

Yas, Queen! Zhuzh It, Henny!

The Representation of Homosexuality in Bravo's Original *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) and Netflix's Reboot *Queer Eye* (2018)



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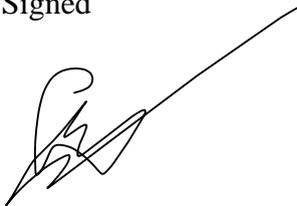
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Laura Merks', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

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Abstract

This thesis examines male homosexual representation in Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007) and Netflix's *Queer Eye* (2018-present). In the first chapter, the general concepts of representation and male homosexual representation on American television since the 1960s are discussed by using Cedric Clark's four stages of representation. The second chapter covers the theoretical approach that is used to analyze *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye*, focusing on the concepts of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and stereotypes. Chapter 3 concentrates on Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. First, background information on the series is provided and then an elaborate analysis of the content of the series follows. In chapter 4, the same is done for Netflix's *Queer Eye*. In chapter 5 the similarities and differences between both representations are discussed. The outcome of the comparison entails that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was groundbreaking in its time, but presented a limited and stereotypical image of homosexuality. *Queer Eye* has, through the focus on identity and personal stories, been able to paint a more comprehensive picture of homosexuality. Ultimately, in chapter 6, the conclusion is drawn that much has changed in the representation of male homosexuals in American (reality) television, and that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* enabled tolerance for homosexuals, whereas *Queer Eye* strives for acceptance.

Key words: media representation, homosexuality, heteronormativity, homonormativity, stereotypes, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Queer Eye*, Clark, stages of representation

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Preface

The reason I am writing about the topic of homosexual representation in American television is because I believe that I, a cis-gendered, white, heterosexual Dutch woman, have been and am still being influenced and formed by American media; specifically American television, which influences me in terms of (subconscious) ideas about race, gender and sexuality. For example, I started watching *Friends* when I was about 8 years old. I have loved it from the beginning and still adore it, yet I only later realized how much influence that show had had on my perception of America. When I came to New York for the first time in 2007, I was shocked by the amount of African-American and Hispanic people I came across. I only later understood that my image of New York had, from a very early age, been primarily formed by *Friends*, in which only Caucasian “New Yorkers” are portrayed. The same goes for my idea of homosexuality. I have always loved watching *Will & Grace* and am particularly fond of the character of Jack McFarland, the flamboyant gay man. Just like my image about New York(ers) had been formed by *Friends*, my idea of homosexuals has been greatly influenced by what I saw in *Will & Grace*. Therefore, I would like to have a better understanding of how representation on American television works.

Being a high school teacher, I am in close contact with young people every day and I am aware that they gather much knowledge outside of school. I know that their worldviews are influenced by what they see in the media, but I want to know in what ways that influence works and in what ways it can present itself. The subject of homosexuality, and queerness in general, is a topic I like to bring to my students’ attention and with this thesis I hope to educate myself on how the influence of the media works, so that I can make my students aware of this as well and make them more critical towards the information they consume.

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Introduction

American media has, for a long time, been centered around white, cis-gendered heterosexuals. However, it has become more and more clear that representation of minorities, such as racial, sexual or gender minorities, in mainstream media is important on two levels. Firstly, it provides visibility within society and this creates room for social education. Secondly, media representation helps members of minority groups to affirm their identity (O'Brien). Media representation is a complex issue, because representation can be based on perpetuate stereotypes and can influence the lives of the minorities represented. "Negative designations of a group have negative consequences for the lives of members of that grouping. (...) Representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated (...) but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society." (Dyer 3) Luckily, it seems that American media is becoming more and more inclusive of minorities, "The mass media are shifting the terms of our public conversation toward a greater acknowledgement of diversity" (Gross, "Up" xvii). In this MA thesis, I will investigate what representation in media is and the focus will lie on the representation of the homosexual male on American television within a theoretical framework based on the concepts of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and stereotyping. The series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) and *Queer Eye* (2018) will be used as case studies to see whether that change in homosexual representation is visible in these seemingly similar American reality television series.

In 2003, the television series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* first aired on American television. This reality show revolves around five gay men, known as the Fab Five in the show, who give straight guys a make-over. Each of the five men have their own area of expertise; Ted Allen is the food and beverage connoisseur, Kyan Douglas, whose field of expertise is grooming and bodily maintenance, is responsible for beauty makeovers, Thomas Felicia is in charge of interior design, Carson Kressley is the expert on clothing and Jai Rodriguez knows everything about culture, in the show he focusses on popular culture. Each episode has the same set-up. The five guys drive around in a pick-up truck in New York City, discussing their next 'project', the straight guy whose life they are going to give a make-over. In each episode, they work towards a personal goal of that episode's subject, which can be something along the lines of a date or an important work-related event. In the first ten minutes of each episode, the Fab Five will, rather enthusiastically, investigate the life of their subject by going through their home,

their wardrobe, their kitchen and questioning their social life. After this first meeting, the subject has one-on-one meetings with each expert and receives a make-over, physically as well as mentally. In the episodes it appears as if this is all done in one day, while it actually took four days of shooting (Giltz).

At first sight, the set-up of the 2003 original series and the 2018 reboot seem generally similar. The show still centers on five homosexual men who provide life make-overs for a different person in each episode. They also start each episode in a pick-up truck, they comment on their subject in the first 10 minutes and after that, each expert gets one-on-one time with that episode's subject to work on the different areas of expertise. There are differences, however. Firstly, the Fab Five are five different, more culturally diverse, men. There is Antoni Porowski for food and wine, Tan France for fashion, Karamo Brown for culture and lifestyle, Bobby Berk for design and Jonathan van Ness as the grooming expert. Secondly, the location is different as well. Whereas the first series was located in New York City, the new series takes place in the states of Georgia, Kansas, and Missouri. The third difference is that the people who receive the make-overs are no longer predominantly heterosexual white males, as was the case in the original series, but are also straight white women, lesbian black women, transgenders and black gay men, just to name a few. In short it can be said that the identity of the people on the receiving end of the make-over has gotten more diverse too.

The fact that these two shows are so closely related and similar, yet were produced in different societal circumstances makes the comparison especially interesting. In the time span this thesis focusses on, the early 2000s until late 2019, views on homosexuality have drastically changed in the United States. Whereas in 2000, 54% of the American population was in favor of same-sex marriage, that number had risen to 73% in 2019 ("Gay and Lesbian Rights"). Representation and visibility of non-straight characters on television has also increased. GLAAD (formerly known as Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) has conducted a yearly research since 2005 in which they investigate how many of the scripted characters that are visible on American television belong to the LGBTQ+ community. In the 2005-2006 television season, less than 2% of all scripted characters belonged to the LGBTQ+ community. In the television season 2018-2019, 8.8% of all characters in a television show were part of the LGBTQ+ community ("Where We Are"). Despite these cultural changes, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* producer David Collins, claims that there is still a need for a reboot of the once so popular reality show from 2003. He insists that a show that promotes acceptance is necessary in a time when the country is so divided (Boucher). And so the reboot of the original series

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy from 2003, now called *Queer Eye*, premiered on Netflix on February 7th, 2018.

Another reason for these two shows to be the case studies is because they are reality shows. Not only have non-straight characters started to be a bigger part of scripted television, they are now also very much present in reality television, for example in shows such as *RuPaul's DragRace* (Gamson). At the time of the original *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* however, a reality show with queer leading characters was something entirely new and unique. The show displayed the friendship that can grow between straight and gay men and how they can learn from one another. The men in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* were not personalities written by someone else, they were not playing a role; they were themselves (Rodriquez qtd. in Giltz). This might suggest that the representation of homosexuality in both series is authentic and therefore entirely realistic and comprehensive, yet it is all the more interesting to see what message about homosexuality is being sent exactly and how comprehensive or selective that message might be. Furthermore, most of the research done about representation of male homosexuals has so far focused on fictional American television. It will be interesting to see whether these fiction-rooted theories are also applicable to non-fictional reality television.

The last reason why these two particular shows will serve as case studies is because of their popularity. Neither the original nor the reboot series were/are broadcast from a niche corner of American television. The series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was broadcast on national television on a weekly basis and managed to reach a mass audience. Network Bravo reported peak viewing rates of 3.34 million viewers for episodes in September of 2003. Overall, the show was well-watched and could count on approximately 2 million viewers per episode (Vary). In 2007, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* ended due to decreasing viewing rates and the final episode aired on October 30th, 2007. For *Queer Eye*, these specific numbers are not available, because Netflix does not disclose viewing rates. However, in the second quarter of 2019, Netflix had 151 million subscribers worldwide, which means that *Queer Eye* was available to that number of viewers (Watson). Considering the fact that the company has released four seasons of *Queer Eye* in two years gives away that the show is very successful. Various Emmy nominations and wins, the amount of media coverage, and the popularity of the new Fab 5 on social media show that *Queer Eye* is part of mainstream American television. These two shows have been watched by many Americans and have therefore influenced and affected the audiences.

When combining the issues of the importance of representation, the two television series discussed and the status of social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in the United States

mentioned above, one main research question comes up; how do the original and reboot version of *Queer Eye* relate, do the two series represent homosexuality differently and if so, what does that mean for the message that is sent to the audience? In order to be able to answer this question, the concept of identity representation must first be understood. In the first chapter of this thesis, theories about representation in general and homosexual male representation in television series in particular will be discussed. In the first part of this chapter Stuart Hall's cultural theory of encoding and decoding will be used to understand how media communicates with its audience. The four stages of representation by Cedric Clark will also be used to understand representation in general. After this, a historical overview of male homosexual representation on American television will be given. This overview will start in the 1960s, when the first homosexual character appeared on American television. From there on the more tolerant 1970s, the AIDS-dominated 1980s and the rise of gay leading characters in the 1990s will be discussed. Lastly, the 2000s and 2010s will be covered, including the way streaming services have influenced gay representation.

A theoretical approach towards understanding homosexual representation is given in chapter 2. The theory of heteronormativity by Michael Warner and the theory of homonormativity by Lisa Duggan will be explained. I will also analyze various male homosexual stereotypes that have been established through the on-screen representation of LGBTQ+ characters on American television over the last 60 years.

In the third and fourth chapter, the original version of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the reboot *Queer Eye* will be researched and analyzed. For this analysis, two episodes per season of the series will be used; the first and last episodes, the episodes in which a non-straight person is the candidate, and some random episodes. This comes to a total of 10 episodes for *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and 8 episodes for *Queer Eye*. Various elements of the series, such as the Fab Five members, the make-over candidates, and locations and the concepts of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and stereotypes established in chapter 2 will be taken into account to be able to analyze how the representation of homosexuality is established in these series.

In the fifth chapter the findings on these two series will be compared, contrasted and critically evaluated in order to be able to draw a conclusion about how homosexual representation in these two series works. The outcome of this research will provide insight into how television series influence its audience and how television could be used as an educational tool to inform the audience about minorities, in this case the homosexual male, without falling into prescribed societal norms and stereotypes.

1. Overview of Male Homosexual Representation on American Television

1.1 Representation in General

In order to understand how male homosexuals are represented in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye*, it is important to first establish what representation is and why it matters. In this chapter, the concept of representation will firstly be discussed and in the second part of this chapter there will be an overview of gay representation on American television in particular.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, representation is defined as: “A depiction or portrayal of a person or thing, typically one produced in an artistic medium; an image, a model, a picture” (“representation”). When looking at television broadcasts and movies in particular, representation is often described as the way in which certain types of people or communities are presented. Whereas white cis-gendered males and females are very present in mainstream media, minorities of a certain race, sexuality, class, body type, disability, and religion have traditionally been underrepresented in (American) mainstream media (Ramos).

Many scholars, such as Stuart Hall, think that what is represented in the media affects the audience. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall believes that popular culture is influential, because, even though popular culture and mass media are commercially driven, it is through popular culture that society’s values are displayed and transformed. In his essay *Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’*, Hall claims:

The cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture. That is what the concentration of cultural power - the means of culture-making in the hands of the few - actually means. These definitions don’t have the power to occupy our minds; they don’t function on us as if we are blank screens. But they do occupy and rework the interior contradictions of feeling and perception in the dominated classes; they do find or clear a space of recognition in those who respond to them. Cultural domination has real effects – even if these are neither all-powerful nor all-inclusive. (“Notes” 234)

Hall states that culture is not fixed, but that it is ever changing and that the dominant culture has the power to influence the audience and to reshape culture. By selecting and repeating certain texts (meaning texts, but also other creative products such as movies or television shows) the audience is influenced. As Hall states in the quote above, the audience is not a blank canvas and is therefore not brainwashed by the media, yet there is an interaction between the medium and the audience that has an influence on certain values the audience holds. This interaction between sender and audience is what Hall describes as the theory of encoding and decoding. A text is encoded by the sender, which means that, through all kinds of aspects, a certain message is being conveyed. However, the sender does not determine how the text is received. According to Hall, the viewer is not a passive entity. The viewer decodes the text and, through personal values and experiences, interprets it, adapting their views if deemed necessary (Hall, "Encoding"). The fact that the viewer is active and adaptable shows that it matters what message is being sent.

A scholar who believes that as a result of this representation on television has a real and lasting effect is queer theorist Larry Gross. Similar to Hall, Gross claims, "American popular culture remains an active battlefield for the foreseeable future" ("Up" xvi). Meaning that he also believes that society's values and ideas are being challenged and redefined by popular culture. Gross explains that what people see in the media, and especially on television, represents the truth for them. People are aware that what they see is not reality, and yet, "even the most sophisticated among us can find many components of our "knowledge" of the real world that derive wholly or in part from fictional representation" ("What" 144). Gross claims this effect of shaping reality through media is especially true for groups that most people are unlikely to be in close contact with every day. The image that is presented on television is oftentimes the only opportunity for learning about those minorities, even for minorities themselves ("What" 144). Many people get their information about certain groups in society solely from what they see on television, because they do not (knowingly) interact with those groups in their daily lives. In the case of a young gay teenage boy growing up in a heterosexual environment representation is key. His frame of reference about homosexuality is created by what he encounters in the media. However, what is put on tv, and therefore who are represented on-screen and in what way, is determined by a mostly white, male cis-gendered heterosexual elite and this divide between the portrayers and the portrayed causes under- and misrepresentation of minorities.

Communications scholar Cedric Clark has extensively studied the representations that are put out by the media elite. Similar to Stuart Hall, he claims that, because of the commercial

nature of mass media, on-screen representations often mirror society's dominant views. Clark portrays media representation of minorities as a fluctuating concept that can occur in a series of four chronological stages. In his critical study, Clark focused on the representation of African-Americans as represented on American television, but these four stages have since been applied to all kinds of minorities, including the LGBTQ+ community, making his model a very interesting one for this thesis.

The first stage of representation is non-recognition. This stage simply means that a group is not visible in mass media whatsoever (Clark 19). This first stage is what communication professor George Gerbner called symbolic annihilation. Gerbner coined this term in 1976 together with Larry Gross and explained that: "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner 182). The second stage is ridicule. This stage entails that a group is represented and visible, but only to serve a comical purpose. Clark explains that this form of representation works two ways, namely that on the one hand the minority feels recognized and somewhat content with having gained visibility and on the other hand the dominant culture uses this as a confidence boost and a reaffirmation of their status (19).

Even though a minority group that moves from stage one to stage two will initially be happy to be represented at all, a moment will come when the group members grow discontent with the one-dimensional representation they are given and will respond in order to bring about change. If this succeeds the representation moves into the third stage: regulation. In this stage the particular minority group is no longer ridiculed, but they are only represented in limited, socially acceptable roles. The way these minorities are visible is not comparable to their role and visibility within society. In Clark's research it became apparent that when African-Americans were in this stage of representation, many were only cast for the roles to uphold the social order – nurses, doctors and police officers (20). Whereas in real life, African-Americans were working in all professions imaginable. Therefore the third stage of regulation is an improvement compared to the second stage of ridicule, however the representation is still limited. It is not until the characters are represented in all layers and positions of society, with negative roles as well as positive roles, that the fourth and final stage, the stage of respect, is reached (Clark 21).

In 2007, Blaine Branchik used Clark's framework to analyze the representation of homosexuals in print advertising in his research *Pansies to Parents: Gay Male Images in American Print Advertising*. The outcome of this research caused Branchik to adjust Clark's framework to fit homosexual representation better. The first stage of non-recognition is what

Branchik calls the stage of targeted recognition. In the advertising Branchik analyzed it appeared that some early advertisements already contained elements that homosexuals would recognize as targeted at them, but that would not be recognized by larger society. Branchik named the second stage one of ridicule and scorn. In advertising, he recognized ridicule, but also wanted to include the explicit scornful attitude that he saw towards homosexuals in advertising; they were portrayed, “as objects or initiators of scorn or social rejection” (48). The third stage, according to Branchik, is the cutting edge stage. After ridicule and scorn, the representation of homosexuals in American advertisement turned towards a depiction of gay men “as edgy leaders of fashion and trends—stereotypical depictions in their own way, given society’s association of gay men with the fashion and design industries” (49). The gay men were represented as role models for fashion and design, making them very two-dimensional beings. The definition of the last stage, respect, remained the same as in Clark’s framework. These two frameworks will be used when analyzing *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye*, because Clark’s framework is based on television and Branchik’s framework is adapted to the homosexual subject.

It is desirable for all minorities that they reach the stage of respect, because it will improve their position in society. In his book *The Matter of Images*, professor in film studies Richard Dyer states that representation in the media has a direct effect on the position of a minority in society:

Negative designations of a group have negative consequences for the lives of members of that grouping. (...) Representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated (...) but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society. (3)

This is true for all minorities, but especially for the LGBTQ+ community. Symbolic annihilation has a negative effect on any social minority, be they black men or Hijab-wearing Muslim women. But what makes it so particularly catastrophic for members of the LGBTQ+ community is that black men and Hijab-wearing Muslim woman are easily recognizable when you pass them in the street. Even if they are invisible or underrepresented in the media, average Joe will still encounter these women and African-American men in his daily life, because he can physically tell who he has in front of him. However, it does not work that way for the vast majority of queer people. Their sexuality is not visibly marked on their forehead, so the absence

of LGBTQ+ representation in the media can create the idea that they do not exist at all (Hilton-Morrow 78) .

In the next part of this chapter it will be examined how this symbolic annihilation of the LGBTQ+ community was present on American television and how representation of queer people on American television has started and developed over time. Larry Gross is optimistic about how representation has become more inclusive, “The mass media are shifting the terms of our public conversation toward a greater acknowledgement of diversity” (“Up” xvii). This thesis will prove whether that shift was necessary and, if so, is visible in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye*.

1.2 History of Homosexuality on American Television

For decades, representation of homosexual men was stuck in Clark’s first stage of non-recognition. It was not until the late 1960s that homosexual men and other queer characters began to appear on American television. This mostly had to do with the Motion Picture Production Code. This code, introduced in 1930, designed by Will Hays was meant to restrict non-religious depictions in motion pictures. All depictions of sexuality were prohibited, explicitly banning the representation of gays, lesbians and bisexuals (Gross qtd. in Raley 23). This code, which was originally meant for Hollywood motion pictures, also became a standard for what was considered suitable for television and therefore also erased homosexual men from tv existence. It was not until the Motion Picture Production Code was lifted in the 1960s that queer characters started to appear in American television shows. Prior to this, homosexuality was discussed in talk shows during the 1950s, but this was always straight people commenting on homosexuality, asking questions such as “Can he/she be cured? How can it be treated? Should sodomy be legal?” (Tropiano 8). This created a negative public image of homosexuality.

From the moment queer characters started to appear on television, homosexual men moved from Clark’s non-recognition stage to the ridicule stage of representation. The ridicule stage of queer representation entailed pejorative language and stereotypical representation. As Edward Elwood describes in his book *Straight News*, commercially driven producers of American television shows were afraid to air anything that seemed to condone homosexuality, because they were afraid they would drive away viewers and advertisers, costing them their income and profit margin (139). In his book *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV*, Dr. Stephan Tropiano gives an overview of television series and made-for-tv movies that addressed the theme of homosexuality in at least one episode. The list consists of a

mere nine entries for the 1960s and the 1970s combined (3). Elwood says that the image created of homosexuality in these years, and especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s is that of either the homosexual as extremely effeminate, thus enabling comic relief, or as an untrustworthy criminal, most often in the role of a sex offender. This is, for example, the case in CBS's show *Kojack*, in which the effeminate gay man is a child molester (140). These and other recurring media stereotypes will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis. Since homosexuality was not only represented through ridicule, Branchik's second stage of ridicule and scorn is also applicable here.

In the 1970s, the gay rights organizations started to emerge and this forced more visibility of homosexuality on television. While there had existed gay rights organizations in the 1950s and 1960s that did important work and laid the foundation for the eventual gay liberation movement in the 1970s, historians see the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 as the primary pivotal point in gay activism. The riots were covered so widely in the media, that the American people could not ignore the queer community any longer (Green). In the 1970s, the gay liberation movement, which consisted of all kinds of different groups such as the Gay Liberation Front and Street Transvestite Activist Revolutionaries, gained momentum. One of the major milestones the movement achieved was the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental illnesses in 1973 (Stone). Now that homosexuality was no longer an official disease, the road was freed for a more full-grown representation of gay men on television. Homosexuals had already been appearing for a while as side characters, and in the 1970s this occurred more and more often, but it was not until 1977 that a homosexual character could step onto the center stage of American television. The first gay main character in an American television show was Jodie Dallas, played by Billy Crystal, in the television show *Soap*. Before the show aired it had been made clear that the show would involve unlawful sexual activity between men and women, but the allegedly most shocking news was that one of the main characters was to be a homosexual. Before the first episode aired in September 1977, ABC, the broadcasting network, had already received 56,000 protest letters. The protests caused so much attention that the public became eager to see what all the fuss was about (Streitmatter 38). Even though the controversy about the character of Jodie Dallas remained ongoing, fueled by both social conservatives (Jodie's character would have a bad influence on children) as well as gay rights activists (Jodie's character held too negative a view about his sexuality), the first gay main character in a prime time television series was a historical fact.

Soap might have been a starting point for a more comprehensive representation of homosexuality on American television, had it not been for the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. When AIDS started to emerge in the early 1980s, the disease was originally referred to as GRID, Gay-Related Immune Deficiency. The terms ‘gay cancer’ and ‘gay plague’ were also used. From the moment AIDS was first discussed in the media, it was associated with gay males and the homosexual lifestyle (Piontec qtd. in Hart 64). In his article *What is Wrong with This Picture? Lesbian Women and Gay Men on Television*, Larry Gross claims, “By 1983, nearly all mass media attention to gay men was in the context of AIDS-related stories (...) And the public image of gay men has been inescapably linked with the specter of plague (145). Even though research had proven that infection was not restricted to homosexuals and had officially been given the name Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, the damage had been done. The cautious first appearances of homosexual characters on American television in the 1970s, however incorrect, stereotyped, and criticized they may have been, were now overruled by the image of the gay man as instigator of this horrible disease. AIDS reversed the achievements of the 1970s and alienated the subculture even further. Various television shows during the late 1980s and early 1990s featured AIDS-themed episodes and in most of them AIDS was linked to a gay character. According to Gross, there were only two flavors gay men came in on American television in those years; they were either the “villainous AIDS carriers” or the “abandoned victims who may finally be accepted back into the arms of their families” (147). Gross describes that what was not shown on television was the sense of survival that grew within the gay community and all the initiatives that were set up to overcome the AIDS tragedy (148). This meant that the image created on television was incomplete and a false negative.

It was not until the 1990s that the representation of homosexuality in American media moved away from the AIDS villains and victims-narrative and became an omnipresent and heavily debated subject. Ron Becker, in his book *Gay TV and Straight America*, claims that this was the result of shifting awareness of Americans in terms of diversity, cultural relativism, and social fragmentation. This shift meant that race, gender, and sexualities suddenly began to matter. America found itself in “The Gay Moment”: “The gay moment is unavoidable. It fills the media, charges politics, saturates popular and elite culture. It is the stuff of everyday politics and public discourse” (Kopkind qtd. in Becker 4). This was evident during the 1992 elections. Bill Clinton was elected president and was at the time viewed as a proponent of, and even advocate for, gay rights. Whereas presidents before him had not dared to support gay rights, Clinton had done so during his campaign and had pledged to fight AIDS and promised to lift the ban on homosexuals in the United States army (Schmalz). However, Clinton did not manage

to keep these promises. In 1994, the Don't Ask Don't Tell-policy was instated in the US military, meaning that gays and lesbians who wished to serve could not talk about their sexuality, while their superior could not ask about it either. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed, which he later claimed to have done so reluctantly, the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage for federal purposes as the union of one man and one woman. However disappointing these legal setbacks might have been, the debates surrounding those issues proved there was more room for queer stories in American society than there had ever been before. As a result, there was also more room for queer visibility on American television:

Between 1994 and 1997, for example, well over 40 percent of all prime-time network series produced at least one gay-themed episode; nineteen network shows debuted with recurring gay characters; and hit shows like *Roseanne*, *Friends*, and *NYPD Blue* (to name a few) seemed to include gay jokes and references to homosexuality every week. American television seemed obsessed with gayness. (Becker 3)

Homosexuality was booming and representation had moved to Clark's third stage: regulation. Homosexuals and lesbians were visible on television, and not only for the purpose of ridicule. However, they were not yet well-rounded characters either and their main asset was their queer identity.

Now the recurring gay characters in supporting roles had returned, the time had come for lead gay characters on American prime-time television. In 1994, the show *These Friends of Mine* started, starring Ellen DeGeneres as Ellen Morgan. From the second season onwards, the show was called *Ellen* because of the main character's popularity. At the end of season 4, in 1997, rumors started about DeGeneres's sexuality and in the series it was hinted at that her fictional alter ego would be gay as well. In April 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out on the cover of *Time* magazine and a week later *The Puppy Episode* of *Ellen* aired in which Ellen Morgan announced that she was gay. This episode was the highest-rated episode of any show on ABC network to that date ("Controversial"). And so it happened that the first gay lead character on American television was finally a fact.

However, as much as this moment in television history was celebrated then and might even be more feted today, Ellen's coming out was not without consequences. After *The Puppy Episode*, ABC put a parental advisory warning on the show and one season later *Ellen* got canceled due to decreased viewer ratings which ABC said was the backlash of 'gay content' (Carter). Just after *Ellen* had ended, the new show *Will & Grace* started on NBC network. This

was the first prime-time television series to have two male gay main characters, Will and Jack. Whereas *Ellen* had been surrounded with controversy and protest, this was not the case for *Will & Grace*. Rob Becker believes this was because *Will & Grace* did not push gay representation as far as *Ellen* had done. He claims, “The series’ central premise (...) “a kind of friendship that’s possible between a man and a woman when sex doesn’t get in the way, worked to if not heterosexualize, at least de-(homo)sexualize Will” (Becker 172). Even though the main relationship of the series was not between two men, the characters of Will and Jack were something entirely new on television and male homosexuality had now become visible on prime-time American television. The series became hugely successful with an average of 15 million viewers per episode and had a great cultural impact. As Rodger Streitmatter describes in his book *From Perverts to Fab Five: The Media’s Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians*:

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* is one of the newspapers that has written about the power of these media depictions. “Programs such as *Will & Grace*”, the paper observed in 2003, “give straight viewers a chance to make friends with gays in their living rooms. It’s like gay sensitivity training. (3)

In 2012, Vice President Joe Biden also emphasized the importance of the show. “I think *Will & Grace* did more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody has done so far. People fear that which is different. Now they're beginning to understand" (Biden qtd. in Stein).

The success of *Will & Grace* was a major step forward in the visibility of homosexual men on American television and it paved the way for other (reality) shows to have leading and recurring gay main characters in the 2000s. Fictional series such as *Queer As Folk* and *Six Feet Under* have multiple gay leading characters and almost every series on American television created after the turn of the millennium has recurring gay characters. With the emergence of reality television after the global successes of shows like *Big Brother*, *Idols*, and *Survivor*, real-life gay people also started to become visible on American tv (Hill). In 2002, Bravo Network had the premiere of a reality show which revolved around gay and lesbian people. *Gay Weddings* told the stories of four same-sex couples who were about to get married and were followed in their preparations for the big day. Gay reality television was completely new and after the success of *Gay Weddings*, Bravo aired two new gay reality series a year later, in what Ron Becker calls ‘The Gay Summer of 2003’. He coined the term because not only were gays

everywhere on television all of a sudden, but they could now have legal intercourse with each other: In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court ruled that American laws prohibiting private homosexual activity between consenting adults were unconstitutional (Becker 219). One of the new reality series presented that ‘Gay Summer’ was *Boy Meets Boy*, the homosexual take on the popular dating show *The Bachelor*. In *Boy Meets Boy*, one man, James, got to date and choose between fifteen potential male partners. However, what James did not know was that not all the candidates were actually gay. Every week he had to eliminate one candidate and if James ended up picking a gay man he would win \$25,000, but if he were to pick a straight man, that particular candidate would get the prize money. Another reality series that premiered in 2003 was *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, which will be elaborately discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. This series was new in the sense that it depicted friendship between gay and straight men and it “built bridges between gay and straight masculinity and reversed homophobic hostilities” (Parsemain 28). This reality tv show fit the third stage of representation ‘cutting edge’, as prescribed by Branchik, perfectly. This representation of gay men caused them to be seen as leading experts when it came to fashion and design. These reality televisions shows attributed to the positive vibe surrounding homosexuality in the early 2000s and showed the audience that homosexuality was not something fictional and that real homosexual men existed on television and therefore also in real life.

In general, the American attitude towards homosexuality became more positive. In the case of representation on television, the notion grew that proper representation was completed and that Clark’s stage of respect had been reached. This affected homosexual characters on television, because in most cases, being gay was no longer their main characteristic. In her book *The Pedagogy of Queer TV*, Ava Laure Parsemain even speaks of what was at the time regarded as a “post-gay” era:

Gay people were integrated into mainstream American culture. In an era marked by the decriminalisation, depathologisation and destigmatisation of gay sexuality, the media promoted the idea that gays were now part of mainstream society and that identity politics had become irrelevant. This “post-gay” ideology emphasised sameness and assimilation over difference. Characters were no longer defined by their homosexuality but were “incidentally” gay. Stories of discrimination, homophobia and coming-out were replaced by uplifting tales of success, talent and romance. (27)

The fact that on the 26th of June 2015 the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage was now legal nationwide contributed to the positivity surrounding the LGBTQ+ community.

However, despite the fact that homosexual visibility on American television increased significantly in the 2000s and 2010s, in hindsight it has become clear that the representation had still not reached completion. In the book *Pink Dollars, White Collars*, Wendy Peters describes how the profit driven cable networks “whitewashed” the homosexual, as the representation of the entire queer community was predominantly: “male, white, middle- and upper-class, and gender normative” (200). According to Peters, this: “leads to whitewashed images of middle-class, primarily gender normative, gays and lesbians” (194). Examples of this form of representation are the characters of Mitchell Pritchett and Cameron Tucker in the popular ABC series *Modern Family*. These two men are main characters in the show and their homosexual relationship is portrayed as equally important as the heterosexual relationships in that show, but it exemplifies the lack of intersectionality in mainstream American media even today. There is little room for diversity within the homosexual community as represented on TV: “Instead of celebrating queer diversity, these images promote the acceptance of a fragment of the LGBT+ population, thus re-inscribing gender, race and class hierarchies” (Freitas and Samson qtd. in Parsemain 29). Even though it seems as if homosexuality is now accepted and maybe even celebrated in American mainstream media, in reality that is only true for white, middle-class, cis-gendered homosexuals.

While traditional cable television networks fall behind when it comes to intersectional representation of homosexuality, streaming services have taken to the intersectional approach with more enthusiasm. Streaming services now have the opportunity to target a niche audience, since they no longer rely on advertisers but on subscribers. This means they have the opportunity to tell different stories. From 2010 until now, many major streaming services such as Netflix, HBO and Amazon have created content that is not restricted by advertisers. Series such as *Orange Is The New Black* (Netflix), *Looking* (HBO), *Sex Education* (Netflix), and *Transparent* (Amazon) all address different sides of the queer community in terms of race, class and gender.

All in all, representation of homosexual males on American television has changed completely over the last fifty years. When looking at Clark’s and Branchik’s four stages of representation it can be said that a part of the homosexual community has gone through the four various stages, from non-recognition to ridicule/scorn to regulation/cutting edge and ultimately respect. However, this is only true for the white, middle-class, cis-gendered homosexuals. Homosexual men who do not belong to that particular subgroup, will not find themselves as

well-represented on television. Though intersectionality is being addressed more and more in series produced by streaming services, it is an issue that is yet to be tackled fully in mainstream American media.

2. Theoretical Approach to Male Homosexual Representation

2.1. Concepts of Heteronormativity, Homonormativity, and Stereotypes

Chapter 1 explained the general concept of representation. It also gave a general overview of the representation of male homosexuals on American television. However, in order to be able to understand, interpret, analyze and discuss male homosexual representation in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye* it is important to understand what different styles of representation have been used so far and in what context they are being put forward. Therefore, this chapter will outline the concepts of hetero- and homonormativity, intersectionality, as well as various key stereotypes.

Heteronormativity

In American society, the ideas of heterosexism and heteronormativity are dominantly present. The two terms are closely related, but: “heterosexism generally refers to the belief and expectation that everyone is or should be heterosexual. Heteronormative thinking assumes that heterosexuality is the indisputable and unquestionable bedrock of society; heterosexuality appears as a “given”—natural, coherent, fixed, and universal” (Warner qtd. in Yep 167). In his book *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Michael Warner, who coined the term heteronormativity, describes it as: “Het[ero] culture thinks of itself as the element form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (xxi). In other words, American society is built around the belief that being hetero, straight, is the norm and that every other sexuality is therefore ‘divergent’. This belief has seeped into American media. As made clear in chapter 1, for a long time homosexuals were not visible at all on American television and when they did become visible they were alienated from their heterosexual counterparts. This “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich qtd. in Raymond 103) has for a long time been the standard, but in her essay *Popular Culture and Queer Representation*, Diane Raymond explains that it does not have to be so forever, because heteronormativity is not a fixed entity and can be challenged; both in real life and in the media. She bases her claims on the theories of Butler and Foucault, who have long argued that sexuality and gender are not fixed, but rather fluid and variable (104). So even though heteronormativity has long seemed to be a fixed given in American society, the media has the power to challenge it if it so wishes.

When analyzing *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye* in chapters 3 and 4, it will be researched if and how a heteronormative structure is present and whether it is adhered to or challenged.

Homonormativity

The concept of homonormativity is closely linked to the concept of heteronormativity. However, whereas heteronormativity entails the idea that heterosexuality is the standard, homonormativity does not suggest that everyone is homosexual. It does represent certain ideas about homosexuality, or queerness in general, as generalized and fixed. Lisa Duggan gives the following definition of homonormativity in her essay *The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism*,

[it is] a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions — such as marriage, and its call for monogamy and reproduction — but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (179)

This is visible in two ways. On the one hand homonormativity entails the idea that all members of the queer community strive for the same goals as heterosexuals. This comes to play in the idea that equality will be achieved through, for example, same-sex marriage. Even though these people are not straight, they are still striving for the straight standards and this undermines the queerness and reaffirms the heteronormativity. On the other hand this strengthens the idea that all members of the queer society are similar and can fit into the mold of the ‘typical homosexual’. In his research paper *U.S. Children's Picture Books and the Homonormative Subject*, Nathan Taylor claims that this ‘mold’-style of thinking means non-fitting members of the queer community end up being left behind:

In addition to Duggan’s definition, I specify that homonormativity does not challenge various systems of oppression such as heterosexism, classism, racism, sexism, ableism, lookism, ageism, and geographical bias. This tacit agreement between homonormative subjects and privileged heterosexuals has dangerous implications. By supporting existing systems of oppression in exchange for institutional recognition (e.g., legal: gay

marriage/adoption; military: right to serve; education: curricula inclusion/antibullying campaigns), others across various queer communities are left behind. (137)

Whereas the concept of heteronormativity, everyone is straight, is all-inclusive, the concept of homonormativity is exclusive. Only lifestyles that fit the acceptable, heteronormative-derived mold are acknowledged.

However, when the standard image of homosexuality is challenged it becomes problematic. When the by Nathan Taylor mentioned various systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, or classism, are applicable to one identity that is called intersectionality. Intersectionality is an: “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization” (Collins 299). Within the construct of homonormativity, there is little to no room for addressing intersectionality. The idea of the white, middle-class, cis-gendered queers, married and with (adopted) children is an image of homosexuality that fits well into the norm of heterosexist society and is therefore exclusive of other forms of queerness, for example on the basis of race, gender or class. An example of intersectional identity is the character of Eric Effoing from the Netflix series *Sex Education*. He is a black gay man, who likes to dress up in drag clothing. He challenges various homonormative structures, namely the assumptions about race and gender. His intersectionality portrays an idea of homosexuality besides the existing image of a white cis-gendered gay man. In the analyses of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye*, attention will be paid to how hetero- and homonormativity as well as intersectionality are represented and/or challenged.

Stereotypes

Stereotype is a term often used in the analyses of popular culture. In *The Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, a complex definition is provided. The first aspect of the definition of stereotype focusses on repetition. When a certain manner of representation is repeated the same way over a longer period of time it becomes a stereotype. The second aspect is the negative image; the word stereotype often has a negative connotation. The third characteristic the dictionary attributes to the term stereotype is unrealism. A stereotype, by definition, does not represent reality and vice versa (Pearson 592).

In his essay *The Role of Stereotypes*, Richard Dyer adds nuance to this definition and makes the distinction between stereotypes and social types. He defines social types as depictions of social groups who are ‘in’, in other words who belong. Dyer claims that

stereotypes portray the opposite, they are 'out'. "Who does or does not belong to a given society as a whole is then a function of the relative power of groups in that society to define themselves as central and the rest as 'other', peripheral or outcast" (209). Dyer states, "The role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible, so that here is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares; and to make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit" (211). By portraying certain minorities, in this case male homosexuals, in a stereotypical, limited fashion, they cease to pose a threat to the societal status quo, because they are designated to be peripheral 'others' within society.

Below, different stereotypes of homosexual males that have been established since the first gay characters appeared on American television are discussed. Since most of the representation of homosexual males on American television has been in the form of fictional characters, the stereotypes described below are mostly based on that form of representation. It will be interesting to see whether they also hold up in American reality television. Lastly, these stereotypes are not separate and the image of most male homosexuals on American television might be constructed out of various of these stereotypes.

The Effeminate Gay

The effeminate gay is the most well-known stereotype when it comes to the representation of homosexual males. Since the beginning of gay representation in Hollywood movies and later also in television shows, homosexuality has been in sharp contrast with masculinity and was seen as the opposite of traditional masculinity (Russo qtd. in Battles 89). The opposite of masculine is feminine. Therefore, gay characters were often attributed with effeminate traits. The character of Jack McFarland in *Will & Grace* can be used as an example of this stereotype. In the essay *Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: Will & Grace and the Situation Comedy Genre*, Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow analyze the entire series of *Will & Grace* and its characters. They claim that the character of Jack McFarland is the example of an effeminate gay (91), due to his interest in traditionally female matters such as fashion, female singers like Madonna and Cher, his love for acting and singing and his humor. This stereotype is what has otherwise become known as the 'sissy'. This stereotype is what Kevin Hart describes as: "a self-centered, promiscuous, mean-spirited, flamboyant queen" (70). Through body language and motion it becomes visibly clear that a certain character is gay. A limp wrist, high-pitched voice, frisking instead of striding, and hysterical laughter or crying are just some examples of the ways in which this idea of non-masculinity is created. Especially in

situation comedies, this stereotype is often used for comic relief (Epstein). Thus it becomes hard for the viewer to take characters like these seriously.

The Heterosexualized Gay

Another stereotype of homosexuality is the gay straight man. In their previously mentioned essay about *Will & Grace*, Battles and Hilton-Morrow describe Will from the series as being a gay straight man. He embodies the stereotypical heterosexual image from the early 2000s; young, handsome, physically fit, well-educated and with a high income, providing for his 'family', in this case himself, Grace and very often Jack. The heterosexualized gay is the homosexual who fits too well with the stereotype of masculine straight male and therefore emphasizes the heteronormative constructs. Critics have responded negatively to this character by claiming he was "not gay enough" (90).

The heterosexualized form of homosexual stereotyping is strengthened by the typical gay male/straight woman friendship that is often visible on contemporary American television. The male and female are portrayed as: "wannabe partners whose sexual orientation are at odd" (Walters qtd. in Shugart 73). The homosexual male is presented as homosexual, but the main relationship he is in, is with a woman. This again underscores heteronormativity.

The Sexless Gay

Even though gay men have become more and more visible on American television, they are not often shown in the setting of a romantic relationship, let alone in a sexual one. Rayley and Lucas conducted research and compared heterosexual and non-heterosexual characters on American television. One of their findings, published in the article *Stereotype or Success*, entailed that queer characters are less often than heterosexual characters shown in a relationship and when they are portrayed that way, they are almost never shown in a sexual context. Whereas the heterosexual couples are shown kissing, hugging, in bed (before, during or after intercourse), this is almost never the case for queer characters (32). Rayley and Lucas's research comprised the 2001 American television season, but more recent research still endorses their observations. Ava Parsemain's 2019 research reaffirmed that gay male sexuality is often "tamed" and not taken seriously (30). This absence of male homosexual sexual expression results in incomplete representation and creates the idea that gay men do not have sex. Their relationships, when they are represented at all, are incomplete compared to the representation of heterosexual relationships.

The Victimized Gay

Homosexual men, especially young gay men, are often stereotyped as victims. For a long time, gays were primarily portrayed as the victims of AIDS. Larry Gross analyzed that in American television series, homosexual men were almost always represented in the form of AIDS carriers (also see: *The Villainous Gay*). In family-centered television, the main message was that the sick victim needed help; they were “objects of pity”, who were to be “tearfully reconciled with their family” (146).

In a more general and contemporary sense, the homosexual young male has nowadays morphed into a victim for being different. In the essay *Teenage Queerness: Negotiating Heteronormativity in the Representation of Gay Teenagers in Glee*, Frederik Dhaenens describes that in American society as well as on American television, teenage gay boys are often seen as victims of the consequences of otherness. “In academic and popular discourse, gay youth have been repeatedly discussed in relation to being at risk of psychosocial problems (...) gay teen suicide, homelessness, HIV infection, drug and alcohol abuse, and the increased risk of being verbally or physically threatened.” The emphasis that is placed on these negative consequences causes gay adolescence to be seen as a “troublesome phase” (307). Homosexuality is something particularly boys need to come to terms with.

The way this is represented on American television can be seen in the example of the character of Kurt Hummel in *Glee*. In the first episode the viewer meets Kurt, being portrayed as flamboyantly gay, who is bullied by the school’s jocks and is thrown in a dumpster (“Glee”). This happens within the first three minutes of the series and immediately the image of the homosexual as a, very literal, victim is established. Being gay is different, society disapproves and the victim has to overcome this burden.

The Sex-Crazed Gay

The last key stereotype discussed in this chapter is the one of the sex-crazed or the villainous gay. On the one hand, there is the image of the sexless gay (as discussed earlier), but on the other hand some representations of the male homosexual have caused the stereotype sexual predator to be established. The image of evil homosexual is mostly created through expressions of sex. One way this stereotype came to be was through the depiction of gay men as villainous AIDS carriers. Larry Gross describes television series in which characters who have already been diagnosed with AIDS, continue to be sexually active and knowingly infect other, thereby “threatening the lives of innocent victims” (147). Another way that the villainous gay was created was through the idea that gay men not only like to have sex with other men,

but with children too. The figure of the gay pedophile used to be presented with images of older men abusing young boys. This had the effect that, until the late 1970s, the general public did not think homosexual men should be allowed to work at schools (Alwood qtd. in Hart 63).

This last variation of the villainous gay is not often seen anymore, but the idea of gay men being sexual predators or extremely sexually active is still alive today. The representation of homosexuality in series like *Queer As Folk* and *Looking* shows that homosexual men often engage in forms of sexual relations that are different from the heteronormative standard, like multiple sexual partners at the same time, non-monogamous relationships, polyamorous relationships, and quick sexual contacts through apps like *Grindr*. There seems to be little representation on American television that can be placed between the sexless gay on the one side of the spectrum and the sex-crazed gay on the other.

2.2. Method of Analysis

Now that the theoretical framework has been established a comparative analysis will follow in the next two chapters. Chapter 3 will discuss Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007) and chapter 4 will revolve around Netflix's *Queer Eye* (2018-).

The structure of analysis will be the same for the two shows. For both series the analysis will start with some general information; facts about the network and production team, the five main presenters will be introduced, an overview of the makeover candidates will be given, and the location of the series will be discussed. Lastly, a short overview of the initial reception will be given. In the second part of the analysis, the content of the series will be analyzed. For this analysis, two episodes per season of the series will be used. This means ten episodes for *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and eight episodes for *Queer Eye*. For both series, the first and last episode of the series have been selected, as well as some random episodes, and the episodes in which the Fab 5 make-over a non-straight man or woman. Each episode has been viewed multiple times in order to grasp the meaning in full.

For the analysis the following questions will be of essence:

- What message (verbally and physically) is being sent about homosexuality?
- How does this message relate to the concept of heteronormativity?
- How does this message relate to the concept of homonormativity? Is there attention for intersectional identities?
- How does the representation in the series relate to the beforementioned stereotypes?

In chapter 5 a discussion of the two series will follow and in chapter 6 a conclusion will be drawn from the findings.

3. Analysis of Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007)

3.1 General Information

Before the content of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* will be analyzed, some general information will be provided. The focus of this analysis is the way in which homosexuality is represented within the series, but since this is a reality series, it is important to also take matters behind the scenes and away from the film locations into consideration. Since the gay men in the series do not play a role, it matters what they do in their personal lives. Also, it is impossible to provide an in-depth analysis of all 100 episodes of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* within the scope of this MA thesis. Therefore, this part of chapter 3 will provide enough general information to draw conclusions about the series as a whole, in addition to the in-depth analysis of ten episodes. From this point onwards, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* will be referred to as *QEftSG*.

How It Started

When David Collins, producer at Scout productions, went to an art gallery somewhere in the early 2000s, he experienced something that would later lead to the creation of a very successful television program. At that art show, a wife was talking to her husband about his appearance and how he had not paid the proper attention to it, when three gay guys started interfering in that conversation and started to protect the husband and give him tips about how to dress and how to do his hair. Collins was watching this scene unfold and thought to himself that what had just happened there would be a good idea for a television program (Vargas 77). Collins, a gay man himself, together with his straight friend David Metzler, pitched his idea to Bravo network and they loved it. However, right after that Bravo was bought by NBC and the men of Scout productions were afraid that was going to be the end of it. Instead, NBC upheld Bravo's decision and ordered 12 episodes immediately. Moreover, money was invested in the show's promotion: "With NBC's muscle behind them, a massive PR campaign began, featuring a shot of the Fab 5 in black suits that played like a cross between *Reservoir Dogs* and *Charlie's Angels*. Huge ad spreads ran in magazines like *Rolling Stone*, and billboards popped up in Times Square and on Sunset Boulevard" (Giltz).

The focus of the pitch and the aim of the series was showing the possibility of friendship between a gay man and a straight man. Collins also claimed: "Viewers are hungry for a different kind of reality show, a make-better show, not just another makeover show. We

aren't just about before and after; we're about narrative, about what happens in the middle" (Finn). Since the candidates in the series receive a make-better and not a make-over, they will be referred to as the make-better candidates. The target audience of *QEftSG* was, according to Ad age reports, not gay men, but women aged between 18 and 49. Gay males were the second group targeted (Silverman).

The name *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was a controversial one at the time. The word *queer* was considered too risqué for television and also legally prohibited to be used in the name of a business in the state of New York. However, the men from Scout Productions insisted on the word *queer*, because they wanted to take back the word and turn its insulting connotation into a positive one (Porowski et al. 9). From season 3 onwards, the series' name was officially changed to *Queer Eye* to be more inclusive when it came to the make-better candidates. However, for the sake and clarity of this thesis, the original Bravo series will still be referred to as *QEftSG*, in order to clearly establish the difference between the old and the new *Queer Eye*.

The Fab 5

The fabulous five, the Fab 5 for short, are the five leading gay men of the series. Each member has his own field of expertise and helps the candidate with issues in that particular area.

Ted Allen is the expert on food and wine. Allen, born in 1965, is a Caucasian man who has an MA degree in journalism and has been writing for *Esquire* magazine since 1997. He mainly wrote about food and wine, but also wrote an award winning article about male breast cancer. In 2003, Allen made his television debut on *QEftSG*. After that show ended in 2007, Allen made several television appearances as a judge on cooking shows and since 2012 has had several of his own cooking shows. Allen has been together with his partner Barry Rice since 1993 and the two were married in 2013 ("About"). In the series, Allen provides the make-better candidates with knowledge about their kitchen, their kitchen tools and prepares several dishes with them, to get them acquainted with cooking.

Carson Kressley is the man for fashion. Kressley, born in 1969, is a Caucasian man who grew up in a family that raised ponies and Kressley himself became a world champion equestrian in 1999. Before becoming the fashion expert on *QEftSG*, Kressley worked for the fashion brand Ralph Lauren. Since the ending of the series, Kressley has appeared on many television shows as a fashion expert and has been a judge on *RuPaul's Drag Race* since 2015. Kressley is not in a relationship at the moment and was not in a relationship while *QEftSG*

was on the air (“bio”). In each episode, Kressley takes the make-better candidate shopping and gives them fashion advice. He tells them what and what not to wear.

The series’ Grooming Guru is Kyan Douglas. Douglas, a Caucasian man born in 1970, grew up learning about hair from his sister. It was not until he was 30 years old that he started at a hairstyling and grooming school. Before becoming one of the Fab 5, Douglas already featured as a grooming expert on the shows *What Not to Wear* and *While You Were Out*. While he was on *QEftSG* he had relationships with several men, to one of whom he even got engaged, but Douglas eventually called off the engagement (Mwaura). After *QEftSG*, Douglas took some time off to travel and take care of his sick mother and has since 2012 been the advisor on styling for *The Rachel Ray Show*. (Laudadio) Douglas helps the make-better candidates with their beauty and grooming routine. He explains what products can be used and how hair should be styled. He does not cut hair himself, however, but he does introduce the make-better candidates to their hairdressers.

The series’ expert on interior design is Thom Felicia. Felicia is a Caucasian man, born in 1969, who already was a successful interior designer before appearing on television in *QEftSG*. His New York based office, Thom Felicia Inc., worked for big names such as Tina Fey and Jennifer Lopez. After having been one of the Fab 5, his business became even more successful (“Thom”). During the airing of *QEftSG*, there were some rumors about Thom dating Carson (the show’s fashion expert), but this turned out not to be true. Thom has been together with his partner Greg Calejo since the ending of *QEftSG* (“What”). In the series, Thom provides the homes of the make-better candidates with a makeover. He focusses on the interior design and helps the candidate to live in an improved environment.

The last member of the Fab 5 is Jai Rodriguez. He is of mixed Puerto Rican and Italian descent and was born in 1979. Rodriguez was the guy for culture. This entailed him giving advice on etiquette, self-love and social interaction. He is also an actor and singer and, both before and after *QEftSG*, he was very active in those professions. Rodriguez was not in a relationship at the time *QEFTSG* was shot and aired (“Jai”).

After the first couple of episodes aired, the Fab 5 became very well-known and hugely popular. Not only did they gain much media attention, their salaries increased as well. In the first season, the Fab 5 earned \$3,000 per person per episode. After the success of the first season, that number went up to \$10,000. They also published a book, a DVD and many other forms of merchandise. Since the series contained its fair share of product placement, each individual Fab 5 member was approached by several brands with the question if they wanted to promote their products (Atkinson). The Fab 5 were extremely popular and not only

appeared in their own show, but were also the guests in, among others, *The Ellen Show*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

The Make-Better Candidates

Each episode centers around a different candidate. These candidates are given a make-better, not a make-over, and are generally referred to as ‘this week’s straight guy’ or ‘our next victim’ at the beginning of each episode. Every episode starts with the Fab 5 in a car on their way to the candidate. They briefly discuss the candidate, most often by criticizing their appearance and cracking jokes about aspects of the person’s life. In each episode, the candidate works towards a goal and the candidate and the Fab 5 have some sort of ‘mission’. In some cases this is on a professional level; the candidate needs the Fab 5’s help in order to get ready for, for example, a work presentation. Yet, more often than not, the mission is on a personal level and revolves around a present or potential female partner. The Fab 5 help the straight men get ready for a date, a proposal, or anything in between.

All in all, there were 5 seasons of *QEftSG* which contained a total of 100 episodes. Since some of those episodes were special episodes with no new candidates (inspections, for example, where the Fab 5 would visit old candidates and ‘check-up’ on them), while other episodes focused on couples, the total number of make-better candidates featured in *QEftSG* is approximately 100. Out of those 100 candidates, two men were gay and one man was transgender; six episodes revolved around heterosexual couples and two episodes covered the stories of entire families; but otherwise all candidates were heterosexual men, so in terms of gender and sexuality there is very little diversity. This is also true in for race; almost all candidates are Caucasian.

The Location

QEftSG takes place in New York City. Almost all episodes are shot in New York City, except for some episodes in season 2 that take place in England and in Texas. In season 4 the Fab 5 are in Las Vegas for three episodes, but the rest of the season is set in New York City again. New York City, and the state of New York in general, are known as liberal territory. The state New York is considered a secure Blue State, which means that since 1984, the state New York has voted Democratic in the presidential elections (“List”). Another reason to choose New York as a shooting locations is that New York City is seen as one of the gay capitols of the world. In his book *The Gay Metropolis*, Charles Kaiser claims: “In the postwar period, New York City became the literal gay metropolis for hundreds of thousands of

immigrants from within and without the United States: the place they chose to learn how to live openly, honestly and without shame” (xiv). New York City became the place where previously oppressed people felt the freedom to be who they wanted to be and to explore that identity. Since the mid-20th century, New York City has remained an important city for gay liberation activities, such as the annual Gay Pride with a big parade. In *QEffSG*, New York City is the backdrop for the series, but does not play much more than a symbolic role. When there is a shift from one scene to another, typical shots of New York are shown: for example, yellow cabs and the billboards on Times Square. As a viewer, you will not forget where this is taking place, implicitly reminding you of the liberal life styles and social relations the city promotes. The locations within New York City that appear on the show are the homes of the candidates and the space where the Fab 5 watch their candidate after they have left them to their own devices. The homes of the candidates are located all over New York City and never feature for more than one episode, while the home of the Fab 5 is always the same in every episode.

Response

When *QEffSG* was first aired, the viewing rates were extremely high for Bravo’s standards and the series could count on approximate 2 million viewers per episode. The impact that the first season had had, was the subject of the article *Pride, Patriotism and Queer Eye* in *The Advocate*. It describes the show’s popularity:

The first season gave us not only 24 episodes of the show but also a best-selling book, a soundtrack, a music video, endorsement deals, magazine covers, TV talk-show appearances—including the quintet’s invasion of *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*—and immeasurable cultural impact. After all, who hasn’t referred to a fifth-wheel friend as the “Jai” of the clique or talked about “Queer Eye-ing” a straight friend? (Vary)

In addition to this, Carson Kressley’s catchphrase ‘zhuzh’ (meaning “to improve in appearance by way of a slight adjustment”) also found its way into commonly used vocabulary of everyday English (“How to Zhuzh”).

The response to season 1 was predominantly positive and the Fab 5 became megastars quickly. The airing of the show did not cause any uproar and after the first season, director David Collins said that there had been some critical response claiming *QEffSG* promoted stereotypes, but that he had not received homophobic reactions (Owen). *QEffSG* won an Emmy

award for 'Outstanding Reality Program' in 2004, as well as two GLAAD awards for 'Outstanding Reality Program' in 2004 and 2005 ("Awards"). *QEftSG* was broadcast in many different countries and in some countries the format was used to create a local version, for example *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy UK* and *Aussie Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. In America, the spin-off *Queer Eye For The Straight Girl* was produced after season 1 of *QEftSG* had aired. A series in which 3 gay men and 1 lesbian woman made-better female candidates. The spin-off was canceled after one season, however.

3.2 Content Analysis of the Episodes

3.2.1. Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

Now that the backdrop of *QEftSG* has been formed, the content of the series will be analyzed. This will establish the way in which homosexuality is represented in the series.¹

Heteronormativity, the idea that heterosexuality is the standard and that other sexualities are therefore divergent (see chapter 2), is affirmed through the candidates of *QEftSG*. Even though, for the first time in reality television history, gay men are in the majority while the straight guy is a minority, and one might think this provides the premise that gay men are in control and have the power, the construction of the show's format does not allow for such subversion of heteronormativity. In each episode, the Fab 5 are called in for help, most often by the wife or girlfriend of the straight guy. The goal of the make-better is to improve the man so that he can, in the majority of the cases, be a better partner for his female life partner. Out of the 100 episodes, 97 feature such heterosexual relationships. The gay presenters are invited into the straight guy's house and their role is not to elaborate on their own queerness, but to support the heterosexual identity of the candidate. Of course, the Fab 5 do criticize the straight guys' bad haircuts and sloppy apartments, but this is done in the spirit of making better, not with an intention to break down. Also, in their essay *Seeing "Straight" through Queer Eye*, Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix explain that focusing on these types of minor aesthetic issues helps "maintain the dominant social order by deflecting attention away from contested issues of central importance, and focusing instead upon unimportant peripheral issues" (440). Indeed, the Fab 5 are present in the series, but because the series is centered around superficial issues, the gay men become a supporting tool for the continued perfecting of heterosexuality, thus reinforcing the heteronormative social structures.

Another part of the series' format that supports heteronormative structures, is the fact that the Fab 5 are not present throughout the entire process the candidate goes through. At the beginning of the episode, the Fab 5 are filmed while they are on their way to the candidate in their big black SUV, then they rush through the straight guy's life, fix him up and then during the moment supreme, namely the moment when the straight guy is presenting his new self and new home for the first time, the Fab 5 are not present to take credit for their work. In the essay

¹ For clarity's sake, there will be no parenthetical references for quotes from the *QEftSG* and *Queer Eye* episodes. An episode guide can be found in the appendix, in which the name of the candidate is clearly stated for each episode. The episodes can also be found as separate entries in the works cited list.

The Aesthetic Power of the Fab 5, Zizi Papacharissi and Jan Fernback state how this places the Fab 5 on the outside looking in: “The distance from which they have to observe could serve to symbolically situate them away from the mainstream, thus rendering them the Other” (361). Not only are they literally placed at a distance from the reveal of their completed work and are they unable to take or be given credit for their achievements, they are also figuratively distant and not part of the bettered reality unfolding at the end of the episode. This places the Fab 5 in the position of ‘The Other’ and, through that, *QEstSG* places homosexuality itself in the position of a non-normative entity that directly opposes heterosexuality.

It is not only the series’ format that enhances heteronormativity, the remarks made by the Fab 5 themselves also reinforce this idea. When they make-better a gay guy, Wayne Hollander, for the first time, the Fab 5 do not seem to know about this beforehand. When they are in the car discussing their next candidate and Carson reads from his file, “I grew up a little gay Jewish boy in the Bronx”, the Fab 5 exclaim, “Wait, he’s gay?” and, “Yeaaah, we have a homo!” followed by applause. This gives the impression that homosexuality is something rare and out of the ordinary. Of course, the Fab 5’s reaction is understandable, as this was the first time that they provided a make-better for a homosexual and they may have been surprised about that since this was uncommon within the context of the show, but even so the way the news is received enhances the idea that homosexuality is different. A similar thing happens at the end of the episode with the brothers David and Brandon Bravo. David has written a poem about his time with the Fab 5 and reads it to his family:

Different lives, different times
 Five sets of unfamiliar eyes
 Beauty set is doses
 Five pure souls, unconditional love
 Five hearts helping two
 Eventually becoming one

While they are watching this scene unfold from their Fab 5 loft, Ted says, “Two straight guys, writing that poem for 5 gay guys and reading it without being embarrassed, in total sincerity, I mean, that’s amazing!” By stressing how special it is that two straight guys express their gratitude towards five homosexuals without embarrassment, Ted underscores hetero norms and alienates homosexuality as an entity steeped in shame.

Besides presenting the idea that being straight is normal and being gay is not, an image of what homosexuality should entail, an aspect of homonormativity, is also produced. When the Fab 5 make-better a gay guy for the second time in the series, in the Jeff Burman episode, Jai explicitly states at the end of the show, “There are all different types, but just because you may not fit a specific profile of a type, doesn’t mean that you are not gay or you are not a full gay person. All of us are very different, we don’t fit one specific stereotype. It’s embracing who you are, even if that’s uniquely different.” This message makes clear that there is not one definition of queerness that fits all gay men, but that gayness can come in many shapes and sizes. This message is strong and was not heard much on television before. Jai is directly speaking to Jeff, but at the same time also to the viewer. However, this was just one quote in one episode and it is an atypical message to be verbalized on *QEftSG*. The remainder of the episodes take a much more black-and-white stance on homosexuality. Throughout the series, the Fab 5 are constantly making remarks about what is gay and what definitely is not, and by doing this so frequently the Fab 5 are laying down the norm for what homosexuality is and how it should form part of someone’s gay identity.

Firstly, homonormativity is present in *QEftSG* through the identities of the gay men running the show. They are all fit, young and middle-class. Except for Jai, all the members of the Fab 5 are also white. Jai is of Puerto Rican and Italian decent which makes his identity intersectional, an aspect of his identity that the show ignores. Other than speaking Spanish in some episodes, no explicit attention is paid to Jai’s different cultural background. Secondly, the fact that the Fab 5 are specialized in grooming, fashion, food, interior design and culture creates the idea that these are areas that all gay men are familiar with and should therefore know the latest ins and outs of subjects like these. In short, the main image presented through the queer identities shown on *QEftSG* is that all homosexuals are white, fit, middle-class and concerned with appearance and aesthetics.

The Fab 5 emphasize this definition even more with their comments. In most episodes, this happens in relation to notions of straight masculinity. In the episode with Carlos the zookeeper, for example, one of his roommates is wearing an, according to the Fab 5, ugly t-shirt. Ted then comments on the shirt, saying: “Any doubts about Jack’s heterosexuality have just been erased.” Apparently, due to homosexuality’s predilection with aesthetics, a gay guy would never wear a shirt like that. When the Fab 5 are on their way to Wayne Hollander, the first gay guy, they are discussing his profile and cannot believe he is gay. Ted says: “He dresses badly, he hasn’t been to a club in ten years, he lives in a dumpy post-college apartment, he loves wrestling and comic books.” To which Jai replies: “Bad taste does not discriminate.” Ted says

that “They’ll let anybody be gay these days” and Thom exclaims: “Exactly, how did he get his gay card anyway?” All these comments are insinuating that in order to be a ‘good’ gay, you have to live up to certain expectations, without which you cannot, or at the very least should not, get access to the homosexual domain. The same thing occurs when the Fab 5 make-better their second gay guy, Jeff Burman. When they arrive at his apartment, his 3 heterosexual roommates are also home and the Fab 5 are made to guess which one of the four is gay. They do this by asking them questions about the frequency of getting facials, the names of the characters in *Golden Girls* and their opinions on “Who is better: Cher or Madonna?” By doing this, and responding negatively when the actual gay man does not know the presupposed ‘correct’ answers, the Fab 5 reinforce the idea that homosexuals should all have similar interests and opinions, and that gay men who do not meet these expectations are not proper gay men at all.

3.2.2. Stereotypes of Homosexuality

In the series, all five experts are their own person, with their own personality. This means none of them can be entirely captured by one stereotype. Despite this however, *QEftSG* presents a stark array of homosexual stereotypes to its audience. Most of the time these stereotypes arise from a combination of the physical and verbal interaction between the gay and straight men featured on the show.

Only two of the stereotypes that were discussed in chapter 2 and are therefore known to be present in American fictional television are not present in *QEftSG*. The first stereotype that is not present in *QEftSG* is the heterosexualized gay. The heterosexualized gay is always presented in relation to a straight woman and the relationship the gay man has with her is supposedly the most important one in his life. In the series, the Fab 5 are only presented in relation to men as they interact only with each other and with their male make-better candidates, but not with women. They do sometimes interact with the candidate’s mother or a female friend, but never for long enough to actually establish a real relationship with them. The stereotype of victimized gay is also not visible in *QEftSG*. As discussed in chapter 2, the story of the victimized gay focusses on overcoming the hurdle of finding out who you are and struggling with your own homosexuality. The Fab 5 do not share personal stories in the series. When they refer to their own homosexuality it is most often in the form of a joke or just a quick remark. While they do go into the personal lives of the candidates in each episode, they do not talk about their personal experiences and definitely do not discuss their homosexuality with each other or

with the candidates. In the episode about transman Miles, Jai indirectly does touch upon the fact that the Fab 5 all have their individual coming-out stories. While the Fab 5 is watching Miles interact with his family and see them talking about Miles being transgender, Jai remarks, “We all have stories like this.” However, none of the Fab 5 share those stories. In the two episodes with gay men and the single episode with a transman, the issues of coming out, getting bullied, and being ‘different’ in a heterosexual world are touched upon through the stories of the candidates. They briefly talk about coming out to their families, which were all supportive, but never discuss the issue in depth. In these conversations, the Fab 5 listen, but do not relate on a personal level, only general remarks such as “I know how you feel” are uttered. Since only three of the 100 episodes involve aspects of gay life that are generally perceived as difficulties, the idea of the victimized gay is not present in *QEftSG*.

A stereotype that is present is the effeminate gay. Styling guru Carson Kressley is the embodiment of the effeminate gay stereotype. Carson is flamboyant, cheeky, rarely serious, frequently makes references to musicals and singers like Cher, and is often shown with a limp wrist. In the episode about the brothers Brandon and David Bravo, for example, Carson is sitting in the bedroom with Brandon, Ted and Thom. Ted finds a bottle of urine in Brandon’s room and they talk about that for a little bit. While Ted and Thom respond to the discovery with toned-down disgust, Carson shrieks in a stereotypical high-pitched voice, “Eeeew, I touched a bottle of urine, I touched a bottle of urine!”, while fluttering his limp wrist.



Figure 1. Carson Kressley in "Taking on the Twins: Brandon & David B".

Carson further emphasizes his femininity by referring to himself as female. For example, in the episode about transman Miles Goff, Carson asks Miles’s roommate Austin (also a transman) where the ladies’ room is. Austin answers by saying, “We don’t have any ladies here.” To which Carson replies with, “Hello, I’m a lady!” However, Carson is the only one referring to himself

as female. The other members of the Fab 5 often call each other queens, which also links homosexuality to femininity.

Another explicit example of an effeminizing gay identity can be found in the first episode in which the Fab 5 make-better a gay man, Wayne Hollander. After having gone shopping with Wayne, Carson explains that there are different types of skin tones and demonstrates that by using four visibly female mannequin heads. Once Wayne's skin tone has been determined, Carson places the chosen head on the bed and shows Wayne's new shirts under that female head, making it seem as if a woman is wearing those clothes. This way of modeling a male candidate's new clothing is not used in any of the other episodes, therefore its usage can be explicitly linked to the candidate's gay, and therefore stereotypically female, identity.

'Culture Vulture' Jai Rodriguez also fits the effeminate stereotype, but in a less obvious way than Carson. The difference is that Jai does not effeminize himself, but rather that it is the other members of the Fab 5 who often link him to femininity. The first instance this happens can be found in the first episode. When they are showing candidate Bryan Schepel his new apartment, Jai is encouraged by the other gay men to lie next to Bryan in bed "to see what it would like if a woman would lie there."

An additionally present stereotype is the sexless gay. This stereotype is established through the absence of topical speech and physicality. Firstly, despite it being known that the Fab 5 are gay men, they do not discuss their homosexuality with either each other or their candidates, not even their gay candidates. Not only do the Fab 5 not discuss the hardships involved with being queer, as was mentioned earlier, they do not seriously discuss their sexuality at all. Superficial references to homosexuality are made constantly, as will be discussed more in the next paragraph, but it never becomes personal, which makes it seem as if the Fab 5 do not have a personal life outside of the series. This creates a paradox. The Fab 5 are continuously working on other people's love life, but never discuss their own, or even seem to have one. The homosexual love-life appears to be non-existent. The same is true for sex. Oftentimes the Fab 5 will ask about the straight guy's sex life, causing hetero sex to be discussed explicitly, but gay sex is never a debated topic. In terms of physicality, the Fab 5 hardly ever touch each other. On the contrary, the relationship between the gay and straight men is formed and strengthened by many handshakes, hugs, back-rubs, and pats on the shoulder, which are shown repeatedly throughout each episode; yet this only happens between each individual Fab 5 member and the make-better candidate. The Fab 5 between themselves never show this kind of physicality. Thus gay physicality is ignored and the image of sexless homosexual is

strengthened. The only time the Fab 5 do touch each other is when the straight guy is standing near them, like in the episode with Willy Mosquera, as pictured below. In such situations, the candidate seems to function as a human lightning rod than can subvert any suspected or perceived sexual tension.



Figure 2. The Fab 5 with Willy Mosquera on the left in "Like Father Like Son: Willy and Nathan M".

Paradoxically, while the Fab 5 are portrayed as sexless gays themselves, their jokes often relate to the image of the sex-crazed, villainous homosexual. On many occasions, jokes are told by the members of the Fab 5, particularly Carson and Thom, and these jokes are often gay-sex related. Most of the jokes are of a sexual nature, yet sometimes the men also joke about being a villain. In the first episode, imagery of the sex-crazed homosexual pops up when Carson is out shopping with Kyan and their candidate, Bryan Schepel. Bryan is tucking in his shirt, when Thom says, "He is going easy on you for letting you tuck that yourself". Carson then says, "Normally I would be jamming my hands down there." Bryan replies, "I know, I thought we were going to have to make a list of how many times..." Carson interrupts him and says, "Show me on the doll where the bad man touched you." In this conversation, Carson, jokingly, pictures himself as a molester. Similarly, in the episode about Carlos Flores, Thom is going through Carlos's apartment and finds an alien mask. He puts it on and says, "I came from outer space to tell you that you have the ugliest apartment I've ever seen. I'm gonna have to anally probe everyone who lives here and then I will leave you for dead." Of course, this is meant as a joke. However, the strong language and imagery are strongly connected to the portrayal in which homosexuals have, for a long time, been shown on television; namely that of rapist. It is worth noting that by far most of the jokes are not directly linked to the image of the homosexual male as rapist, but it is notable that it does happen. Also, a great number of jokes is sexually loaded

and therefore a reference to the elephant in the room nobody talks about. The large number of gay jokes enhances the idea of the homosexual as sex-crazed, even if this means encroaching upon the area of heterosexual intimacy of heterosexual men. An example can be found in the episode about Rob Munroe, a black man with Jamaican roots. Carson keeps on joking about Rob's physique and how he wants to have sex with him. When they are out shopping for clothes, Carson, Rob and Kyan are lying on a bed. Carson lays his head on Rob's shoulder and says, "Oh daddy". Kyan says, "Your safe word is zucchini. Whenever things get too weird, just say zucchini". The word zucchini is also a joke, given its clear phallic reference. Later, Rob is in his underpants. Carson is with him in the fitting room and says, "Oh, you are practically bursting out, I am going to try something on too" and closes the dressing room door. Rob then starts yelling, "Zucchini! Zucchini!" The idea of the gay man as a rapist is again emphasized here, since Rob feels 'unsafe' with Carson in the fitting room.

Jokes like these are scattered throughout all episodes and are predominantly made by Carson. On the one hand, the fact that the straight guys, generally, laugh at these jokes and play along, shows that they do not feel genuinely threatened by non-heterosexual men and this shows the real connection and friendship the Fab 5 have with the straight guys. On the other hand, however, the fact that the only time the Fab 5 talk about homosexuality is in a joking fashion and then always connected to sex, sometimes even framing themselves as predators, influences the way the audience is informed about homosexuality and strongly limits the message about homosexuality that is sent, by giving it a strong otherness-is-dangerous subtext.

In addition to featuring the stereotypes that had also been visible prior in fictional America television, *QEftSG* also puts forward the image of the superior gay. When watching the series, the viewer is immediately confronted with this idea in the opening credits. The five members are each presented in their fields of expertise. Carson is seen shopping, Kyan is doing someone's hair, Ted is cooking, Thom is picking out paint and Jai is DJ'ing, when they receive a 'QE' message on their flip phone, as if they are being called away for an emergency. They are then shown putting on their sunglasses and walking through the streets of New York together. Everything is gray, but all the places they walk by turn to color. The song *All Thing Just Keep Getting Better* by Widelife plays in the background with, the lyrics:

All things just keep getting better
 You came into my life
 And my world never looked so bright, yeah
 It's true, you bring out the best in me
 And now I can clearly see
 Days keep getting better, nights keep getting better



Figure 3. Still from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* opening credits.

The juxtaposition of all these elements combined present the clear image of these gay men as super heroes coming to the rescue of someone in need. Clearly they know what they are doing and are both ready and able to help. The knowledgeable of the Fab 5 versus the helplessness of the straight guy in each episode, creates the sense of gay superiority. The idea of the gay man as superior to the straight man is most visible through the comments directed at the straight men. When the Fab 5 is going through the apartment of, for example, Bryan Schepel in the very first episode of the series, the comments are harsh. Thom tells Bryan that his house is a disaster, while Carson makes fun of his underwear, “I think we are in a car accident, because I see skid marks.” The straight guy is put on the spot and the gays do not hold back. In his essay *We’re Here, We’re Queer—and We’re Better Than You: The Representational Superiority of Gay Men to Heterosexuals on Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Kevin Hart explains how this influences the power structure in the series:

The use of humor in these ways reveals that it is just as easy for gay men to make fun of heterosexuals as it has been for heterosexuals to make fun, for decades on television, of gay men. As such, the use of humor in the show further undermines long-standing representational power dynamics pertaining to gay men versus straight ones. (“We’re” 247)

After this initial examination of a candidate’s living space, the Fab 5 each invent a plan for their candidate and the straight guy does not have a big say in what will happen. This is what Hart claims attributes to the notion of superior gay, “It is remarkable how completely most heterosexual subjects give themselves over to the gay men and adhere to their every instruction, order, or whim, even in situations when they initially appear reluctant to do so” (“We’re” 246). In the last episode of the series, candidate Willy Mosquera repeatedly tells Kyan that he wants to keep his long hair, but the grooming guru decides otherwise and the hair is cut short. However, because the superiority only focusses on material and superficial things, this does not challenge heterosexuality, as is discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Still, the image of the superior gay does influence the way homosexuality is represented by strengthening the already existing notion that gay men are better at grooming, fashion, cooking, and interior design.

Lastly, the sense of gay superiority is presented by the means of the Fab 5’s consumerism and, through that, class. When the Fab 5 comment on their straight guys, the comments are often related to the lower-class products the men bought. In the essay *Metrosexuality: the Middle Class Way Exploring Race, Class, and Gender in Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Beth Berila and Devika Dibya Choudhuri explain how this works in the series:

Carson shrieks at fake Mohair and jean shorts, Kyan is put out by disposable razors, Ted is deeply offended by paper cups and frozen hamburgers, and Thom groans at 70s style mass-produced furniture. Their “tasteful tips” make it clear that this form of masculinity can only be properly achieved by middle to upper class men—it is unavailable to people who cannot afford it. (Berila)

The Fab 5 are shown to have an elitist attitude and place importance on obtaining a higher class status through consumerism. Their straight guy will not be able to be as successful as they are until he buys all the products they recommend and blatantly advertise through product placement. This creates a sense of superiority, but at the same time also reaffirms the notion of

gay superficiality, reducing homosexuality to a series of products and accessories instead of community, politics and identity.

In brief, it is safe to say that there is not one clear standardized image of homosexuality that is presented throughout *QEftSG*. However, it is clear that the image of homosexuality we do get is severely limited. The fact that homosexuality is visible on reality television at all is positive and that it is even represented as superior, in some superficial ways, to heterosexuality is innovative. Yet, this superiority remains restricted to pre-existing clichés and does therefore not challenge heteronormative structures, leaving the Fab 5 and the gay community to symbolize in an inferior social position. The idea of homosexuals as effeminate and sexless is confirmed, while the many sex-crazed jokes while at the same time create a distorted image of homosexuality that misinforms the audience.

4. Netflix's *Queer Eye* (2018 - present)

4.1 General Information

In this part of chapter 4, just as in chapter 3, some general information about the series *Queer Eye* will be provided in order to establish some context before moving onto the analysis of the series itself. At the time of writing this thesis, four seasons of *Queer Eye* were available on Netflix. A special (*Queer Eye in Japan*) and the fifth season had been announced, but were not yet available for viewing and therefore the analysis of *Queer Eye* focusses on seasons 1, 2, 3, and 4.

How It Started

On 24 January 2017, Netflix officially announced that they were going to produce a reboot of *QEFTSG*. That statement read:

In a time when America stands divided and the future seems uncertain, a team of five brave men will try to bring us closer together with laughter, heart, and just the right amount of moisturizer. The Emmy Award winning *Queer Eye* is back and ready to Make America Fabulous Again. With a new Fab 5 and the show's toughest missions to date, *Queer Eye* moves from the Big Apple to turn the red states pink... one makeover at a time. (“New”)

The same production team from Scout productions was now once again in the lead for this reboot.

The Fab 5

For the reboot of *Queer Eye*, new Fab 5 members were cast. The casting procedure was a multiple-day event, in which all prospective Fab 5 members had to go through group exercises, chemistry tests and interviews (Brody). Eventually, five new gay men were chosen to become Fab 5 2.0. These five new men clearly stated how the original series *QEftSG* influenced them when they were watching the show. In an interview with *People Magazine* they claim that seeing five real gay men on television was a new experience for them and that it allowed them to be more accepting of themselves (“The Cast”).

The expert on food is Antoni Porowski. He was born in Montreal in 1984 to Polish parents who had moved to Canada after Porowski's sisters were born. When Porowski was 12, he moved to New York City. He was never formally trained to be a chef, but learned by working in restaurants and being mentored by Ted Allen, the food and wine connoisseur from the original *QEftSG*. Besides cooking, Porowski has starred in several television shows and movies (Vargas). Unlike the other Fab 5 members, Porowski does not identify as homosexual. He thinks of himself as bisexual and is still figuring out where on the LGBTQ+ spectrum he is exactly, if determining his exact position is even possible. He likes to think of sexuality as something fluid instead of static. He has had relationships with men and women, but claims that he has never been very comfortable with his own sexuality and that he is still learning how to feel comfortable about it (Carley). During the time the first season aired, Porowski was together with his male partner of seven years, but broke up with him late 2018. After this, he got together with another male reality star, Trace Lehnhoff, but they broke up in 2019 (Karasin). After this, Porowski and Van Ness started a joined Instagram account on which they insinuated that they were dating. This turned out to be a practical joke and the two men have officially stated that they are not a couple and are both single.

Tan France is the series' expert on fashion. France was born in South Yorkshire, England to Pakistani parents in 1983 and grew up in a Muslim household. In his memoir *Naturally Tan*, France explains that he has always known that he was 'different' and that he liked boys. Growing up in a Pakistani family, however, it was difficult for France to be himself and to honor religious and cultural rules at the same time. France makes clear that growing up, not his sexuality, but his color was his main concern in figuring out how to fit into society (8). France did not aspire to go into entertainment. He worked for various fashion brands, like *Zara* and *Bershka*, before launching his own brand *Kingdom & State*, which focused on the Mormon market in the US. In 2008, France met his partner, former Mormon Rob France and they got married in 2013 (Crummy).

The new Grooming Guru is Jonathan van Ness. This Caucasian man was born in 1987 in Illinois. Van Ness claims he never had to come out of the closet, that it had always been clear that he was a gay man; at least until he figured out that there were more options to choose from and made clear that he is gender nonconforming. Sometimes he feels like a man, sometimes he feels like a woman and is therefore very in touch with his feminine side and is not afraid to show this publicly. He often wears high heels or nail polish, for example (Tirado). After finishing high school, Van Ness got interested in hairstyling and eventually moved to Los Angeles and opened a salon there. He gained gay cult fame when he started the

webseries *Gay of Thrones*, which is a parodic recap of the series *Games of Thrones* (Yi). In September 2019, Van Ness's memoir *Over the Top* was released, in which Van Ness tells the reader about his history with drug addiction and his HIV-positive status. In this memoir, Van Ness shows a different side of himself, as opposed to the happy-go-lucky figure he is on *Queer Eye*. Van Ness is currently not in a relationship (Hawgood).

Bobby Berk is the interior designer. Berk is also a Caucasian man, born in 1981. In one of the *Queer Eye* episodes in season 1, Berk openly talks about his childhood. He was raised in Missouri, in an Amish community and was met with homophobia when he was young ("Camp"). When he was 15, he ran away from his family, because he felt that he could not be himself at home. While he was gone, he was outed to his family by someone else and when Berk came back he immediately left again because his mother could not accept his homosexuality ("Coming out"). Hereafter, Berk moved to New York and pursued his passion for interior design. After working in stores like *Bed, Bath and Beyond*, he started his own company in 2006. Berk now lives in Los Angeles with his husband of eight years, Dewey Do ("Bobby's Story").

The expert on culture is Karamo Brown. Brown was born in 1980 in Houston, Texas. He is of Jamaican and Cuban descent. Brown came out as gay when he was 16 years old. In 2004, he gained fame when he was the first African-American homosexual man in an American reality television series, MTV's *The Real World*. He became an instant role-model for gay and bi man in the African-American community. After his appearance on *The Real World*, Brown worked as a social worker for ten years, before appearing on television again. This time as the host of shows like *Are You The One: Second Chances*. Brown got involved in activism in 2015 when he cofounded the organization *6in10*, which tries to raise awareness for AIDS in the African-American community (Anderson). Brown is the father of two sons, one biological and one adopted. He did not find out he was a father until his biological son was 10 years old. The boy's mother had kept the pregnancy a secret and moved away shortly after getting pregnant. Brown did not hear of his son's existence until over a decade later. That is when Brown was granted custody and also adopted his son's brother, in order to keep the siblings together (Reynolds). In May 2018, Brown proposed to his partner of eight years, director Ian Jordan (Falcone).

The Heroes

The candidates in *Queer Eye* are referred to as ‘heroes’ by the Fab 5. In each episode, the Fab 5 briefly discuss the hero in the car on their way to their first meeting with the candidate. They talk about physical traits of the hero in question, but they also discuss the hardship that the hero has gone through. Every hero ends their week with the Fab 5 with a special event, which is either in the personal or professional sphere and this mission is also explicitly discussed by the Fab 5 in the car.

Seasons one through four each have eight episodes. Each episode has one hero, except for one episode in season 3, in which the Fab 5 help two sisters. So, in total there are 33 heroes. Out of those 33 heroes, 18 are straight white men, 3 are straight African-American men (one of whom is disabled), 1 is a straight Iranian-American man, 1 is a straight Indian-American man, 1 is a gay African-American man, 1 is a white transgender man, 4 are straight African-American women, 2 are straight white women, 1 is a lesbian African-American woman, and 1 is a straight Hispanic-American woman. In terms of diversity, the heroes cover a wide range of different backgrounds and many of them have intersectional identities.

The Location

In the official press release announcing the reboot, Producer David Collins claimed it is now *Queer Eye*’s mission to “turn red states pink” (“New”). Whereas the original series took place in New York City, located in a traditionally liberal state, the reboot moved to Atlanta, Georgia for the first two seasons. Season 3 was shot in Kansas and Missouri and season 4 takes place in Missouri entirely. The states Georgia, Kansas and Missouri are known to vote predominantly Republican and can therefore be regarded as conservative states (“Red”). This means that the Fab 5 now operate in an area where many inhabitants have traditional values when it comes to marriage and relationships. By moving the series from liberal New York City to the conservative South, the producers create space for rural Americans to get in touch with people and phenomena that otherwise are more limited to the urban areas of America.

Response

After season 1 of *Queer Eye* was released on February 7th 2018, the reception was generally positive. With an approval score of 97% on rottentomatoes.com (“Season 1”) and the renewal for season 2 announced within 6 weeks, the Netflix series could be considered a success. The Fab 5 gained instant fame and were the guests on, among others, *The Late Show*

with Stephen Colbert, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, and *Good Morning America*. Online they are a big hit as well, with all of them having at least 2.5 million followers on Instagram and there being innumerable videos featuring the Fab 5 on YouTube, such as “Queer Eye's 'Fab 5' Get Honest During a Game of Never Have I Ever” and “Queer Eye Cast Answer the Web's Most Searched Questions”, which all have a multiple million views. Catchphrases from the show like ‘Yas Queen’, ‘Can you believe?’, and ‘Henny’ are scattered over the internet, being especially popular in GIF’s and memes (“How to Speak”). In 2018, *Queer Eye* won three Emmy awards; Outstanding Structured Reality Program, Outstanding Picture Editing for a Structured or Competition Reality Program and Outstanding Casting for a Reality Program. In 2019, *Queer Eye* won in the same categories and went home with the Emmy for outstanding directing for a reality program as well (“Awards and Nominations”). In 2019, *Queer Eye* also won the GLAAD award for Outstanding Reality Program (Hod).

4.2 Content Analysis of the Episodes

Now that the framework of *Queer Eye* is clear, the content of the series will be analyzed and this will establish the way in which homosexuality is represented in the series.

4.2.1. Heteronormativity and homonormativity

Queer Eye's first episode starts off with a clear statement of the series' mission for acceptance. The Fab 5 state,

Tan: "The original show was fighting for tolerance. Our fight is for acceptance."

Antoni: "My goal is to figure out how we're similar as opposed to how different we are."

Karamo: "We all got to come together in a way we understand each other."

At the end of the first episode, Bobby notes,

All human beings have a commonality. More so than anyone thinks. We're all really exactly the same. We all are born, we all grow up wanting to be loved, We all become an adult searching for love. It doesn't matter if it's gay or straight. A common thread that holds every human together is that we want to be loved.

The fact that both the show's mission and the ideology behind the series are so explicitly mentioned through these statements, enhances the idea that the producers believe there is still a gap to bridge between heterosexuals and homosexuals. By explicitly stating the existence of heteronormativity as a given, it is immediately highlighted that it is the series' goal to reduce the power of heteronormative ideas in society.

The majority of the episodes is still centered around straight people in (search of) a heterosexual relationship. However, finding or maintaining a heterosexual relationship is not the purpose of *Queer Eye*. The focus now lies on the transformation for the personal advancement of the hero in question, not for the sake of a romantic partner that needs to be kept happy. In some episodes, a situation presents itself in which certain heteronormative societal structures come to the surface. It is mostly when the Fab 5 are working with a straight hero that heteronormative issues are discussed. When this happens, the Fab 5 do not fall back, but face

the issue head on and see it as an opportunity for re-education. In the first episode, hero Tom Jackson asks Bobby whether he is married and Bobby answers that he is indeed married now, as it was not legal before. Tom then asks, “Are you the husband or the wife?” With this question, Tom imposes his heterosexual norms of a married consisting of a man and a woman onto Bobby’s marriage in particular, and gay couples in general. Bobby and Jonathan, who is with them in the car, immediately seize the opportunity to educate Tom and undermine his heteronormative tendencies.

Bobby: “That is a misconception.”

Jonathan: “Let’s break that down, Let’s unpack that.”

Bobby: “That’s a little sexist Tom.”

Jonathan: “I get that as a gay man a lot, you know. 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 whatever role you are, whether it’s like moon or sun, moon being more feminine energy and sun being more masculine, I think there is gorgeous strength to be had in both.”

Bobby: “So, yeah, we both wear the pants.”

Tom: “Ok, that’s good.”

Another example of the imposition of heteronormative ideas on human relations is when farmer Matt Morland opens up to Karamo and tells him that he was anxious to meet the Fab 5, because he thought they were going to make him uncomfortable. By expressing this, he gives voice to the notion that heterosexuals and homosexuals are different by default and that, in a world where heterosexuality is the standard, anything deviating from that standard will make you feel uneasy. When Matt opens up about his fears, the Fab 5 once again use the moment for re-education:

Matt: “I was a little nervous. Am I going to be able to handle five gay men in my house? You all came in and I didn’t have a heart attack. I didn’t pass out. I wasn’t, like, stiff as a board. I feel like myself right now.”

Karamo: “Could you send a memo around to the rest of the straight guys around the world? Let them know if they get around five gay guys that they won’t have a heart attack?”

Matt: “And you won’t try to convert us.”

Karamo: “No, we won’t convert you. The thing you all don’t know is that 99 percent of you we don’t want. Let the ladies have you. We have enough troubles with our own guys.”

It is through instances like this that *Queer Eye* actively seeks the opportunities to have a conversation, re-educate the straight heroes and, through them, also the viewers of the show.

The main message about identity that is presented through the Fab 5’s conversations and responses is that everyone is fine just the way they are. This attitude directly undermines traditional ideas about femininity and masculinity. Since the Fab 5 and most of the heroes on the show are male, most of the show’s focus logically lies on masculine identity, but that is not to say female identity goes undiscussed. In the episodes about Jody and Jess, the concepts of femininity versus masculinity are discussed. In the episode with Jody Castellucci, Bobby says, “Everybody is a different point on the scales of masculinity and femininity. And whatever point you’re at on the scale is just fine.” With these words, Bobby questions the idea of gender as a fixed given. This is important to note because refusal to accept the preset gender dichotomy means refusing to accept toxic masculinity, one of heteronormativity’s most discussed side-effects. Toxic masculinity is a term first used by psychologist Shepherd Bliss in the 1980s. The term indicates that there exist clear, fixed social ideas about what makes one male or female and that one is expected to always conform to the characteristics of the male/female identity a person has been assigned at birth, even if those characteristics are harmful or “toxic”. Characteristics that Bliss defined as being “toxic” to traditional prefixed masculinity included “avoidance of emotional expression”, the “over-aspiration for physical, sexual and intellectual dominance” and the “systematic devaluation of women’s opinions, body and sense of self” (Bliss qtd. in Barr). In *Queer Eye*, much attention is put on challenging these preset standards for men. In the first episode of the series for instance, Karamo tells hero Tom how much they all love him. Tom starts crying and says, “Damn guys, you’re making me cry.” He is visibly embarrassed about crying, an act that goes against the principle of “avoidance of emotional expression”, as outlined by Bliss. Karamo tells Tom it is okay and the rest of the Fab 5 comfort him. Tom apologizes for his tears, but the Fab 5 refuse to accept that apology and start hugging Tom. The general idea that it is unacceptable for men to show emotions is therefore undermined by the continuous outpour of love Tom receives after, reluctantly, sharing his feelings.

Toxic masculinity is also challenged through the encouragement of self-care, both physically and mentally. Jonathan provides the heroes with tips and tricks for their looks and in some cases, he advises the men to wear makeup. In the episodes of Tom, Skyler, and Matt,

Jonathan advises them to use a green stick and foundation, to cover up the redness in their face, which will make them feel more confident. When he discusses this with Skyler Jay, he says, “Classically, make-up has been marketed towards women, but I know lots of men who are full of ingrown, who have a lot of discrepancies in their skin, that can be well-suited by just doing a little bit of makeup.” By proposing that men can benefit from makeup as well, Jonathan blurs the lines between masculinity and femininity. Such blurring of lines goes both ways. Not only is transman Skyler told that it is kay to be a bit more feminine, but homosexual Anthony ‘AJ’ Brown is also told he can be confident in being a bit more masculine. This last advice is given when it becomes clear that AJ’s homosexuality is an issue for him, because he does not see himself as the stereotypical feminine homosexual. Tan then tells him, “There is no right way or wrong way to be gay. There is no right or wrong way to come out. It’s your journey. Do it the way you want to do it.”

In short, the main message about identity coming from the Fab 5 is that you can be whoever you want to be. However, at the same time there is still some homonormativity present in the series. There are various instances throughout the series when members of the Fab 5 claim something to be true for the entire homosexual community. For example, in the first episode, Tan takes hero Tom Jackson shopping. Tan asks him whether he is nervous about “getting dressed by a gay”. Tom answers with, “Gay guys dress great”, to which Tan responds, “You know we do”. This suggests that, apparently, all gay men should know how to dress well. When they walk into Anthony Brown’s house for the first time, it is very messy and Bobby immediately exclaims: “What in gay hell, AJ?”, insinuating that all gay guys ought to have organized homes. In the episode about transman Skyler, his love for Todrick Hall, an American artist who is known for his homosexuality and gender fluidity, is an important subject of conversation. Tan says at one point, “I’m the worst gay of them all. I don’t even know who this Todrick person is”, as if not knowing every homosexual singer is somehow a crime. Through statements like these, an outline is sketched of some characteristics that are supposedly part of the ‘gay DNA’. Not only does this ‘gay DNA’ prescribe the way in which homosexuals should dress or behave, but also what they should aspire in life. This last element is illustrated in AJ’s episode. When AJ’s boyfriend is at the door after the make-better, Karamo, while watching the end-of-the-week video from the Fab 5 loft, exclaims, “Ooooh, your future hubby’s at the door!” This creates the idea that for gay relationships, like for heterosexual ones, there is only one next step to be taken and that is obtaining the ultimate goal of marriage. This presumption conforms to the heterosocial norms of society and restores, if only partially, the well-known social status quo of heteronormativity.

Another important factor in the idea of homonormativity, or: the general perception of homosexuality that is palatable for heteronormative society, is race. Most gay men who have been on television, whether they were fictional characters or real people, are white. *Queer Eye* undermines the racial idea about televised homosexuals being Caucasian by paying much attention to intersectional identities. This happens through the Fab 5 members Karamo Brown and Tan France, the first being African-American and the latter being a British Pakistani Muslim. Not only do they elaborate on their queer identity on the show, they also explicitly connect their sexuality to their racial and religious identities as well. In the episode about the disabled African-American man Wesley Hamilton, for example, Tan explains how difficult it was for him to be himself in his religious family, and says that he did not come out to some of his family members until *Queer Eye* aired for the first time. Some of the heroes that receive a make-over also exemplify that not all gay people are white. In the episode with Anthony 'AJ' Brown, an African-American homosexual, Karamo and AJ talk about the fact that AJ did not come out to his father before he died, because he felt that he needed to keep up a more traditional front. Karamo says that it hits home for him and expresses that it is difficult to be gay in the black community. AJ then says, "Yeah, we already have a few strikes against us". Through this conversation, focus is brought onto the fact that being an African-American homosexual means having to deal with multiple systems of oppression, namely those of racism and homophobia. Later, Karamo compliments AJ by saying, "You are the epitome of what it is to be a strong, beautiful black gay man." It is not only Karamo and Tan who point out intersectional elements in identities. The other Fab 5 members do it too. In the episode about Jess Gilbo, an African-American lesbian woman, Jonathan van Ness immediately mentions her intersectional identity at the beginning of the episode, "She is a young, black woman of color in an extremely red state. And she is a lesbian. She is an expert in overcoming adversity like I will never know." Jonathan explicitly focusses on the fact that Jess is in a difficult social position because of her gender, her sexuality and also the color of her skin. By naming these three factors explicitly and approaching the hero's struggle from all three points of view, queer identity becomes a much broader entity than just the white, fit, middle-class homosexual identity.

This attention to diversity does not just apply to aspects of the homosexual life, but also applies to differences within the larger LGBTQ+ community as a whole. In the episode about Skyler Jay, a transgendered man, it becomes clear that there are great differences within the LGBTQ+ community. This episode starts with the Fab 5 watching Skyler's top surgery, the surgery in which his breasts were removed. Later in the car, Karamo says, "That video [of the top surgery] was so eye-opening to me. So many gay men, lesbian, bisexual people, we don't

know truly what the trans experience is. We support our sisters and brothers, but we don't know everything they go through." Tan adds, "I think that probably, most straight people assume that because it's LGBTQ, we must all understand each other's plight. That couldn't be more wrong. I've never met a trans person before." Antoni concurs by remarking that, "In this car alone, our five stories are so completely different." The issue of LGBTQ+ diversity comes up again in the episode about Jess Gilbo. Its focus is put on the L in LGBTQ+. Jess is a young lesbian woman who, at first, identifies herself as "lumberjack lesbian". For her, being a lesbian is connected to dressing a certain way, namely in lumberjack style; with plaid shirts and big boots. As the episode progresses, the Fab 5, but especially Karamo, help her to find her own identity beyond the boundaries of her idea about lesbianity and address the fact that not every lesbian woman is the same and that therefore being a lesbian does not automatically mean having to look like a lumberjack. Karamo also discusses her African-American roots with her, which once more places focus on her intersectionality. Jess eventually adopts "I am a strong black lesbian woman" as her mantra, a phrase which is repeated many times throughout the episode.

4.2.2. Stereotypes of Homosexuality

Intersectionality is not just a useful tool to break the bonds of heteronormativity and broaden the scope of what homonormativity defines to be part of homosexuality. It is also a practical tool to break through the bonds that stereotypes hold on our perception of reality. When these bonds are broken the boundaries of stereotypes are blurred, which in turn causes contrast diminishment. An example of such blurring can be seen in Jonathan van Ness's femininity. One might say that he is a typical example of the stereotypical effeminate gay, because of his limp wrist, constant pop-culture references, and high-pitched screams. He also refers to many inanimate objects, such as a shampoo bottle or a t-shirt, as "she", which reinforces the veil of femininity surrounding him. Jonathan, but also the other members of the Fab 5 further emphasize the connection between femininity and homosexuality by referring to each other as queen, girl, or diva. However, Jonathan takes his effeminate homosexual performativity one step further by often wearing typically feminine clothing, such as heels, nail polish, skirts, and dresses. In the episode about Jody Castellucci, Jonathan teaches Jody how to walk in heels, while walking in heels perfectly and pretending to be on a catwalk himself. Since Jonathan has an otherwise masculine corporeal look, (long dark hair, a beard, and a big moustache) he creates a clash between stereotypical male and female gender/sexuality norms.



Figure 4. Jonathan van Ness in "From Hunter to Hunttee".

That is to say, Jonathan is a homosexual man in sometimes typically masculine, sometimes typically feminine clothing, who also has a beard and wears nail polish. His means of self-expression do not fit any traditional labels. That underscores the notion that no part of someone's identity defines them fully, but rather that all aspects are connected and intersected to create a unique whole.

This contrast diminishment of stereotypes is also visible in the display of sex in the series. Neither the stereotype of the sexless gay, nor the sex-crazed gay is present in *Queer Eye*. The gay men who appear in the series, both Fab 5 and heroes, often discuss their romantic relationships and refer to their boyfriends and husbands regularly. In the case of the Fab 5, their significant others are not visibly present in the series, so actual physical contact between them and their partners as such is not possible. However, matters are different for the heroes. In the case of Anthony 'AJ' Brown, the homosexual hero in season 1, his boyfriend is present in the episode and they are shown kissing and embracing.



Figure 5. Anthony and his boyfriend Andrej in "To Gay Or Not Too Gay".

Even though the members of the Fab 5 are not romantically involved with each other, they do have much physical interaction: they sometimes mimic a couple's behavior or admire each other's bodies.



Figure 6. Tan France and Antoni Porowski in "From Farm to Able".



Figure 7. The Fab 5 in "From Hunter to Hunttee".

In every episode, when there is a shift between one scene to the next, the fab 5 are shown together, individually, or in pairs, mostly while they are dancing or goofing around together, making physical contact more often than not. These transition sequences are similar to what is visible in the opening credits of the series, in which the Fab 5 are introduced separately, but at the end dance together.



Figure 8. The Fab 5 in the opening credits of *Queer Eye*.

Physical contact is also a notable part of the relationship between the Fab 5 and their heroes. The Fab 5 are often touching the heroes, be they gay or straight, by putting a hand on their shoulder or through their hair by means of investigation.

Because there is so much physicality between the gay men of the Fab 5, the concept of gay sex is visualized and normalized. This is a radical break with the original show. Whereas before, the audience saw either no image of sexuality at all or solely that of the stereotypical sex-crazed homosexual, in *Queer Eye*, a middle-ground has been found through the televising of physicality and the normalization of gay men touching each other. However, this being a reality show, the extend of the physicality has its limits. There are no scenes of homosexual couples in bed either before or after sex, as is often the case with heterosexual couples in fictional television. As far as a reality television show like *Queer Eye* can allow physicality, it portrays gay physicality without explicitly talking about it, which normalizes it even more. Had it been a frequent topic of discussion and had it been obviously used to educate the viewer, the physicality would have come across as unnatural, whereas now it does not.

A homosexual stereotype that is depicted in *Queer Eye* is the victimized gay stereotype. The personal stories shared in the series cause the stereotype of the victimized gay to be well-represented. The stereotype of the victimized gay is characterized by the notion that a

homosexual man is actively seen as different by society and has to overcome that burden (see chapter 2). Many of the stories told by the Fab 5, and also by the heroes, attribute to the idea that being queer in present-day society is hard and that it is something that one, along with one's family and friends, has to come to terms with. In the Anthony 'AJ' Brown episode, AJ explains that his biggest regret is not coming out to his father before he died. When AJ comes out to his stepmother at the end of the episode, he talks about how hard it has been for him and later he speaks of a weight that has been lifted off of his shoulders. In that same episode, Jonathan van Ness talks about his own experience growing up gay, "Did I get chased around with pitch forks? Definitely. Did it make me a really hard worker? For sure." This shows that his social environment made it hard for him to be himself, but that he eventually learned how to cope with it and that the experience made him even stronger. AJ appreciates all the stories the Fab 5 share with him and says, "Hearing all you guys' stories, hearing that you've been through the same thing and you guys survived". The word 'survived' here implies that the fab 5 have all suffered from adversity, but have managed to conquer it. Bobby Berk shares the story of his childhood in the episodes about Skyler Jay and Jess Gilbo. He relates to their personal hardship by telling them about his own youth and upbringing. He was adopted into a religious family and left home at 15, because he was scared of the responses to his coming out. Later, when he returned, his fear turned to have been legitimate and his family disowned him. Through telling this story in several episodes, this part of Bobby's life becomes an important aspect of his identity on the show. His queerness is irrefutably linked to adversity and this is true for all queer identities on the show, Fab 5 and heroes alike.

The stereotype of the heterosexual gay is not present throughout *Queer Eye*, although there are instances when the typical heterosexual male/female bond is shown. In total, there are 8 episodes that revolve around a female hero. In the other episodes, the gay men on the show do not intensely relate themselves to women, so in those episodes there is no possibility of creating the image of the heterosexual gay. In the 8 episodes in which they do stand in close contact with a woman, they relate to the women on a personal level. When talking about relationships for example, they compare their own homosexual relationships to that of the woman. This does not allow room for a heterosexual relationship reenactment. However, they do seem to admire a women's body in a heterosexual way. After the make-better of Jody Castellucci for instance, the Fab 5 marvel at her new looks with terms like "sexy", "hot", and focusing on "the girls" (her breasts). They talk about her in a heteronormative sexualized way, whereas they admire the men they make-better in a more friendly, non-sexual way, by saying

“you look handsome” or “you look so nice”. By talking about Jody in this fashion, the typical heterosexual male/female bond is restored to a certain degree.

Finally there is the matter of the superior gay. Fab 5 are presented as superior in opposition to the heroes they make-better. Generally, they try not to behave that way and position themselves as equals towards their heroes, but the premise of the show is that they tell the hero how to handle the grooming, fashion, food, interior design, and culture in their life. Remarks like, “That’s what an adult man’s bed looks like” or “Let’s look at how our baby did” when watching the ‘reveal’ from the Fab 5 loft drive this point firmly home. Especially when it comes to the LGBTQ+ heroes, the Fab 5 come across as superior. For example, in the episode with transgendered Skyler, Bobby Berk has many comments about the visibility of queer items, such as rainbow flags, being on display in the house. Bobby does not like this and says it is not necessary to have queer things all over the house in order to be queer, “Queer is a pillar in the house of Skyler, not the entire house.” In that same episode, Jonathan does not agree with the way Skyler wears his newly grown beard and says, “It’s a collaboration, I want you to be the best you you can be, but I also don’t want you to look like a leprechaun.” Jonathan is implying that he wants Skyler’s approval before removing the beard, but Skyler is not genuinely in the position to say no after the leprechaun comment. However, when helping the heroes, the Fab 5 also know their limitations. In the Wesley Hamilton episode, Jonathan invites a special hairdresser to take care of Wesley’s afro-textured hair, because he cannot do that as well himself. In the Jody Castellucci episode, Karamo wants Jody to be more in touch with other females, because she has always been surrounded by men, so he arranges for her to go to a group meeting with women. He acknowledges the fact that he cannot facilitate that bonding on his own and finds help elsewhere. The fact that the Fab 5 are willing to call in help when necessary, reduces the notion of their perceived superiority.

Even so, the sense of the Fab 5’s superiority also seeps through in their sense of consumerism. In her article *The New Spiritual Consumerism*, Amanda Hess explains the role of consumerism in *Queer Eye*. “The makeover is styled as an almost spiritual conversion. It’s the meaning of life as divined through upgraded consumer choices.” By buying new self-care products and furniture, the hero will be able to live a happy and fulfilling life, but they do not always have the means to do that. She continues:

The trouble is that when “Queer Eye” offers these comforts, the show implies that its subjects have previously lacked them because of some personal failure. They have been insufficiently confident, skilled, self-aware, dedicated or emotionally vulnerable. The spiritual conversion of the show occurs when the subject pledges a personal commitment to maintaining a new lifestyle going forward. But what these people need is not a new perspective. They need money, and they need time, which is money.
(Hess)

By ignoring the financial issues the heroes may be struggling with, *Queer Eye* creates the image that all heroes were always able to afford their improved lifestyle, they just did not want to. The ease with which the series creates the assumption that from now on everything will be different and that the heroes will be able purchase all these life-altering products, lacks insight into class-diversity and the Fab 5 seem ignorant to this form of financial variety. Such snobbishness attributes to the idea of superior gay.

In short, the representation of homosexuality in *Queer Eye* is complex. There are no clearly distinguished stereotypes present on the show and explicitly discussing misunderstandings or questions about homosexuality, the LGBTQ+ community, and also gender causes the structural concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity to be undermined. The gay men in *Queer Eye* are physically interactive, which gives them sexual agency and positive power over their own life choices. However, by sharing personal stories about their relationships and their past, the gay men educate and inform their audience, but at the same time also create the image of victimized gay, steeped in negativity because the majority of their stories entail aspects of overcoming the burden that is coming out to the family and not being accepted by society.

5. Discussion

The original *QEftSG* was new for its time. There had been no fictional television show with gay men in the majority, let alone actual gay men in a reality series. At a time when same-sex marriage was not legal, the genesis of this television series was groundbreaking. As for the time in which the renaissance *Queer Eye* is produced, there have been shifts in society when it comes to views of homosexuality. Same-sex marriage has been legalized and more and more attention is brought to the LGBTQ+ community. This called for an adapted representation of homosexuality. Even though the format mainly remained the same, there are many differences in the way homosexuality is represented and thus a different message about homosexuality is sent to the viewer. *Queer Eye* moves beyond superficiality and provides a multidimensional representation of male homosexuality and is therefore able to move into Clark's fourth stage of representation, namely respect, whereas *QEftSG* remains in the third stage; regulation.

The greatest similarity between both shows is the presence of the image of the superior gay. In *QEftSG* as well as *Queer Eye*, this stereotype is constructed mostly through consumerism. In both series, the financial circumstances, and thus class, of the make-better candidates are completely ignored and the idea that happiness can be bought through expensive products is reinforced in every episode. Since the Fab 5 do not seem to be bothered with the question whether the candidate in question can actually afford all this to keep up his new and improved lifestyle, their high-class attitude towards the financially less fortunate comes across as superior.

However, the image of superhero gay that was present in *QEftSG* is no longer present in *Queer Eye*. The original Fab 5 were displayed as heroes through their profession, the new Fab 5 are all-round figures. In both series the Fab 5 are called in for help on the basis of their expertise. Branchik's definition of the third stage of representation is 'cutting edge', because gay men are portrayed as cutting edge leaders in terms of fashion and design (see chapter 1). When using that definition, it can be said that both series are still in stage three, because the Fab 5's main objective is to positively influence the candidate's life by using their knowledge about grooming, fashion, design, food, and culture. Their 'cutting edge' knowledge is what helps the candidate. The main difference is that, in *QEftSG*, this is the Fab 5's main asset and other aspects of their personalities are not presented; whereas in *Queer Eye*, the Fab 5's personalities are their main strengths and because much of the focus goes out to aspects other than their field of expertise, the representation is able to move beyond just their 'cutting edge-

ness'. This is visible in the activities that the Fab 5 undertake with the candidates. In *QEftSG*, for example, food expert Ted would teach the candidate about cooking and kitchen utensils, but did not discuss any other elements related to eating. In *Queer Eye* however, food expert Antoni teaches the candidates about cooking, but at the same time places emphasis on the importance of spending time together in the kitchen. The focus of the cooking lesson is not on the preparation of the meal, Antoni's expertise, but on the importance of a healthy diet and family-time spent in the kitchen. Antoni's role is not to, like Ted did, pass on his cutting edge knowledge, but to help the candidate realize what food and cooking could mean for them personally.

The most important difference presented in the series is that in *QEftSG* the concept of homosexuality is presented as static and that *Queer Eye* portrays homosexuality in particular, but identity in general, as a fluid concept. This starts with the division of entertainment and politics in both series. *Queer Eye*, by explicitly putting focus on the political aspect of the series, namely striving for tolerance and painting red states pink, creates the opportunity for the Fab 5 to share personal stories, to educate their heroes and thus the viewers. The main purpose of the show is to entertain, but that does not eliminate a political agenda in the process. In *QEftSG*, the emphasis is merely on entertainment and presenting a fast and funny show. No space is created for political messages. This idea is enforced by the locations where the shows take place. The liberal city of New York in *QEftSG*, on the one hand, and the Southern, red, states of Kansas, Missouri, and Georgia in *Queer Eye*, on the other hand. By moving *Queer Eye* to traditionally Republican states and opening up the conversation about alternative lifestyles, the lines between an entertaining show and a political conversation are blurred.

Another way in which queer identity is fluidified in *Queer Eye* is through moving beyond the strict confinements of homosexual stereotypes by focusing on individual identity. As is discussed in chapter 2, Richard Dyer states that the role of stereotypes is to undermine the complexity of the minority presented by limiting their identity. This creates a sense of otherness. At the time *QEftSG* was produced, the image of gay identity is kept simple and shallow for safety reasons. The American public was not used to in-depth homosexual identity on television and by adhering to stereotypes, gay identity remained safe and did not become threatening to society's status quo. That stereotyping happens in *QEftSG*, for example, by the focus that is put on Carson Kressley. Kressley fits the idea of the effeminate gay, because of his flamboyance, humor, and limp wrist. He is the most present member of the original Fab 5 and consequently this idea of the effeminate gay is strongly present. No other aspects of his personality are shown or explicitly discussed in the series. The same goes for the other Fab 5 members. There is no

room for personal identity. The fact that their personal lives are not discussed also enhances the image of the sexless gay. The Fab 5 are not shown in a sexual way and because of the absence of serious conversations about their queer identity, the representation is not able to move beyond the third stage of regulation. Their queer identity is regulated through the stereotypes they adhere to. In *Queer Eye*, stereotypes are present at the surface. Jonathan van Ness appears like the typical effeminate gay at first, but as the series progresses, his identity becomes more complex and he delicately balances between masculinity and femininity. The same is true for the image of the sexless gay. The Fab 5 are not life partners, and are not shown in explicit sexual scenes, however they are very physical with one another, sometimes implying sexual behavior. In *QEftSG*, the only references to gay sex were made through jokes, always aimed at the straight guy, accentuating the binary division between homosexuality and heterosexuality. *Queer Eye* blurs these lines by showing physicality as well as talking about it, omitting the stereotypes of sexless and sex-crazed gays.

As has become apparent in chapter 2 and 3, *Queer Eye* provides much room for intersectional identities, which undermines the concept of homonormativity, whereas *QEftSG* does not allow an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is explicitly discussed in *Queer Eye*, for example in the Anthony Brown episode, in which his African-American roots in combination with his gay identity are the main topic of the episode. The same is true for Jess Gilbo; her motto “I am a strong black lesbian woman” is the core of her episode. In *QEftSG* as well as *Queer Eye*, the expert on culture is a gay man of color. In the original there is Jai Rodriguez, he is of Italian and Puerto-Rican descent and in *Queer Eye* this role belongs to African-American Karamo Brown. Even though the name of the field of expertise remained the same, the content of the activities differ greatly, which has significant consequences for the way in which these intersectional identities are represented within the larger framework of the individual series. In *QEftSG*, Jai is the only gay man of color and his expertise is not given as much attention as the others. In the episodes, an equal amount of time is spent on Carson taking the man shopping, Thom showing him around a furniture store, Ted explaining him how to cook a certain dish, and Kyan supervising him at a hair or beauty salon. However, Jai does not have a specific task within the make-better, and his contribution often consists of a minor chore, such as arranging tickets to a theater show for the make-better candidate and his partner. His actions get substantially less screen-time than the actions of the other Fab 5 members. His role is not nearly portrayed as serious and as significantly as the other experts’ roles. This, combined with the fact that he is the only Fab 5 member of color, sends the message that homosexuals of color are less worthy than the white gay men. In *Queer Eye*, African-American Karamo Brown

is not the only Fab 5 member of color; his fashion colleague Tan France is a Pakistani-British Muslim. More importantly, his role as 'Culture Vulture' is expanded to cover the area of mental well-being. With Brown's background in social work, his time with the heroes in *Queer Eye* is spent talking about personal issues, during which he does not fear to open up about personal, often race-related, experiences, and doing activities to work on said issues. For example, in the episode with disabled man Wesley Hamilton, Karamo talks to him about the shooting during which Wesley got paralyzed and later arranges a meeting between Wesley and the man who shot him in order for Wesley to be able to process the trauma. His screen time is comparable to that of the other experts and his share in the make-better process is taken very seriously by the heroes and the other Fab 5 members. Intersectionality is not diminished, but rather put on display and therefore a broader sense of what homosexuality can entail is represented.

The fact that the new Fab 5 share personal experiences, positive as well as negative, allows the representation of homosexuality to move into the stage of respect. Whereas the Fab 5's homosexuality in *QEstSG* is merely a given fact, the personal experiences of the Fab 5 in *Queer Eye* are discussed at length and much emphasis is placed on the hardship that is involved in many queer lives. They speak about overcoming prejudice and hate from family and society, but show that they are accepting of themselves and have overcome the adversity. Clark's definition of the fourth stage, respect, involves a well-rounded representation, including allowing negative sides of the minority's experiences to be discussed. As all these factors are present in *Queer Eye*, it is safe to conclude that the reboot has moved from the original's regulation stage of representation to the fourth and final stage of respect.

6. Conclusion

Representation is important. What is shown on television causes interaction between the sender (the producer) and the receiver (the audience). This is what Stuart Hall refers to as encoding and decoding. The way minorities are represented matters, because their visibility in the media influences their position within society. It is especially important for minorities that are not physically recognizable, such as the LGBTQ+ community, because they do not knowingly encounter their peers on a daily basis, which causes a sense of loneliness. According to Cedric Clark, there are four stages of minority representation. The first stage is non-recognition, which is when a minority is not represented at all. This was the case for homosexuals on American television until the 1960s, as a result of the Motion Picture Production Code, which did not allow homosexuality to be shown in movies.

This echoed through to television, and it was not until the 1960s that the first gay characters appeared on TV. That is when homosexual representation moved from Clark's non-recognition stage into the second stage, namely that of ridicule and, Blaine Branchik's addition, scorn. Extremely effeminate gay characters enabling comic relief and gay men as criminals, mostly sexual predators, formed the gay community's representation in the 1960s and early 1970s. Just when representation started to become more comprehensive, AIDS arose in the early 1980s, which kept the representation of homosexuals in the second stage until the early 1990s, namely as villainous AIDS carriers or helpless victims. Then, Americans' awareness shifted in terms of diversity, cultural relativism, and social fragmentation. This shift meant that race, gender, and sexualities began to matter. There was room for debate within American society and more and more American television shows featured lesbian and gay characters, albeit in supporting roles. This meant a general shift to Clark's third stage of representation, namely regulation. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the time had come for leading gay and lesbian characters in fictional television in *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*. The fact that there was more attention and room for LGBTQ+ characters did not mean that the representation was comprehensive. Homosexual representation was heavily limited and presented through heteronormative structures, which meant that homosexuality was oftentimes represented as 'different', whereas heterosexuality was presented as 'normal'. By using stereotypes, repeated images of a certain social group that are regularly seen as negative, this sense of 'othering' was emphasized. According to Richard Dryer, stereotypes are used to limit the fluidity of minority identities and underscore the sense of otherness.

It is the representation through stereotypes that keeps reality television series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in the third stage of representation for both Clark's definition, namely regulation, as well as Branchik's cutting edge description. In 2003, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* first aired on American television. The show was a big success and the fact that five real gay men were the lead of the show was groundbreaking in itself. However, the representation of homosexuality in *QEFTSG* was limited. It was a given that the men were gay, but their personal homosexual identities were not discussed. The focus of the show was on the straight guy who received a make-better and his personal life and heterosexual relationship were the center of the series. The Fab 5 were merely present in an alienated, superhero role. They came sweeping in, criticized the straight guy, and taught him about fashion, grooming, cooking, interior design, and culture, but never moved beyond the homosexual surface.

This changed when *Queer Eye* was rebooted by Netflix in 2018. The new series' purpose is stated explicitly at the beginning of the first episode, "The original show was fighting for tolerance, our fight is for acceptance". This fight for acceptance is fought by focusing on individual identity instead of superficiality. By providing personal stories of both queer and non-queer people, restrictions on sexuality and gender are discussed and blurred. Stereotypes are challenged through the focus on intersectionality. Much room is created for highlighting different aspects of one's identity; African-American, Muslim, Pakistani-British, transgender, lesbian, gay, male, female. This allows *Queer Eye* to move to the fourth stage of respect and provide the viewer with a well-rounded representation of homosexuality.

However, there is always room for improvement. The image of the victimized gay in *Queer Eye* could be toned down, by selecting queer heroes with issues other than their sexuality. In the episodes featuring queer people so far, the focus of their make-better has been on finding their identity and place within the larger LGBTQ+ community. This ensures that the message sent about being queer is always accompanied with a feeling of pity, since the focus is on overcoming obstacles within society. The representation could become even more well-rounded when heroes are selected, whose main issue is connected to, but not mainly focused on their queerness. The Fab 5 could also play an important role in this by discussing their personal successes. Most of the personal stories the Fab 5 share are connected to difficult phases in their lives. By also elaborating on success stories, the image of the victimized gay would be mitigated.

As this thesis has proven, representation is a complex concept and is subject to change due to ever-altering societal values. For future research it would be interesting, when sticking to the subject of homosexual representation, to zoom in on the difference between cable

television and streaming services. Since streaming services are still developing and expanding, it will be interesting to look at how that has influenced representation. Investigating the concept of representation within a broader scope of the LGBTQ+ community would also be interesting. This research has focused on the change of homosexual representation in reality television series, but it would be interesting to see how, for example, representation on American television has changed for lesbians or for transgendered people.

Appendix

Episode Guide *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*

Episode descriptions retrieved from IMDB:

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0358332/episodes?season=1&ref_=tt_eps_sn_1

Episode	Make-Better Candidate	Title
S01e01	Bryan Schepel	"Hair Today, Art Tomorrow: Brian S"
The Fab Five makeover artist Butch for his first art show.		
S01e21	Rob Munroe	"Meeting Mildred: Rob M."
The Fab Five help Rob arrange a dinner party for his Godmother and girlfriend to meet.		
S02e01	David and Brandon Bravo	"Taking on the Twins: Brandon & David B"
The Fab Five makeover twins.		
S02e05	Wayne Hollander	"Queer Eye for a Not-So-Straight Guy: Wayne H."
For the first time, the Fab Five makeover a gay guy.		
S03e06	Jim Boyd	"A Nude Scary Garcia: Jim B"
The Fab Five makeover a nudist.		
S03e19	Carlos Flores	"Clean up Zookeeper to turn him into a Keeper: Carlos F"
The Fab Five makeover a zoo keeper.		
S04e04	Jeff Burman	"Bringing Out the Inner Fab: Jeff B"
Jeff is gay man living in a straight man's world. The Fab Five step in to help one of their own embrace who he is, while remaining comfortable in his environment.		
S04e09	Miles Goff	"Trans-form this Trans-man: Miles G"
The Fab Five help 24 year old trans-gendered Miles, who just moved to Brooklyn from California, embrace his new life as a New York man, and celebrate his new life with a coming out party for all his friends and family.		
S05e03	Julie and Phil Dickler	"Julie & Phil D"
Teachers Phil, Julie and 7 year old son Harrison are not quite what you would call an average family. From their mullet and Jesus hairstyles, to their monster truck obsession, to Phil's huge collection of everything from animal skulls to toy aliens, this family enjoy being unique. But everything has its limit, and Julie feels her family have reached theirs.		
S05e10	Willy and Nathan Mosquera	"Like Father Like Son: Willy and Nathan M"
Queer Eye's final episode, 100 episodes and four years on air. The Fab 5 help father Willy and son Nathan.		

Episode Guide *Queer Eye*

Episode descriptions retrieved from IMDB:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7259746/episodes?season=1>

Episode	Hero	Title
S01e01	Tom Jackson	“You Can’t Fix Ugly”
A lonely dump-truck driver with a big ol' heart goes from "ugly" to unbelievable and learns how to reverse years of bad habits.		
S01e03	Anthony ‘AJ’ Brown	“To Gay Or Not Too Gay”
An emotional makeover helps the self-proclaimed "Straightest Gay Guy in Atlanta" come out to his stepmother and make peace with his past.		
S02e04	Jason Vodersing	“The Handyman Can”
A free-spirited Mr. Fix-It who lives for Burning Man makes big changes to prepare for a cross-country move. But his best friend doesn't want him to go.		
S02e05	Skyler Jay	“Sky’s The Limit”
The Fab Five help a transgender man who's recovering from top surgery throw a party to thank his friends who've shown unconditional love and support.		
S03e01	Jody Catellucci	“From Hunter to Hunttee”
She can hunt, fish and grow her own food. But this self-sufficient woman needs help when it comes to crafting a look that's both womanly and powerful.		
S0305	Jess Gilbo	“Black Girl Magic”
A young lesbian struggling with her identity opens her heart to let people in, only to discover she's much stronger than she realized.		
S04e02	Wesley Hamilton	“Disabled But Not Really”
A former bad boy who turned his life around after becoming paralyzed gets a wheelchair-accessible home and a new image to match his positive outlook.		
S04e08	Matt Morland	“Farm to Able”
A recently divorced farmer who's weathered hard times makes room for self-care and turns his barn into a chic farm-to-table dining space.		

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