

Papacharissi, Z., & Fernback, J. (2008). The aesthetic power of the Fab 5: Discursive themes of homonormativity in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 32(4), 348-367.

Synopsis

The authors discuss the reality television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* as a means of queer discourse. They argue that while this show creates positive implications for the overall promotion of queer society, it simultaneously produces negative representations of queer people because of the show's limiting nature. While *Queer Eye* stars five gay lead characters, its limiting nature results in an inability to accurately and thoroughly represent queer people. Ultimately, *Queer Eye* compromises and mutes the fab five's abilities, thoughts, and interests to keep the reality television show digestible and comfortable for the suggested heteronormative audience. In a more positive sense, the authors examine *Queer Eye* through the unique lens of overlapping homonormative and heteronormative realities. They point out that *Queer Eye*'s homosexually dominant power structure is rare, where five gay men fix-up one straight man. Conclusively, Papacharissi and Fernback agree that the potential impact of *Queer Eye* is compromised because the empowering homonormative contexts are frequently administered with heterosexual norms, in attempt to appeal to a wider audience and consumer-market.

Key Concepts

- **Habitus:** “a schema of “structuring structures” which reproduce the social order through “naturalized” modes of belief and action” (p. 3).
- **Gay Window Advertising:** “Recent advertising appeals to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual markets have been framed in the context of coded representations interpreted as gay by gay, lesbian, and bisexual readers, but not disruptive to straight audiences” (p. 5).
- **Homonormativity:** “[the cultural idea that] homosexuality is normal, unremarkable, and possible, and may also suggest that other sexualities are aberrant or distinctive” (p. 7).

Key Quotes

- “The show presents a cultural terrain in which the traditional power structure is reversed, and the heterosexual male functions as the minority” (p. 3).
- “Like gay window advertising, *Queer Eye* sustains popularity by overtly and covertly ‘winking’ to a sexually diverse audience, while resting on commodified portrayals of sexuality” (p. 5).
- “...show is compromised by the fact that it airs on a network catering to a narrow and educated demographic (Bravo) and that it focuses on Metropolitan East Coast areas that could be perceived as being more culturally diverse” (p. 17).

Essential Question

- Whose responsibility (Bravo as a network, *Queer Eye* as a television show, or neither party) is it to consider the effects of the distorted messages they are conveying about queer people, if in the end these messages increase subscriptions and promote the show more?