28, Heterosexual, Mixed Latina/Native American/White, Female, Graduate Student). Katya describes her idea:

> So taking something like [the Hero's personality] and just sharpening it up a little bit and making it useful for these individuals instead of being just like, why are you self-deprecating?...[The Fab Five] are giving [the Heroes] confidence but at the same time, playing to what [the Heroes feel] comfortable with so it's not just like a huge, drastic change.

This example (re)introduces Vargas's (2008) description of the Fab Five as "superheroes" whose sole purpose is being excited to help other people (Streitmatter, 2009). The divergence exemplified by Katya's comment demonstrates a shift in ways the Fab Five are being commodified: Vargas (2008) argued that a primary role of Bravo's Fab Five was to facilitate economic activity as a way to construct selfhood while Katya is acknowledging Netflix's Fab Five as being responsible for being exemplars of emotional intelligence and emotional coaches (Wharton, 2009). Katya emphasizes audiences' specific engagement with the Fab Five as emotional laborers. This engagement is informed by the expectations of the Fab Five to manage the Heroes' feelings through the performance of emotional labor instead of managing their own feelings (Hochschild, 1983). By reflexively identifying with the Heroes, audiences have come to expect the Fab Five to perform emotional labor for them as well.

Similarly, viewers charged the Fab Five with the emotional responsibility of their Heroes through the description of their individual roles on the show. To recapitulate, Netflix's Fab Five consists of Bobby Berk (Design), Karamo Brown (Culture), Tan France (Fashion), Antoni Porowski (Food & Wine), and Jonathan Van Ness (Grooming). Bob describes the roles slightly differently, however, when he claims that "each of the gays has like, a superpower, like Captain Planet. There's like 'Hair Gay,'…and oh, I don't know, like 'Clothes Gay,' and probably one has the power of heart." Once again replicating superhero and supernatural tropes (Vargas, 2008),

Bob situates the Fab Five's emotional responsibility within the context of their profession being interactive (Wharton, 2009). Further drawing on the Fab Five's professional status, Mariela (32, Female, Heterosexual, Asian, Female, Copywriter) characterizes them as each having individual expertise to help the Hero of the episode. She recounts that "Karamo kind of works on the confidence and branding side of things. Jonathan…he's about the self-care and hair and beauty tip" and that the Fab Five use these specific talents to help their Hero who does not "have the confidence that they need to move forward with [their] career or with relationships" (Mariela). To put it differently, the Fab Five become responsible for the emotional growth, intelligence, and well-being of their Heroes.

The final representation of audiences' expectations of Netflix's Fab Five as emotional laborers arose through conversations surrounding how the Fab Five would benefit their viewers in perceived relationships. When asked which member of Netflix's Fab Five they would be friends with and why, only one out of the thirty participants in this study described his reason as "I like his…attitude and the way that he talks to people" (Diego, 34, Straight, White, Male, Software Engineer). All of the other responses centered around things the Fab Five could do for the participant. After some deliberation, Margot (21, Straight, White, Female, Nurse) said that she wanted to be friends with Van Ness because "if [she] was having a bad day, he'd be the one to sit in the bed with [her] with ice cream and cats, and just let [her get] it all out." More explicitly, Louise chose Brown because she identifies him as someone who is naturally gifted at identifying personal traumas and can convince people to talk about them. She acknowledges how important this is saying, "all of [the Fab Five] are great…at boosting people's self-confidence, but…[Brown] does it in an emotional capacity" (Louise). Other interviews yielded similar answers for each member of the Fab Five, some reflecting an explicitly emotional need, like

Louise or Margot, while others represented need for actual labor, like choosing a new wardrobe, being cooked for, or redecorating their living space, as a way to help them access self-actualization or emotions within themselves. Whereas audiences of the original Bravo's *Queer Eye* looked to the original Fab Five for examples of how to construct selfhood through capitalist activity, audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* access their selfhood through requiring the new Fab Five to perform emotional labor, which exemplifies Hochschild's (1983) argument detailing the transition from an economy of goods to an economy of service.

In summary, as participants in the current study deployed a reflexive reading of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, they exhibited astute awareness of the genre's conventions, as well as the perceived roles of the Fab Five, that all converged in an expectation of the Fab Five to draw out the audiences' true and actuated self through the performance of emotional labor. Initially, the appropriation of Queer emotional labor was recognized in audiences' understandings around the show as being a "make better show," not a makeover show (Collins, "You Can't Fix Ugly," 2019). In other words, audiences approached Netflix's *Queer Eye* through a lens of reflexivity distinguished by their awareness of the reality makeover genre itself, describing it as a show meant for more than just a physical transformation and instead a venue for exploring constructions of selfhood. Additionally, audiences performed reflexivity by interpreting the context of Netflix's Fab Five as emotional managers for both the series' Heroes and the viewers as well. The final mode of reflexivity and expectance of emotional labor presents itself in how audiences envisioned themselves as members of a friendship with Netflix's Fab Five. While describing which member of the Fab Five they would choose to be friends with, nearly every participant response featured an act of service to accompany the friendship. Viewers wanted Bobby Berk to redesign their house (Charlotte), Karamo Brown to encourage them (Louise), or

Jonathan Van Ness to comfort them on bad days (Margot). These responses serve as exemplars for the way audiences are now expecting emotional labor from Netflix's Fab Five, and Queer men as an extension, to access authentic selfhood.

Reflexivity

Similar to Sender's (2012) study of reality makeover show audiences, participants in this study used distinct deployments of reflexivity as a mode of engaging with Netflix's *Queer Eye*. According to Sender (2012), reflexivity, or the audiences' abilities to understand the context a concept is situated within, is integral to research focused on how audiences engage with and use reality makeover shows to construct a self with complexity, authenticity, and autonomy. For the current study, reflexivity is presented through tensions, mimicking Sender's (2012) argument that "reflexivity does not take us beyond institutions, power, and knowledge systems, nor is it hopelessly corrupted by longings for utopia—rather, it holds these institutions and feelings in tension" (p. 199-200). In other words, reflexivity creates a space where knowledge of different conventions and influences on a concept and ideal interpretations of the concept can coexist. Audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* illustrated their reflexive readings of the series through tensions between media industries and believability, Queer reality and Queer representation, and, finally, fandom and anti-fandom.

First, audiences navigated expressed tensions between their knowledge of media production and the perceived authenticity of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Participants were candid about their suspicions—or, in some cases, their certainties—that just because a series is labeled reality television does not necessarily mean that the events in the show happened naturally due to their acknowledgment of the presence of cameras, production crew, and the processes of casting and editing. A plurality of viewers, like Mikey, see this juxtaposition represented in the structure of

the show as planned or staged but the final product of the show, the achievement of self-actualization, as verification of authenticity. He explains, “there’s certain things that happen at a certain time, on purpose…[that] don’t seem totally legit to me” but then describes “the way [the Heroes] are reacting to [the makeover] is real. You know, the set-up, not so real, but…what happens at the end of the show…is worth it” (Mikey). In other words, Mikey is attuned to the inauthentic, surveillant structuring of the reality makeover genre but is willing to excuse those observations due to his understanding of the final emotional product as authentic. Similarly, viewers acknowledged the role casting plays in the series saying, “I mean, obviously they put people in these situations to make for ‘good tv’ [but] It’s still real—real to me” (Carmen). Carmen’s recognition of the “behind the scenes” aspects of reality television like casting but instead of that acknowledgment detracting from the believability, Carmen’s reflexive engagement with Netflix’s *Queer Eye* and the parasocial relationships (Click, et al., 2015) she built with the Fab Five prompts a critical and complex reading of the series. For Penelope (39, Bi, White, Female, Customer Success), however, the Fab Five’s social media posts implying continued relationships with the show’s Heroes is evidence enough to interpret the show as real. She explains, “I know that [the show is] reality tv or whatever, and a lot of stuff is edited out, so I understand it. It is believable to me because I do follow all of them on social media, I know that they stayed in touch with most of the [Heroes]” (Penelope). Penelope’s navigation of her knowledge of reality television produce and her acceptance of social media posts from the Fab Five exemplify her reflexive interpretation of authenticity in Netflix’s *Queer Eye*. For Penelope, the believability in Netflix’s *Queer Eye* is situated within the context of a constructed reality, a convention of the reality television genre, but also influenced by interactions between the Fab Five and the Heroes on social media. In conclusion, viewers’ awareness of generic conventions

of reality makeover television, coupled with their perceptions of the emotional conclusions and parasocial relationships as genuine demonstrated their reflexive engagements with Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

Additionally, participants in this study were also hyper-aware, and at times hyper-critical of the shallow nature that defines the reality makeover genre. When describing the actual makeover process, George (32, Gay, White, Male, Archivist) relayed that the Fab Five's efforts fell flat. In addition to commentary about the overt and uninvited advice on parenting, he noted that Netflix's Fab Five "did that…take the glasses off and pull the ponytail out thing where they just cut his hair and shaved him…I was like, 'Yeah, he was already handsome'" (George). Because George was aware that the goal of the makeover was to connect the Hero to a deeper sense of selfhood, his intertextual knowledge of makeover conventions informed his reflexive interaction with Netflix's *Queer Eye*. While Mikey's aforementioned acceptance of the emotional response being authentic came through little resistance, George wrestled with his perceptions of the show as authentic debating that "it's like, not scripted, but it is staged. It's not authentic in that sort of way…[but] I feel some of the reactions are real." Once again, the presentation of the emotional climax in the episode proved to be enough to reify audiences' reflexive engagements with the series.

The structure of the show proved to be only the first way of audiences engaging with Netflix's *Queer Eye* reflexively, the next way being the exploration of the tension between Queer realities and Queer representation. As they explained their personal relationships to the meaning of Queer, viewers provided beautiful and complex definitions that explored deep subtleties of Queer identity. Ranging from performances of homosexuality to participation in polyamorous relationships, participants described Queer as "anything that isn't full on in that majority [of

being cisgender or heterosexual], falls into Queer" (Slint, 23, White, Asexual, Male Packing Engineer) or "everything that is not what society expects or assumes something to be" (Jade, 27, Bisexual, Black, Female, PR Account Supervisor). Both Slint and Jade represent the discourses of members of the Queer community exploring their identities and celebrating the nuances they see in themselves and in other Queer people. That being said, Slint and Jade both described Netflix's *Queer Eye* as good representation of Queerness despite homogenous characterization of the Fab Five.

Tensions between the definition of Queerness as a form of Queer reality and the representations of Queerness in the show provided the opportunity to dive deeper into that concept and explore participants' interactions with the text as "good" Queer representation. Emma (45, Queer, White, Gender Queer Person, Faculty Developer/Adjunct Professor) said that Netflix's *Queer Eye* is not representative of the Queer identity she describes or identifies with. Emma acknowledges the show's tension between the way Van Ness "pushes some [gender performance] boundaries in some ways" but says the series "could be Queerer." Illustrating Sender's (2012) argument of reflexivity being integral to the construction and understanding of selfhood, Emma recognizes the attempt at positive representation of Queer identity but illuminates the attempt's shortcomings. She describes Netflix's *Queer Eye* as a good representation of "little Q Queer, but [not] big Q Queer" (Emma). Here, Emma engages with the positive aspects of Netflix's representations Queer identity but holds in tensions the continued patterns of reduction by only featuring gay, cisgender men. This is substantiated by Hugo's observation that Netflix's *Queer Eye* is a "good" representation of Queerness but not a "comprehensive" one. Hugo observes:

> I think [Netflix's *Queer Eye*] portrays Queerness well. The men are deeply likable, and they're aspirational people. They're kind of as good as any of us could hope to be, the way that they're portrayed in [the series]. As far as being a comprehensive representation, probably not. Most of [the Fab Five] are white, they all seem like they're fairly upper class…They're all cisgendered [sic].

In his observation of Netflix's Fab Five, Hugo holds the positive construction of Queer identity in tension with accurately and completely representing the Queer community. In conclusion, viewers deployed reflexivity in order to make sense of the tension between their own lived Queer realities and the shortcomings of Queer representation in Netflix's Fab Five.

Finally, tensions between fandom and anti-fandom became apparent due to the juxtapositions between Queer representation and reality and audiences' willingness to still consume Netflix's *Queer Eye* to maintain social ties and establish Queer audiences and communities. Audience members often critiqued the homogeny of the Fab Five, claiming that they "are how gay males are perceived…put together, skinny, gay men. That's not how some gays are" (Korey, 28, Mixed, Gay, Male, Insurance Agent). Furthermore, Korey does not feel represented by the Fab Five since he identifies himself and his friends as "bigger, gay males." This detachment from representation coupled with feelings of distaste for Van Ness converged to foster negative associations with the series for Korey. Replicating Martin's (2019) participants' interactions with Perry films as a way to connect with friends and family, however, Korey assured me that he will still watch the series as a way to interact with his social network. For example, Jade noted in my conversation with her that she and Korey, who are friends in real life, enjoyed watching the series together, but thought that may be due to them spending quality time together, not a product of the actual show. For other participants like, Emma, viewership, in spite

of not being represented as a gender Queer person, was inspired by their professional and personal investments in Queer media. The participants' goal, much like Martin's (2019) participants, is to prove that Queer audiences exist and are ready to consume large scale productions of Queer media. Finally, while recounting her introduction to Netflix's *Queer Eye*, Samantha (27, White, Lesbian, Female, Professor) disclosed that she began watching Netflix's *Queer Eye* nearly immediately after she came out to herself and her family as a lesbian. Samantha reported that she liked watching the series because she is "able to listen to each of [the Fab Five's] stories" that were integral "to rebuild [her] sense of self, and [her] self-esteem…it was just so precious…to have" (Samantha). Not only does Samantha's story represent the time of personal transition that characterizes Williams' (2015) engagement with becoming a fan, but it also exemplifies Martin's (2019) argument that marginalized communities often support marginalized media in order to prove the existence of marginalized audiences, despite (in)comprehensive representation. Ultimately, the tension between fandom and anti-fandom for audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* is revealed at the intersection of not feeling represented by the media but wanting to maintain social ties or establish Queer communities and audiences.

To conclude, the complex and reflexive approaches these participants used to engage with Netflix's *Queer Eye*, represent an intricate relationship between authenticity, Queerness, and Queer media. First, audiences experienced tension between understandings of the produced and intentional presentation of reality television and their perceptions of the Netflix's *Queer Eye* as authentic. While some people, like Lindsay, "go into [the] show suspending [her] disbelief" because she "really wants to" believe the show is authentic, many viewers maneuver through their awareness of the manufactured reality featured in reality television shows through a variety of different tactics like Penelope using evidence from the Fab Five's social media accounts,

Carmen's involvement in parasocial relationships, and Mikey's interpretations of authentic emotional responses; all of these represent the contexts, and sometimes contradictions, that characterize a reflexive engagement with Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Additionally, viewers expressed their tensions between Netflix's Fab Five and the concept of "good" Queer representations. Lindsay best describes audiences' tensions by saying, "I don't know that it's a good representation. I don't know that it's a bad representation. I think it's a representation, and as far as Queer representation goes, I will take it." Lindsay's expression of commitment to Netflix's *Queer Eye* was echoed by participants like Emma, Korey, Jade, and Samantha, all of whom experienced significant disappointment from the series' over-simplification of Queer identity. However, like Lindsay, each of those viewers still choose to consume Netflix's *Queer Eye* in order to maintain social connections, find a community, and establish the presence of Queer audiences. Altogether, the reflexivity deployed by the participants in the current study demonstrate the viewers multi-dimensional interactions with authenticity, Queerness, and Queer media represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

Conclusion

Viewers' multi-dimensional reception of Netflix's *Queer Eye* both reifies and challenges traditional readings of reality television and understandings of mediated Queer masculinity. Historically, Queer masculinity, especially as represented in reality television has been stereotypically flat and one-sided (Pozner, 2010). Netflix's *Queer Eye* both challenges that historic representation, presenting different Queer identities that include differing gender performance and race, but also reproduces those conventions. Zoe (69, Heterosexual, White, Female, Retired Nurse Administrator), for example, reported that the show was not expanding any understandings of Queer masculinity because she worked with a gay man who she described

as “quite gay” but “not quite as flamboyant as [Van Ness],” who represents stereotypical depictions of Queer men on television that are being reproduced in Netflix’s *Queer Eye*. Put differently, Zoe says the show “reinforces what I’ve already thought [about Queer masculinity].” However, audiences’ engagement with Netflix’s Fab Five have subtly shifted since Bravo’s version of the show. Netflix’s Fab Five are still responsible for finding, drawing out, and/or constructing the (actualized) selfhood of their clients but instead of encouraging economic discourses, like buying new furniture or new hair products (Vargas, 2008; Sender, 2012), they now perform emotional labor to achieve this goal. Audiences describe Netflix’s Fab Five as “trying to get people to feel confident about themselves” (Margot) or helping clients through “some kind of struggle emotionally” (Jordan). This description was also used on Culture expert, Karamo Brown, who was even defined as “sort of a caretaker” (Hugo). Margot’s, Hugo’s, and Jordan’s comments represent the Fab Five’s perceived responsibility of connecting with a person on an emotional level in order to access true or authentic performances of selfhood. Through a reflexive reading of the series, viewers also exhibited a necessity for Netflix’s Fab Five to aid them in accessing their own feelings, often resulting in cathartic release of emotions in conjunction with the Hero on screen. Katya, Louise, and Jane all report crying during episodes of Netflix’s *Queer Eye* as a result of aligning with the Hero, a characteristic of the deployment of Sender’s (2009) reflexivity in reality makeover audiences. Despite being touted as a progressive improvement on the original series (Collins, “You Can’t Fix Ugly,” 2018; Goldberg, 2018), themes of appropriation and commodification in order to appeal to a wide range of audiences (Vargas, 2008) are being reproduced through the avenue of Netflix’s Fab Five performing emotional labor for their viewers. The shift from commodifying Queer identity as a way to sell products to commodification through emotional labor represents a repetition of dominant cultural

power structures, not a progression towards the acceptance Food & Wine expert, Antoni Porowski, called for in the first episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

Additionally, audience readings of reality television complicate understandings of Queer masculinity through reflexive engagements. Viewers' previous knowledge of media production, part of the reflexive readings of reality makeover television that exemplifies the context of a concept, reveal the "formula aspect" (Korey) of the series which detracts from the overall believability of the series, representing a more critical viewing of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. However, for many viewers, perceptions of self-actualization displayed by both the Fab Five and the Heroes serves as validation for the show's authenticity, heightening their reflexive engagement with the series and, more specifically, Queer masculinity. This complication was then replicated through audiences' descriptions of Queer identity as complex and varied but well-represented by Netflix's Fab Five. Many viewers thought that this was a good representation of Queerness, despite the Fab Five members enjoying privileges like being cisgender, gay, and thin (Korey). This reflexivity between "good" and "comprehensive" portrayals of Queerness (Hugo), displayed through audiences' acknowledgment of the limitations of large-scale media, exemplifies the intricate relationship between marginalized identity and large-scale representation. Similarly, Emma claims that for her, "Queer means non-normative" and supports this by describing the series as a good representation of "a little 'Q' Queer, but [not] big 'Q' Queer." To put it differently, Emma is responding to the notion that even though the show uses the word "Queer" in the title, it does not adequately represent her and presents a version of Queer that is palatable for an audience assumed to be heteronormative. In conclusion, audiences' reflexivity through their knowledge of the context and limitations of Queer representation in media allowed for a critical and complex engagement with Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

While most of my participants could not identify with the Fab Five, the vast majority was thankful for positive depictions of Queerness and looked forward to continuing support for them as ambassadors of the Queer community. For example, while Alex was discussing Queer representation in the show, she understands "there's still so much more that needs to be done for representation but I really appreciate any show that seeks to make people more accepting and make a community more visible." Alex's response to the lack of gender and sexual orientation diversity in Netflix's *Queer Eye* directly models Martin's (2019) audiences and their desire to create and maintain communities. Samantha's aforementioned story of first watching Netflix's *Queer Eye* during the start of her coming out process further indicates audiences' consumption of the Fab Five as ambassadors for the Queer community. Sender's (2012) theory of reflexivity is also expressed through Charlotte's musings on the topic of Queer representation. She argues, "I think it's a good representation of middle-class Queerness…I feel like it's a good representation of what Queer is for Netflix, what Netflix's audience will be accepting of" (Charlotte). Charlotte's critical understanding of the plurality of Queer performances extended beyond just Queer identity and contextualized it in the nexus of Netflix as an entertainment entity as well as Netflix's perceived audience. In summation, these attitudes influenced Queer audiences' engagement with Netflix's *Queer Eye*. Even though they acknowledged the disappointing weaknesses of the show's depiction of Queer identity, each participant above reported their desire to continue watching the series to strengthen social bonds and prove the presence of Queer audiences.

In conclusion, I argue that audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* engage with the text, and by extension Queer masculinity, in two ways: expectations of emotional labor from the Fab Five and a reflexive engagement with Queer identity, representation, and reality television. First,

viewers identified Netflix's Fab Five as emotional laborers through acknowledging the genre of reality television as an explanation of their roles of emotional responsibility. The participants in the current study were keenly aware of the emotional aspect of this iteration of *Queer Eye* claiming that "the first season seemed less interested in the emotional transformation" (Karen) or that "the original [*Queer Eye*] was super shallow" (Bob). Bob and Karen demonstrate viewers' approach to and engagement with Netflix's *Queer Eye* as a media text characterized by deliberate performances of emotion. Furthermore, audiences aligned themselves with the Hero for each episode through reflexive engagement that draws the Fab Five's emotional responsibilities out of the context of the show and positions them in a real-life relation to the viewers' emotional intelligence and expression. Second, audiences' reflexive interactions with reality television as being believable despite awareness of behind the scenes editing and staging, descriptions of Netflix's *Queer Eye* as good representation of Queer identity even if Queer participants were not represented, and intentional support of large-scale Queer media all indicate a complex relationship to Queer masculinity. Audiences are being exposed to different forms of Queer masculinity by means of inclusion and representation, but societal power hierarchies are being reproduced through the commodification of Queer men to perform emotional labor. Though complicated through polysemic readings and reflexive engagements with reality television, Queer masculinity continues to be bound by hegemonic power structures. Jade articulates the detrimental implications for this by simply stating, "my job is to live my life, not save yours." The appropriation of Queer bodies to perform emotional labor reinforces preexisting cultures of oppression, burdening an already oppressed people with the responsibility of helping—or as Jade says, "saving"—the lives of those benefitting from dominant society.

Conclusion

Summary

The current study seeks to examine contemporary understandings of Queer masculinity through an analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye: More than a Makeover*. I explore this broad area of research by focusing on three research questions. My first research question is as follows: How is Queer masculinity represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*? In other words, I wanted to investigate the characteristics that were being used to define Netflix's Fab Five within the context of traditional representations of Queer masculinity in (reality) television shows (Pozner, 2010; Sender, 2012). After this, the focus of the project shifted to encompass audiences' perspectives in my second research question: How do audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* understand Queer masculinity? For this section, I considered media audiences as active meaning makers whose own engagements with the series may differ from encoded messages in the intended meaning (Hall, 1980; Sender, 2012). My final research question explores the relationship between the first two questions: What do the symmetries and asymmetries between messages represented in the text and the audiences' interpretations of Queer masculinity reveal about our current cultural context? The answers to the first two questions, as well as the tensions and overlaps between them, converge to represent contemporary understandings of Queer masculinity.

In this final chapter, I will bring the different sections and pieces of my analysis together and put them into conversation with each other. Exploring the areas of overlap and difference between each part of this project provides a space for analyzing and discussing contemporary understandings of Queer masculinity. Before continuing, however, I will provide a brief summary of the two-step analysis I used to complete this process: first, a textual analysis of the

series, followed by an analysis of its audiences. In what follows, I will revisit the method, data, analysis, major findings, and how those findings answered their respective research questions.

In the first chapter, I performed a textual analysis of the first two seasons of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. A third season of the show was released after the beginning of this project and was not considered in the analysis. The seasons featured in my analysis included sixteen episodes that averaged 45 minutes per episode for a total of 738 minutes (12.3 hours) of air time. My analysis of the series yielded 90 pages of notes that I analyzed for recurring themes. Over the span of more than 50 hours of viewing time, I separated my engagements with the series into three different stages. In the first stage, I familiarized myself with the structure of and characters in the show, more watching as a potential fan than a scholar. Then I approached the series through a lens inspired by research on reality television. The final stage focused even more specifically on the way that Netflix's *Queer Eye* showcased Queer masculinity.

In my textual analysis, I looked to answer my first research question: How is Queer masculinity represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*? I argue that Netflix's *Queer Eye* depicts Queer masculinity as ordinary that is constructed through the everyday focus on intersectionality. To accomplish this, Netflix's *Queer Eye* interacts with the personal lives of the Fab Five in order to highlight the different intersections of the Fab Five's identity stepping beyond simply Queer men and investigating the ways they navigate the everyday, mundane parts of life while being Queer. For example, the series paid special attention to Bobby Berk's (Design) and Tan France's (Fashion) roles as husbands in their own respective marriages. Similarly, the series allowed space for Jonathan Van Ness (Grooming) to speak explicitly about political ideologies and participation in electoral politics. Finally, Karamo Brown (Culture) had the chance to explore his identity as a Black, gay man and share that experience through the advice and coaching he gave

to the Heroes on the show. Traditionally, representations of Queer masculinity have been focused on Othering Queer men as something inhumane, perverse or caricaturish, therefore, Netflix's *Queer Eye*'s presentation of the Fab Five as people with ordinary lives is an important step towards a more accurate and benevolent representation of Queer masculinity.

At this point in the study, my attention shifted from the series itself to audiences' engagements with it. I recruited 30 people who were over the age of 18 years old and had seen at least one episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. The recruitment image, found in Appendix C, was distributed on my personal Facebook page and was shared through my network of friends and colleagues. Additionally, the image was shared on *Queer Eye* fan pages on Facebook, Reddit fan pages (r/QueerEye), and on my personal Twitter account where it was retweeted by William (@SilverLImePhoto), one of the Heroes from the second season of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, as well as his partner, Shannan (@Treeandshield). I held one-on-one interviews with each participant that lasted an average of 45 minutes and featured open-ended question; after each interview, all participants were assigned a pseudonym. Interviews produced 371 pages of transcriptions which were then coded for themes that addressed the second research question: How do audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* understand Queer masculinity?

As I explored audiences' understandings of Queer masculinity through their interactions with Netflix's *Queer Eye*, my results manifested on two different planes: audiences' expectations of emotional labor from the Fab Five and a (self-)reflexive engagement with the series representing audiences' complex understandings of Queer masculinity. First, through previous knowledge of reality makeover genres and reflexively placing themselves in the position of the Heroes of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, audiences expect the Fab Five to help them access their own confident, inner-self through the performance of emotional labor. Additionally, participants in

this study used reflexivity to explore tensions between reality television production conventions and the believability of the series, Queer representation and Queer realities, and, finally, fandom and anti-fandom. For example, viewers understood that "there's certain things that happen…on purpose" (Mikey) but perceive that "the reactions [from the Heroes and the Fab Five] are real" (George), identifying the emotional revelation of the Hero's fully actuated self in each episode as confirmation of the series' authenticity. Similarly, audiences used reflexivity to navigate tensions between their understandings of Queer identity and the failings of Queer representation, claiming that it was a good representation of "a little 'Q' Queer, but [not] big 'Q' Queer" (Emma). Finally, viewers of Netflix's *Queer Eye* exemplified tensions between fandom and anti-fandom in marginalized communities (Martin, 2019). Participants deliberately engage with Netflix's *Queer Eye* despite being disappointed or not represented in the series as a means to maintain social ties and prove the existence of Queer audiences for large-scale, Queer productions. To summarize, audiences expect Netflix's Fab Five to draw out or construct their actuated self through reflexively aligning themselves with the Heroes in the series. This reflexivity also manifests in the participants' navigation of tensions in their understandings of media production, Queer representation, and their own interests in the series to engage in more complex and intricate readings of Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

Symmetries and Asymmetries between Text and Audience

The final research question for the current project—What do the symmetries and asymmetries between messages represented in the text and the audiences' interpretations of Queer masculinity reveal about our current cultural context? —is answered through the overlaps and divergences between the previous questions' answers. To explore this, I first turn to the similarities between the two sets of data. My analysis has proven that there is a distinct shift in

both presentation of and audience interactions with Queer men on reality television. Netflix's *Queer Eye* aims to characterize Queer men as ordinary or everyday. They choose to include opportunities for the Fab Five to complicate their lives and identities in ways that have not often been possible on (reality) television. On the surface, it seems as if Netflix's *Queer Eye* is trying to actively remedy the representational sins, not only of its forbearer, Bravo's *Queer Eye*, but additionally the uni-dimensional and traumatic presentation of Queer masculinity in reality television shows (Vargas, 2008; Pozner, 2010; Sender, 2012). Not only is this the perceived goal of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, but many viewers identified and connected with this theme as well, coding this ordinariness as an example of the Fab Five's collective confidence. Viewers watched this series and were captivated in how Jonathan Van Ness is "going to be fabulous whether you want him to or not" (Jane), or how Antoni Porowski is "real genuine" (Mikey), or how the Fab Five are "all very confident" (Margot). For participants in the current study, Queer masculinity is being defined as something inherently genuine and confident, demonstrating a brave performance of Queer ordinariness through a small break in the traditional characterization of Queer men in television. Due to the perception of Netflix's Fab Five as confident or genuine, audiences have come to expect the Fab Five to draw out their own most authentic self through the performance of emotional labor.

Many participants' readings of the show aligned with the messages encoded within the text itself—like the Fab Five being ordinary, regular people or confident in themselves—but there were definitive divergences that complicated narratives of genuine self-hood that demonstrate audiences' engagements with Queer masculinity in the current cultural climate. Primarily, audiences deployed reflexive readings of Netflix's *Queer Eye* in order navigate the tensions between Netflix's characterization of ordinariness and the genre of reality television, as

well as the Fab Five as exemplars of Queer identity in the series. In my analysis, I argue that audiences were able to contextualize the construction of ordinariness in Netflix's *Queer Eye* through acknowledgement of the reality television genre. In other words, while Netflix aims to characterize their Fab Five through ordinariness, audiences reflexively contextualize this ordinariness within their knowledge of the genre of reality makeover television. For example, even though Netflix is attempting to characterize the Fab Five as ordinary Queer men who are living their truth genuinely, audiences were keenly aware that "they [the production crew] put people in these…situations to make for 'good TV'" (Carmen), that both the Heroes and the Fab Five themselves were possibly "going through emotions for television" (Louise), and that when they watch the show "there's always some suspension of reality…this is whatever reality TV is" (Jessica). Carmen, Louise, and Jessica all acknowledge the behind the scenes production aspect of reality television shows that is indicative of a manicured, not genuine, reality and this? is a contextualized, reflexive engagement with Netflix's *Queer Eye*. In summary, audiences deployed reflexive readings of Netflix's *Queer Eye* as a manner of understanding the intentions of a genuine performance of self through ordinariness within the context of the manufactured presentation of the self in reality television shows.

Additionally, audiences engaged in reflexive understandings of Queer identity to create a space for talking about the reduction of Queer identity represented in Netflix's *Queer Eye*. This can be seen in the juxtaposition of participants' definition of Queerness and evaluations of the series as good Queer representation. For example, when asked to define what Queer meant to them, many participants described Queer as "anything outside of, or anyone who doesn't fall into being cisgender or heterosexual" (Slint). In other words, when participants engaged with what their understandings of Queerness were, they were varied, expansive, and broad. However,

tensions arose between their understandings of Queerness and whether or not Netflix's *Queer Eye* represented accurate or positives representations of what they described. This is exemplified through audiences' insight into the limitations of reality television, Netflix, and Queer representation. First, participants expressed their discomfort with the type of Queer representation describing Netflix's *Queer Eye* as neither a good nor a bad representation but simply "a representation…what kind of sucks is the way that it makes us seem more like fairy godmothers than actual like, human beings" (Jade). To clarify, Jade, and many Queer viewers like her, were excited about the representation but were disappointed that it did not transcend their reflexive knowledge of traditional Queer representation (Vargas, 2008). Additionally, audiences explored the dissimilarities between their understandings of Queer identity and the type of Queer identity Netflix is presenting by claiming, "it's a good representation of what is Queer for Netflix, what Netflix's audience will be accepting of" (Charlotte). In Charlotte's engagement with the series as neither a good nor bad representation of Queerness, she is insightfully focusing in on Netflix's audiences being a limitation for how accurate Queer representation can be when it exists in a space where societal power hierarchies are replicated. Finally, Penelope describes the series as "a good representation of a very specific angle on Queerness," as she wrestled with the fact that no Queer women were in the new Fab Five. Penelope's awareness that Netflix's presentation of Queer identity, though personally complicated through performances of ordinariness, is still reductive in nature due to the sole inclusion of cisgender, male, homosexual men. These complex, intricate, and, at times, conflicted engagements with Netflix's *Queer Eye* and the new Fab Five represent the struggle for accurate and believable representation for marginalized people. Replicating some of the representational disappointments, like inaccurate portrayals and harmful stereotypes, Martin

(2019) explored in his study on Black women's anti-fandom of Tyler Perry films, audiences of Netflix's *Queer Eye* realize that Queer identity and Queer masculinity are much more diverse and fluid than is being portrayed in the series and are expressing their concern through the acknowledgement that though more progress needs to be made, it will not happen without supporting the production of imperfect Queer media.

Interpretations

My analysis of Netflix's *Queer Eye* adds to the preexisting body of research featuring representations of Queer masculinity in two main ways—methodologically and historically. First, this project seeks to move towards a methodological practice of focusing on Queer audiences. Following in the example of Cavalcante's (2018) ethnographic research in the trans community and Martin's (2019) research focused on Black gay men's responses to Black gay sitcoms, this study seeks to work as a microphone for audiences who are traditionally marginalized and ignored. Like Queer representation in reality television, Queer representation in audience studies still requires development and this project aims to add to that conversation.

Additionally, the current project speaks to the changing and progressing narrative of Queer representation in the media. As I argued in my textual analysis, Netflix's *Queer Eye* is actively working to characterize the Fab Five as ordinary people. Netflix constructs this ordinariness by highlighting the different intersections of the Fab Five's identities as Queer men who are married, who develop and nurture platonic friendships, who participate in politics, and who express their sexuality. This is a drastic change in the traditional pattern of representation which consistently characterized Queer men as Other through constructions of the Pansy (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Thorpe, 2014), the Pervert Crazy of the 1950's (Streitmatter, 2009), descriptions of Bravo's Fab Five as "fairy godmothers" and "superheroes" (Lacroix and

Westerfelhaus, 2005; Vargas, 2008; Sender, 2012), and, finally, the destructive reduction of Queer masculinity to a caricature not unlike a jester in reality television shows from 2000-2010 (Pozner, 2010). The characterization of Netflix's Fab Five as ordinary, Queer men represents a dramatic shift in the historical representation of Queer masculinity that removes Queer masculinity from Otherhood and situates it within the everyday.

Audiences' interpretations of and engagements with Netflix's Fab Five aligned with the series' goal to characterize Queer masculinity as ordinary; the participants in this study coded ordinariness as genuine and confident, which informed their expectations for the Fab Five to draw out their own confident, genuine selves. The Fab Five's role in Netflix's *Queer Eye* shifts slightly from torchbearers of coolness and style who were commodified to construct an actuated self through economic activity like buying new furniture or repeatedly buying expensive hair and grooming products to commodification in the form of emotional labor. Audiences' expectations of Netflix's Fab Five to perform emotional labor in order to reveal an actuated inner-self is indicative of the role of Queer masculinity in society today. Whether it is through conventions like a "GBF," or a "Gay Best Friend," or simply a comparison with Netflix's Fab Five, like Zoe equating her flamboyant co-worker "swinging his purse" to Jonathan Van Ness's fluid performance of gender, Queer men are expected to manage the emotions of both themselves and those around them in order to create a comfortable environment for straight self-actualization.

This warrants attention due to the way that marginalized media, media by and/or for a marginalized people group, represents and often creates the dominate narrative about that people group. Again, I reference Samantha's emotional coming out story. Samantha disclosed that her introduction to Netflix's *Queer Eye* came at a time of significant transition in her life: not only was she graduating from graduate school and moving away from her roommate, but through

conversations with her therapist, Samantha realized her own lesbian identity and began the process of telling her friends and family. She described how thankful she was "to be able to have [Netflix's *Queer Eye*] to rebuild my sense of self, and my sense of self-esteem, it was just so precious to me to have it" (Samantha). Samantha's story not only represents Williams' (2015) argument that fandom is created during a shift in the way that you perceive yourself, but also represents the integral nature of Queer media in Queer world making. Queer audiences, like Samantha, use Queer media as a source of entertainment, but also, and more importantly, as a way of reconstructing the self.

Limitations

The current study encountered four prominent limitations. First, only one artifact was examined. With titles like *Westside: A Musical Reality Series* (2018-present), *Dancing Queen* (2018-present), and *Orange is the New Black* (2013-present), all of which feature Queer characters and content, Netflix is becoming a well of Queer representation. Since the findings of the current study represent a shift in the representation of and engagements with Queer masculinity, these series could be other venues to explore Queer representation, specifically within the context of representation on reality television. Second, while the focus of the current study is on Netflix's *Queer Eye*—and I have drawn heavily from scholarship about Bravo's *Queer Eye*—my conclusion that understandings of Queer masculinity has shifted would be supported even more so with the inclusion of a deliberate analysis of the original series in comparison to the new iteration.

The third limitation of this study is the actual method of audience research. According to Sender (2012), reflexivity—the process of contextualizing a concept—applies to both media engagement and the process of audience research. Sender (2012) argues that the ideal audience

studies participant “must be able to consider herself in context; see herself and her media engagements as if through the eyes of another (here the researcher); look within to appraise her investments and motivations; and express herself as authentically as possible” (p. 190). In other words, researching audiences facilitates a requirement that participants place themselves in a certain context and recount their viewing habits through objective lenses. In this study, like in Sender’s (2012), the reflexive similarity between audiences of reality makeover shows and audience studies participants seems to be overwhelming at first, as it provides the space to potentially replicate societal norms of self-presentation from the shows being researched. However, to combat this, I refer not to the audience but to specific audiences, people that are voluntarily and temporarily came together who chose to take part in this research.

The current study examines contemporary understandings of Queer masculinity. However, my final limitation manifested through an exclusion of a specific form of Queer masculinity: female masculinity. This limitation was present both in the formation of this study and in the data collected. None of my research questions dealt specifically with the topic of female masculinity. Certain follow up questions about the representation of an all cisgender, all male representation of Queerness in Netflix’s *Queer Eye* left room for the discussion of female masculinity but it was not a deliberate focus. Additionally, despite the repetition of seemingly all-encompassing definitions of Queerness as “anything outside of, or anyone who doesn’t fall into being cisgender or heterosexual” (Slint), my participants also did not address female masculinity in their discussions. This limitation is indicative of reality television’s repressive legacy of defining Queerness as white, cisgender, and male homosexuality.

Future Research

The results for this study have several implications for future research. In this section, I will suggest recommendations for research in the following venues: a meta-analysis of Queer masculinity in (reality) television, broadening the conversation to include female masculinity, and a focus on Queer audiences. First, the current study analyzes one series of one type of reality show where Queer men are featured. Remembering the aforementioned Netflix reality shows featuring Queer men and Queer masculinity, future research would benefit from creating a timeline of Queer (masculine) representation in (reality) television. Perhaps diving deeper into the harmful reality dating shows Queer men were subjected to in the 2000's or including newer forms of reality programing on streaming platforms like YouTube would create a stronger narrative of what it means to perform Queer masculinity on a reality series. Second, in the words of Emma, Netflix's *Queer Eye*—and at times this study—represented "a little 'Q' Queer, but [not] big 'Q' Queer," as it excludes female masculinity, people who live outside of the gender spectrum, femme Queer men, and many other sexual and gender identities that exist outside of cisgender, male, homosexuality. However, perhaps the fact that discussions about female masculinity are absent represents a gap in reality television representation. In conclusion, a final venue of inquiry to be explored would be to deliberately focus on Queer audiences. Due to Friedman & Linnett's (2003) argument that Bravo's *Queer Eye*'s target demographic was heterosexual women before homosexual men, I did not require a Queer identity to participate in this study. My participant pool reflected Friedman & Linnett's (2003) in that 16 of my 30 participants identified as heterosexual/straight and 14 out of those 16 participants self-identified as (cis-)female/woman. Future research could benefit from explorations of Queer sense making, world building, and identity construction through the lens of an entirely Queer participant pool.

Conclusion

I undertook this study because of my interest in contemporary mediated representations of Queerness. By studying the mediated portrayal of the Queer community, the nuances and subtleties of the narratives that frame their existence become more visible and accessible to a broader audience. Even more important, though, is that it becomes more visible and accessible to other members of the Queer community. Studying the Queer masculinity in Netflix's *Queer Eye*, specifically through perceptions of (queer) audiences, I learned that depictions of queer men in television serve as more than just a representative face, but the portrayal of and engagement with those representations serve as sense-making tools for audiences. As I continue my career, I hope to continue researching mediated representations of queerness, hopefully through different channels, like YouTube and Instagram, and engaging more with the dynamic narratives of my community. Additionally, I hope to encourage other scholarship and investigation into other aspects of the Queer community and the ways they are represented in any form of media. Turning attention to cultural story tellers like the television is integral to truly comprehend contemporary understandings of queerness and queer masculinity,

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire:

1. I am at least 18 years old.
    a. Yes
    b. No
2. I have seen at least one episode of Netflix's Queer Eye and consent to participate in this research project.
    a. Yes
    b. No
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender identity?
5. What is your sexual orientation?
6. What is your race?
7. What is your occupation?
8. When would you be available for a 40-60 minute interview with the researcher? (Please check all that apply)
    a. Weekday Morning/Afternoon/Evening
    b. Weekend Morning/Afternoon/Evening
9. Please enter your contact information so I may reach out to you about scheduling an interview:
    a. Email __________
    b. Phone __________
10. I prefer to be contacted via:
    a. Email
    b. Text Message

Appendix B
Interview Questions:

1. How did you first hear about Netflix's *Queer Eye*?
2. In your own words, can you describe what happens in a typical episode?
3. Who's your favorite Hero/Guest? And why?
4. Have you learned anything from any of the episodes?
   a. Have you applied that in your own life recently?
5. Who is your favorite member of the Fab Five?
   a. Why is he your favorite?
   b. Do you see anything in him that reminds you of yourself?
6. Do any of the Fab Five possess personality traits that you admire or want to possess?
   a. Why do you think that's important?
7. If you could choose one, which one of the Fab Five would you want to be friends with?
8. Do any of the Fab Five remind you of people in your own life?
9. Did any of the episodes, Heroes, or Fab Five members make you uncomfortable?
10. The show is called *Queer Eye*, why do you think they chose that title?
11. What does Queer mean to you?
    a. Do you think that this show is a good representation of Queerness?
12. Does this series seem believable?
13. Is there anything that you thought we would have talked about but didn't that you'd like to share?

Appendix C
Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Orientation	Race	Gender Identity	Occupation
Korey	28	Gay	Mixed	Male	Insurance Agent
Louise	26	Straight	White	Female	Registered Nurse
Danielle	26	Heterosexual	White	Female	Study Abroad Advisor
Zoe	69	Heterosexual	White	Female	Retired Physicians Assistant
Jade	27	Bisexual	Black	Female	PR Account Supervisor
Mikey	37	Homosexual	African American	Male	Retail Banking
Samantha	27	Lesbian	White/Caucasian	Female	Professor
Jessica	32	Straight	White	Female	College Professor
Carmen	28	Straight	African American	Woman	Legislative Assistant
Jane	24	Heterosexual/Straight	Caucasian	Female	Admin Assistant
Karen	50	Straight	White	Female	Retail Sales/Owner
James	26	Gay	White	Male	Nurse Admin
Charlotte	26	Bisexual	White	Cis Female	Educator
Katya	28	Heterosexual	Mixed Latina/Native American/White	Female	Graduate Student
Bob	41	Gay	Pākehā	Male	Web Developer
Margot	21	Straight	White	Female	Nurse
Emma	45	Queer	White	Gender Queer	Faculty Developer/Adjunct Professor
Denise	34	Straight	White	Female	Professor
Jordan	29	Straight	White	Female	Graduate Student
Lindsay	28	Bisexual	White	Cis Woman	Student
Alex	19	Bisexual	White	Female	Theater Educator
Mariela	32	Heterosexual	Asian	Female	Copywriter (Marketing)
Isabel	26	Straight	White	Female	Social Worker
Rachel	31	Heterosexual	White/ Caucasian	Female	Nurse Research Coordinator
George	32	Gay	Caucasian	Male	Archivist
Diego	34	Straight	White/ Caucasian	Male	Software Engineer
Hugo	31	Straight	White	Male	Researcher
Vanessa	21	Pansexual	Black/Afroswede	Cis Woman	Student
Slint	23	Asexual	White	Male	Packing Engineer
Penelope	39	Bisexual	Caucasian	Female	Customer Success

Appendix D
Recruitment Image

Appendix E
IRB Approval

Submission Type: Initial **Date:** 5-1-2019

IRB #: PRO-FY2019-147
Title: Netflix's Queer Eye and Queer Masculinities
Creation Date: 9-18-2018
Status: Review Complete
Principal Investigator: Cameron Brown

Section 1 Institutional Review Board Protocol Application

Human Research Protections Program
Institutional Review Board

Principal Investigator

1 **Name:** Cameron Brown
Organization: Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
Address: , Memphis, TN
38152-3370 **Phone:**
Email: clbrwn16@memphis.edu

1a Your UofM Appointment Status

Professor

Associate Professor

Assistant Professor

Instructor

✔ Student

Staff

Other

2 Do you have a Co-PI or Co-PIs?

Yes

✔ No

Faculty Advisor

2 Name: Amanda Edgar
Organization: Communication
Address: 315 Administration Building , Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Phone:
Email: anedgar@memphis.edu

Primary Contact

3 Name: Cameron Brown
Organization: Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
Address: , Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Phone:
Email: clbrwn16@memphis.edu

Co-Investigators

4

Use the text area for investigators outside UofM, and use the Find People button below for UofM investigators.

Please choose your UofM investigator(s) here:

5 Is there a financial sponsor for this study?

Yes

✔ No

Determination
Do you need a determination for whether or not your study is human subjects research requiring IRB review?

6 *Human subject* means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information.

Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

Yes. Proceed to determination questions for submission

✔ No. Proceed with your protocol submission

CITI Training Completion Information

6 CITI (**C**ollaborative **I**nstitutional **T**raining **I**nitiative at the University of Miami) Training in human subjects research is required every two

years. Date of completion:

04/11/2018

CITI Modules Completed

Check all that apply.

- ✔ Social & Behavioral Research
- Investigators Bio medical Research
- Students conducting no more than minimal risk
- research IRB Members
- Nursing

CITI Record ID:

25753844

6 Anticipated number of subjects for the entire project.

35 participants will be needed for the current study.

7 Submission type

✔ Exempt study

Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

All other studies

Purpose of the study

a) **Study Goal**. Provide a concise statement of the study hypothesis(es) or goal(s).
b) **Literature review.** Briefly describe how the pertinent body of literature supports the study goal. Include citations and references.
c) **Citations and references**. Include citations and a complete reference section.
d) **Possible contribution**. Describe the potential benefits of the proposed research study to the literature.

a) This study will explore audience understandings of gender and sexuality through viewing Netflix's *Queer Eye: More Than a Makeover*. The current study will examine and engage with *Queer Eye*'s audience and their understanding of gender performance and queer masculinities.

b) When it was first introduced to the home, there was significant pushback against television from academic and upper-class society. "Television, like any new invention, entered societies that had established norms of social relations. It also entered societies that had experience with other media and art" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 6). Because the television entered a society that had preexisting norms of art and culture, it served as a popular medium allowing space for many critics to define it as low-brow, oversimplified, and, in the United States, offensively commercial (Gray & Lotz, 2012). However, scholars and activists who did not see the television as a threat, began to form what we today call "television studies," which is characterized by a unique and diverse history.

Television studies is was influenced greatly by scholars from three different approaches: social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies. First, influences from the social sciences are indicative of "the empirical research done in psychology, sociology, and budding communication departments" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 8). Out of this specific contribution, George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli's (1986) formed the theory of cultivation which not only positions television and television narratives as paramount cultural storytellers but also exemplifies the social science influence in television studies. The second contributor, humanities, used influences from literary and film studies, particularly their inclusion of semiotics that were well suited to television studies, especially when regarding television as a cultural storyteller, as mentioned before. The final approach to television studies, influenced by cultural studies, introduced theories and methods to analyze the implications of television, specifically within the context of power in society. From cultural studies, specifically the contributions of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), Hall

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(1980) began producing research that shifted focus primarily negative understanding to a much more optimistic view.

Hall's (1980) essay offers an intensely theoretical account of how messages are produced and distributed, specifically through the medium of television. Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model focused on balancing out the 'encoding' and construction of messages with the 'decoding' of them, which involves how audiences actually interacted with them and shaped meaning for themselves, thus disrupting the previously popular tradition linear model of mass communication research: sender/message/receiver (Gray & Lotz, 2012). In a two-step process, Hall (1980) first encodes the messages being presented by the media artifact, then analyzes its polysemic nature by engaging with the audiences' perspectives. This allows the audience to employ their own subjectivities and interpretative framework, thus accomplishing the goal of audience ethnography which is to break down the idea of an audience as a homogenous, static, and inactive participants in the consumption of media.

c) Citations and References

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17-40). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gray, J., & Lotz, A. D. (2012). *Television studies: Short introductions*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Hall, S. ([1973] 1980). Encoding/decoding. In Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.), Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79 (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.

d) The current study seeks to evaluate the relationship between reality television characters and programs and the audiences consuming them. So many times, media fans are accused of blindly consuming the messages of the programs they follow and enjoy. While there is a possibility of some media consumers fulfilling this stereotype, I aim to find evidence of just how audiences engage with the concept of queer masculinity in Netflix's *Queer Eye* and how that relates to their understanding of it, specifically in a mediated context in the current cultural moment. I want to gather data from the audiences' perspectives to fully demonstrate the ways that audiences interact with television and the impact that reality television has on self-identified fans. This information could liberate reality

television from the stereotype of a genre with very little substance or cultural impact and bring to light the potential gravity of the genre as a whole.

Methods and Procedures

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a) Study design. Provide a summary statement of the design methodology used. For example, stating that the study is a randomized clinical trial using a double blind procedure with a placebo control. Another example would be a reanalysis of de-identified archival data.
b) Materials. Provide a concise description of all special equipment, instruments, or measures in this section. Also, label and attach copies of data collection tools at the end of this Initial Review Request.
c) Procedures. Provide a chronological description of the experience of being a participant in this study. For archival data, describe how the data is secured, stored, and used. Include the process by which consent will be obtained.
d) Indicate which procedures and treatments are associated with the present study and those which are not part of the study (i.e., pre-existing programs, interventions, or classroom exercises).

a) The study is an audience ethnography employing one-on-one interviews.

b) Individual interviews will be recorded with an audio recorder. Interviews will be guided by a series of semi-structured interview questions attached to the end of this request form.

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c) Before each forty to sixty minute interview, each participant will be directed to a SurveyMonkey form (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7GYX9ZC) for screening and collection of demographic data. From there, each participant will schedule an interview time with the researcher. For interviews over the phone, the researcher will ensure set up in a private space, away from excessive background noise.

Interviews will be conducted with just the participant and the Lead Investigator. Participants will arrive to the planned location or be available for a phone or Skype call at the scheduled time. There will be no compensation for interviews.

Before the interview begins, the researcher will explain the study and the participant's right to decline participation, as well as ensure the participant has a copy of the Informed Consent form. The researcher will then make sure the participant is aware that the interview will be audio recorded and answer any general questions about the study design. The researcher will then ask whether participants consent to be interviewed and will have provided the informed consent document as a download from the Survey Monkey form (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7GYX9ZC).

The researcher will then lead participants through a series of open-ended interview questions

(questions attached).

d) All procedures are part of the current study.

Attachments: Instruments and Measures

Survey Monkey Questions.docx
QE Interview Quesitons.docx

Secondary analysis of existing data

10

The specific information is necessary when identifiable data about human subjects will be obtained. Data are identifiable if they include direct or indirect identifiers such as name, email address, UID Number, race, gender, nationality, age etc.
a) List source of the data and an explanation of why the data were originally collected.
b) Describe in detail the data you plan to access and analyze.
c) Indicate the requirements of the data supplier and how access to the data will be granted or obtained. If access to the data is governed by a data use agreement, provide a copy of the agreement.
d) Describe procedures that will protect data you are given access.

Data information: Data Use Agreement, Data Sharing Agreement, Variables List etc.

Investigator Qualifications

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a) Describe the research team's qualifications and experience pertinent to conducting this research project. **This description must address and include information about the lead investigator and, if the lead investigator is a student, the faculty advisor as well.**

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b) If physical or psychological assessments are being administered who will administer the assessment and score the results and what are their qualifications for doing so? Is the training in human subject protection of those administering assessments adequate?
a) The PI has successfully finished his undergraduate degree in Communication Studies from The University of Memphis, as well as having completed one independent qualitative study under the

supervision of a trained researcher. He will be operating under the advisement of Dr. Amanda Nell Edgar who has five years of experience conducting interview and focus group research with media users and fans.

b) No physical or psychological assessments will be performed.

Human Subjects

a) Characteristics. Describe the characteristics of the participant population. Include the age range(s), gender, ethnicity, health status, any physical, mental, cognitive or emotional limitations, and any other relevant variables.
b) Vulnerable Populations. Indicate if subjects include students, prisoners, pregnant women or any other class of subjects that might be especially vulnerable and require special consideration.
c) Pre-existing relationship to subject pool. If subjects are students, describe the relationship between students and researcher. If there is a pre-existing relationship between the researcher and the subject pool, please describe that relationship in detail.
d) Selection. Describe criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects in the study. Provide a detailed explanation for each exclusion and inclusion criterion.
e) Justification for the proposed sample size. This number helps reviewers understand the expected sample size. Please explain why this number was chosen for your sample size. Any increases to sample size require a modification to the study.

a) The participants will be at least 18 years old and must self-identify as having seen at least one episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. There will be no limitation set on gender, ethnicity, or health status.

b) No vulnerable populations will be involved in this research.

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c) The call for participants will be distributed on the PI's personal Facebook page, Twitter account, and in coffee shops frequented by the PI so there is a high possibility that the PI will know some of the participants. However, recruitment images will also be circulated in social media fan groups in hopes of reaching a larger subject pool than would be if a convenience sample were being used.
Finally, as the PI is teaching this semester, in the event that their students participate, no compensation will be provided.

d) In order to qualify for the study, participants must be at least 18 years old and self-identify as having seen at least one episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. The interview questions require familiarity with Netflix's *Queer Eye*.

e) I will conduct interviews until saturation has been achieved. According to Morse (1994), Mason (2010), and Baker and Edwards (2012), the mean number of qualitative interviews required to reach

saturation is 30.

Morse, J. M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 220-235). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/
...

Baker, S. E. & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough? National Centre for Research Methods Review. Retrieved from http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_intervie...

Recruitment

Describe how subjects will be identified and recruited.
Provide detailed description and examples, where relevant, of any material to be presented to potential participants prior to their receipt of the informed consent/assent documents.

Participants will be recruited through advertisements on social media and locally distributed flyers. I will recruit through a combination of Facebook and Twitter, posting in coffee shops around the city of Memphis, email with friends and family members who may qualify or know qualified potential participants, and through classroom advertisement, though no class or extra credit will be given for participation.

Recruitment .jpeg used on Facebook and Twitter, and the social media and email scripts attached. The recruitment image will also contain a QR Code that will connect participants (online or via flyer) to the Survey Monkey form (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7GYX9ZC) to collect screening

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information.

The image is simple so that it is more likely to be read on social media. Therefore, it does not contain screening information. Instead, researchers will ask screening questions before scheduling the interview. If a potential participant does not meet the characteristics outlined above, they will not be interviewed.

To screen potential participants before scheduling interviews, participants will be directed to a SurveyMonkey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7GYX9ZC) form that includes the following questions:

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
2. Have you seen at least one episode of Netflix's *Queer Eye*?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” the potential participant will not be scheduled for an interview.

Recruitment Materials

Attach advertisements, postings on social media, posters, scripts for radio/TV, other electronic ads, scripts for verbal recruitment, copies of email recruitments and any text that will be provided to potential participants. It should be clear in all recruitment materials that you are conducting research. See Sample Recruitment flyer on IRB website.

Recruitment Image.pptx Sample documents: sample_recruitment_flyer.doc QE EmailSocial Media Script.docx

Subject Compensation

a) Describe any economic or other incentives for participation including reimbursement for time and travel.
b) If study participation requires subject to complete multiple sessions, compensation must be pro-rated over

14 the course of the study. (Example: In a study where subjects are compensated $50 per session, Tom completes only two sessions, then he should be compensated $100 for his participation)
c) If the study incentive involves earning course credit, list alternative ways to earn the same credit.

a) No payment will be provided to participants.

b) N/A

c) N/A

Risk Benefit Analysis

Potential Risks

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a) Describe all potential risks: physical, psychological, social, legal or other associated with each procedure. Assess the probability, severity, potential duration and reversibility of each risk.
b) Identify those risks that are minimal and those which are more than minimal.
c) Describe the procedures used to minimize any potential risks.

The risks to participating in this study are expected to be no greater than those encountered in ordinary, everyday life.

Participants may decline to answer any question they choose.

Potential Benefits

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a) Describe the direct potential benefits to the subject. If there are none, this should be so stated.
b) Describe the potential societal benefits of the study in terms of human health/welfare, the advancement of knowledge or the good of society.

a) The study offers participants a chance to think about and discuss their ideas about Netflix's *Queer Eye*, which may be enlightening and enjoyable for participants.

b) The advancement of knowledge that could come from the future results of this project has the potential to open up spaces for the discussion of the impacts of reality television. The potential societal benefits of this study would be creating opportunities of discussion about sexuality and queer masculinity.

Differential Evaluation of Risks and Benefits

17

Justify the research study based on your evaluation of the risk/benefit assessment. When composing this section, imagine you are standing in front of a panel of researchers who are all skeptical about your research. Your task is to reassure them that the benefits of your research outweigh the risks.

The risks to participating in this study are expected to be no greater than those encountered in ordinary, everyday life. The potential benefits, on the other hand, could increase scholars' understanding of the meanings of reality television among audience members (including our participants).

Privacy

The research proposal should outline strategies to protect privacy, including how the investigator will access participant information.
In developing strategies for the protection of subjects' privacy, consideration should be given to:

- The methods used to identify and contact potential subjects.
- The settings in which an individual will be interacting with an investigator.
- The appropriateness of all personnel present for research activities.
- The methods used to obtain information about subjects.
- The nature of the requested information.
- Information that is obtained about individuals other than the target subjects, and whether such individuals meet the regulatory definition of human subject (e.g., a subject provides information about a family member for a survey).
- Privacy guidelines developed by relevant professional associations and scholarly disciplines.
- How to access the minimum amount of information necessary to complete the study.

The methods used to identify and contact potential subjects -- Subjects will be directed to a SurveyMonkey form that includes their preferred method of contact (i.e. phone number or email address), then the PI will reach out to the participant to set up an interview. Emails will be directed to university password-protected email.

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For phone interviews, prior to the phone call, the researcher will set up in a space that allows for utmost privacy. This space will be in private room on campus or in the PI's home. Furthermore, the location will be as removed as possible from excessive background noise and non-participating human interaction.

The appropriateness of all personnel present for research activities -- Only the researcher and participants will be present at the interview.

The nature of the requested information -- The information requested from participants is similar to conversations that might take place in any school, work place, or social gathering. No questions are particularly sensitive, though if participants feel uncomfortable answering, they are not required to do so.

Information that is obtained about individuals other than the "target subjects," and whether such individuals meet the regulatory definition of "human subject" (e.g., a subject provides information about a family member for a survey) -- The researcher will not ask for information about other individuals, other than for recruitment purposes. In the case of recruitment, information gathered about other individuals will be limited to contact information (specifically, first name and phone number or email address)

Privacy guidelines developed by relevant professional associations and scholarly disciplines -- The study is designed with the ethical considerations common to audience ethnography interview protocol.

How to access the minimum amount of information necessary to complete the study -- The semi-structured interview questions are designed to be very general so that participants are able to provide only the information they find relevant to their experiences with the series and surrounding cultural politics.

Confidentiality

The research proposal should outline in detail what variables of identifiable data will be handled, the strategies to maintain confidentiality of identifiable data, including controls on storage, handling, sharing of data as well as eventual destruction of identifiable data including signed consent forms.

NOTE: If using an online survey like Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, etc., change settings to Anonymize Responses so IP addresses will not be collected. The Qualtrics default is to collect IP address and GPS coordinates of respondents. By setting the survey to Anonymized Responses the investigator will not be collecting this identifiable information. Include this language in the Confidentiality, Methods/Procedures, and in any other necessary sections/documents noting that the investigators will set Qualtrics to Anonymize Responses.

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Participants' identities will not be revealed in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data.

The following steps will be taken to further protect participants' identities and confidentiality:

1. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from documents and any reporting of the data.
2. Names/aliases will be changed on the documents.
3. Participants can refuse to answer any question asked.
4. All recordings will be transcribed, omitting any identifying information, and recordings and audio files will be stored on a password protected computer

Collaboration, Engagement & Sponsor Relationships

---

a) Describe all collaborative relationships necessary to complete your research. Include letters of support from the collaborator(s). This letter must come from a person with

20 director-level authority within the collaborating institution. When the collaborator has an Institutional Review Board, please include a copy of the IRB application sent to collaborating institution.
b) Indicate in your study when U of M IRB approval must be issued before the collaborator will commit to the study.
c) Specify what data will be provided to the collaborator(s) and sponsor(s).
N/A

Collaboration Attachments

Letters of support, IRB approvals / protocols from collaborating institutions

Proposal

21

If your study is sponsored, please insert or attach a copy of the funded proposal under this section.
N/A

Full Board and **Expedited** review-categorized research require informed consent for human subjects to participate in research. Such consent must be given by the subject and parent/guardian if the subject is under the age of eighteen (18) years. Voluntary and fully informed consent must be obtained and documented in writing unless a waiver is requested and granted.

Also, templates/guidelines for Informed Consent, Parental Consent, and Children's Assent forms are available on the IRB website.

EXEMPT review-categorized research also requires obtaining voluntary consent to participate. This consent will provide subjects with pertinent information such as stating that the activity involves research and the University of Memphis has approved the research. Also, as is appropriate, include information such as contact for investigators, description of the procedures, risks and benefits, and IRB contact information.

WAIVERS:

WAIVER OF DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT 45 CFR 46.117(c)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) may consider waiving the requirement for obtaining documentation of informed consent if the following conditions are met. To request a waiver, justification for the waiver should be included in the IRB submission and should address each of the criteria listed below.

1. IRB may waive requirement to obtain a signed consent form for some or all of subjects if: a. the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be harm resulting from breach of confidentiality; each subject must be asked whether subject wants documentation;

OR

b. the research presents no more than minimal risk and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

2. In cases where documentation is waived, the IRB may require investigator to provide subjects with written statement regarding the research.

[Note that 1a above is not included in FDA. 1b is included in FDA and HHS regulations 21 CFR 56.109(c)]

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT*
THESE CRITERIA DO NOT APPLY IF THE STUDY IS FDA REGULATED 45 CFR 46.116 [d]**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) may consider waiving the requirement for obtaining informed consent if all of the following conditions are met. To request a waiver, justification for the waiver should be included in the IRB submission and should address each of the criteria listed below.

1. THE RESEARCH INVOLVES MINIMAL RISK TO SUBJECTS
This condition is satisfied if either the likelihood or the magnitude of harm/discomfort is no greater than what the subjects would ordinarily encounter in daily life or during routine clinical care.

2. THE WAIVER OR ALTERATION WILL NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE SUBJECTS
The IRB will assess whether subjects' rights, such as the "right to privacy", would be violated if the consent were waived. *For example, in the case of "right to privacy", the IRB will consider the safeguards for minimizing the potential invasion of privacy and will consider the potential benefits of participation.*

3. THE RESEARCH COULD NOT PRACTICABLY BE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT THE WAIVER;
AND
For example, obtaining informed consent would not be practicable if the investigator will have no direct contact with subjects and will not know their identities.

4. WHENEVER APPROPRIATE, THE SUBJECTS WILL BE PROVIDED WITH ADDITIONAL PERTINENT INFORMATION AFTER THEY HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY
In social science research involving deception, it is common practice to debrief the subjects at the conclusion of the study. In other studies, however, it would not be appropriate to require debriefing. For example, if the research proposed collection of tissue without identifiers, it would not be possible for the investigator to provide additional information since the identities of the subjects would be unknown.

* *To conduct research involving deception or passive consent procedures, these criteria must be met.*
** *Waiver of Consent in FDA regulated studies is permissible only in life-threatening situations or acute care research if specific FDA mandated requirements are met.*

Even if all of the above conditions are met, the IRB is authorized to require an investigator to obtain informed consent. For example, the IRB may determine that the knowledge being sought is not important enough to justify the use of unaware subjects.

Consent Documents

Attach Consent, Assent, Parental/Guardian permission, Waiver requests (Waiver of written documentation of informed consent, Wavier of informed consent)
QE Informed Consent Form (U Memphis).docx

Consent statement (for exempt research), or waiver requests can go here

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If you have nothing to add here, please type n/a.
N/A

Additional questions or concerns can be addressed to either irb@memphis.edu or by calling (901) 678-2705.

Any additional attachments can be added below:

Additional Attachments

When submitting your revisions to a protocol, inform the IRB how you addressed each of the contingencies for the previous version of the submission. Copy and paste the last issued contingency list in a Word document and include your response and related section/question directly underneath each respective contingency.

This document can be attached as an MS Word or a PDF file. You can also copy and paste your contingency response in the text box. See sample document below.

Add or attach your completed **Investigator Contingency Response** document. If you have nothing to add in the text box below, please type **"N/A"**.

Copy and paste document content here:
N/A

Or attach document here:

Investigator Contingency Response.docx Sample documents: Example - Investigator Contingency Response.docx