

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 series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. They examine the Fab 5, a group of five gay men hosts on the show, and they discuss the representations of gay characters through the 90s. They used Bourdieu's concept of the Habitus to analyze the series and argued that the series in some ways empowers gay characters and people; however, it also undermines that power as well. They argue that the series empowers gay people by having gay characters as the protagonists leading to greater representation, by reversing the traditional power structure, and by appealing to a wider and more diverse audience. Despite the series having some positive qualities, the authors explain that the series also has some negatives. They argue that it reinforces stereotypes of gayness, specifically through the men's specialties (fashion, decor, grooming, food and wine, culture), which are stereotypical realms in which gay men might be found. They also argue that the series reinforces normative understandings of gender and sexuality by placing emphasis on the men's physical appearance. They also noted that the series is apolitical, making it superficial and de-politicizing the gay identity through the series' focus on consumerism.

Key Concepts

- **Habitus** - "a schema of "structuring structures" which reproduce the social order through "naturalized" modes of belief and action" (Papacharissi, 350).
- **Heteronormativity** - "the discourses and practices by which homosexuality is constituted as the natural and compulsory norm, against which homosexuality is defined by binary, and hence, negative opposite" (Papacharissi, 354).
- **Homonormativity** - "presents homosexuality as normal, unremarkable, and possible, and may also suggest that other sexualities are aberrant or distinctive" (Papacharissi, 354).

Key Quotes

- "Homosexual activity is either excluded from the media mainstream, or when included, it is identified as the consequence of violence, dysfunctional social background, or mental disturbance, creating the cultural misconception that gay identity is created by and associate with these conditions" (Papacharissi, 354).
- "The Fab 5, despite the extensive makeover power they are allotted, are presented as asexual...to exaggerate flamboyance for comic relief...which is congruent with typical mainstream portrayals of homosexuality" (Papacharissi, 360).
- "All discomfort encountered is located within the zone of consumption, with the Fab 5 functioning as consumption navigators for the confused heterosexual" (Papacharissi, 364).

Essential Question

- Although the authors speak more generally about gay audiences, how might actual gay viewers feel empowered or not by the original series?