"THE (NOT SO) QUEER ART OF FLOPPING": MAKEOVER SHOWS AND

THE FORMATION OF NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTIVITY

A Master's Thesis

by

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DEDICATION

To all my fellow queers who fail stylishly, exceptionally, and unrepentantly

"Often we see queerness as a deprivation, but when I look at my life, I saw that queerness demanded an alternative innovation from me, I had to make alternative routes. It made me curious, it made me ask this is not enough for me because there's nothing here for me."

Ocean Vuong

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science in Marketing.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the integral part makeover shows play in the formation of neoliberal subjectivity. The hegemonic neoliberal ideology demands citizens to claim responsibility for the social welfare services and offerings that the states cease to provide. The idealized citizenship in this system is a self-enterprising, responsible, and autonomous one who has or strives to have self-esteem in order to become and remain the best version of oneself. The subjectivity neoliberalism (re)constructs and promotes can be seen in cultural products, too. Television, particularly makeover reality television, has an informative part in the formation of this subjectivity. The experts makeover shows employ portray and eventually teach the audience how to conduct themselves without the help -social welfare- the states are supposed to offer. Borrowing Michel Foucault's conceptualization of "governmentality", the conduct of conduct for the citizen, this research aims to reveal the neoliberal governmentality displayed in makeover shows through experts' tutorials of the idealized neoliberal lifestyle and consumership. While doing so, this thesis uses the American makeover reality show, Queer Eye as its context. In addition to drawing from the critical governmentality literature, the thesis uses Halberstam's low theory in order to provide an alternative understanding of success/failure that is beyond the binary neoliberal definition of these terms, and questions the possibility for a (queer) alternative way of being.

Keywords: Governmentality, Makeover Shows, Neoliberalism, Queerness, Self-Care

ÖZET

"KUİR BİR BAŞAR(AMA)MA":
BAŞTAN YARAT PROGRAMLARI VE NEOLİBERAL ÖZNELLİĞİN İNŞASI

Turan, Orçun
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Bu tez, baştan yarat programlarının, neoliberal öznelliğin inşasındaki oynadığı rolü incelemektedir. Hakim neoliberal ideoloji, bireylerin neoliberal kapitalizmden once sosyal refah devletleri tarafından karşılanan hizmetlerin yerine geçme sorumluluğunu üstlenmelerini mecbur kılar. Bu ideolojinin idealleştirdiği öznellik, girişimci, (kendinden) sorumlu, otonom özelliklerine sahiptir ve kendinin en iyi hali olmayı, bu hali muhafaza etmeyi bir görev bilir. Bahsedilen , neoliberalizm tarafından inşa edilen ve desteklenen bu öznellik, neoliberal ideoloji tarafından beslenen kültürel ürünlerde de gözlenebilir. Televizyonun, bilhassa baştan yarat programcılığının, bu öznelliğin inşasındaki rolü büyüktür. Bu tip programlarda görev alan uzmanlar, sosyal refah devleti desteği olmadan bireylerin kendilerini yönetmeleri için gerekli stratejileri, izleyici/tüketicilere gösterir ve nihayetinde öğretir. Michel Foucault'nun "yönetimsellik" kavramından faydalanan bu araştırma, baştan yarat programlarındaki uzmanların ideal neoliberal yaşam tarzı ve tüketiciliği öğretileriyle (yeniden) inşa ve temsil edilen neoliberal yönetimselliği inceleyip ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu tez, bunu yaparken, bir Amerika yapımı baştan yarat program olan Queer Eye'ı bağlamı olarak kullanmaktadır. Eleştirel yönetimsellik çalışma ve teorilerinden faydalanmanın yanı sıra, Halberstam'ın alçak teorisinden de faydalanan çalışma, neoliberalizmin ikili şekilde tanımladığı başarı/başarısızlık anlayışına alternative bir kuir varoluş imkanı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bakım, Baştan Yarat Programları, Kendilik, Kuir, Neoliberalizm, Yönetimsellik

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TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consumer research aims to make sense of consumers. It tries to demystify the various factors and processes that shape their minds, decisions, and behaviors. One vein of research under consumer culture theory (CCT) is "mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This research program constructs the consumer as agents influenced by mass-mediated ideologies in particular ways to utilize their market-mediated resources in order to find meanings in and build connections with market offerings. Thus, it privileges the individual agency, ability, and freedom to make sense of various complex messages conveyed by the actors in the market, particularly by the mass media. These phenomenological and identity-making processes have been the focal point of consumer research and CCT literature. The discursive ways of constructing various discourses that are products of different ideologies have been studied in detail, as well as the strategies used by consumers to (re)construct and perform their identities. The compass for the idealized consumership and citizenship is instilled and repeatedly portrayed by the hegemonic discourse where consumption becomes "the primary means for self-transformation" (Sender, 2012, 48).

Consumption becomes the arena in which the practices and performances of self-making take place. Various ideologies are at play in shaping these practices. The contemporary dominant ideology which shapes the economic, political, social, and cultural narratives is neoliberalism, which has been discussed in numerous contexts

under consumer research. There is not one singular neoliberalism in effect, and the definitions may vary depending on different points of view (Ong, 2006, 1). However, it is safe to assume that it becomes more present and powerful and extend its impact "spatially" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, 6). While neoliberalism can be defined in socio-economic terms, a Foucauldian take suggests that it is also "a mode of government" (Dean 1999; Foucault 1991). Because neoliberalism champions the reduction of social welfare and government intervention, it supports the idea of "governing at a distance" theorized by Rose (1999) that authorizes the citizens to eventually self-govern (Banet-Weiser, 2018, 30).

In order for the governments to manage governing-at-a-distance, various technologies of the self, as Foucault (1988) calls, have been developed so that the individuals are burdened with the work that is needed to be done whereas the state gets to do less. These technologies of the self allow the citizens to "govern [their own] soul[s]" (Rose, 1990) with "the nongovernmental means of government" (Cruikshank, 1999, 85) in a way that would ultimately yield to "a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (Martin et al. 1988, 18). The Foucauldian "cultivation of the self' is defined as "the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior" integral to our lifestyles, and is concerned with "procedures, practices and formulas" (McLaren, 2002, 73).

This particular formation of the self was mainly succeeded by emphasizing "privatization and personal responsibility" (Duggan, 2003, 14). This hegemonic ideology is "a mobile, calculated technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, 5)

that reconstructs the connection between the conductor and the conducted (Ong, 2006, 3).

Neoliberalism is an influential ideology because of its capability to produce these technologies that citizens would voluntarily internalize. They claim responsibility to work on themselves as if the self is a project that requires constant effort to adjust according to the ideal template imposed by neoliberal narratives. This "governmentality," which is defined as "the conduct of conduct" by Foucault (1991), is the neoliberal apparatus that manages to govern its citizens with minimum intervention and at the desired distance. This idealized "citizen-subject" constructed by the dominant ideology is personally responsible for their "self-mastery and self-fulfillment" (Rose, 1996; Sherman, 2008).

Two of the crucial tools of neoliberal governmentality are self-esteem and (self) empowerment (Rose, 1996; Cruikshank, 1999; Sherman, 2008; Banet-Weiser, 2018). The quest for self-esteem and empowerment is advocated by neoliberalism so that the substitutions and eliminations of the state institutions and agencies would be justified and not challenged (Sherman, 2008, 91). Self-esteem is "a specialized knowledge of … how to estimate, calculate, measure, evaluate, discipline, and judge our selves [sic]" under neoliberalism (Cruikshank, 1999, 89). This narrative advocates "confidence" as the justifier of investing in the self and the gateway to success (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The neoliberal system diminishes the sense of security and enhances and normalizes anxiety so that it is necessary to work on, invest in, manage, and improve the self (McGee, 2005, 12).

Due to their nature and the relatively lower production costs, reality shows have been prevalent on television and have become a prominent genre. Makeover shows are a sub-genre of reality shows where "the care and improvement of the self, family, and home" are depicted in the form of a before versus after narrative (Ouellette & Hay, 2008). In makeover shows, the host(s) or the people who have related expertise to the makeover meet the subjects in need of a makeover. They listen to the stories that lead them to their current situation, assess their level of consumership/citizenship, prescribe the necessary solutions, and help transform the subjects. A makeover show episode usually ends with revealing the now-transformed subject before their owners or loved ones. Throughout the episode, experts share their tacit knowledge and teach how to maintain the makeover so that the subject, and the vicariously-learning audience, would never end up failing to be proper consumers/citizens. The genre has been studied in various aspects and from different perspectives (Thompson & Mittell, 2013, Heller, 2006, 2007; Lewis, 2008; McCarthy, 2007; McGee, 2005; Mcmurria, 2008; Miller, 2008; Moseley, 2000; Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Redden, 2007, 2018; Sender, 2012, 2015; Weber, 2013) within feminist and critical neoliberal governmentality studies.

The makeover is not a recent concept. Its first known appearance was on the "satirical" Vanity Fair's issue published on October 27, 1860, on page 215 in its "Adornment" section. It referred to a fictional character named Miss Angelica Makeover who can transform her appearance and utilize "'art and culture' to pass 'for a fine woman'" (Miller, 2008, 586). The term showed up in women's magazines later on. Mademoiselle Magazine published the "first formal makeover of an 'average' reader" in 1936. Then, the makeover phenomenon became popular and has

dominated the popular culture and media, particularly in the last few decades (Miller, 2008, 586). The rise of reality television has defined celebrity, media, and "pop cultural landscape of the early millennium" (Redden, 2018, 399), even "constituted over 20 percent of primetime network programming since 2001" in the US (400).

"All things just keep getting better," proclaims the theme song of Netflix's Queer Eye as the members of the Fab 5 dance joyfully. They jump around, strut down, pose as their names and domains of expertise appear on screen one by one. In less than a minute, the opening credits convey the promise of Queer Eye: five jolly queer people with different backgrounds and prowess showing up to spread queer joy and make things better with their know-how, and just like the mechanics of the show, the theme song, and the credits manage to veil the labor and the politics that go into making things better. The tagline of the show declares it to be "more than a makeover. With its many different representations of masculinities/femininities, lifestyle pedagogies, therapeutic and transforming prescriptions of consumption, Netflix's Queer Eye warrants further research.

This research aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of Queer Eye and the ways it constructs a discourse of self-care practices and its configuration of success and failure by applying critical theories of governmentality (Ouellette & Hay, 2008) to the particular consumer culture within which Queer Eye is embedded.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Self in Consumer Identity Projects and the Care of the Self

In order to understand consumer subjectivity and the self they construct, one should need to look at how consumers create these identities through consumption. Individuals have a complex sense of self, which has various levels and dimensions. Selfhood is the "ideas and feelings that [a person] has about [themselves] in relation to others in a socially determined frame of reference" (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, 14). These include (i) real (actual) self, "the way a person actually is"; (ii) self-image (subjective self), "the way a person sees himself"; (iii) ideal self (self-actualization), "the way he would like to be"; and (iv) looking-glass self, "the way [one] thinks others regard [them]" (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, 17). These dimensions are always in an ongoing conversation with each other since the perception (of oneself) is dynamic and ever-changing. The self becomes a site of negotiation along these dimensions, and one can manipulate aspects of the self-concept to enhance the "self". The authors further suggest that one can utilize it as a strategic tool. Through the enhancement of the self, one can also manipulate the way others perceive them. This assertion is relevant for marketers because consumers may buy a product for its promise to enhance their self-image" (Onkvisit & Shaw 1987, 15).

Therefore, consumption is a means to create self-identity (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). In consumer research, Belk (1988, 141) was among the first to suggest that possessions are "not only a part of self but also

instrumental to the development of self" and maintaining self-concept. Thus, the consumption of certain products and services can serve to maintain a consistent self-image and strategically build and project the desired image. As Belk (1988, 145) notes, possessions "symbolically extend self" and "allow us to convince ourselves (and perhaps others) that we can be a different person." Self-image is not innate or essential, rather constructed significantly through consumption.

Consumption is the main field in which individuals "[construct], [perform], and [contest]" their identities (Larsen & Patterson, 2018, 194). Through consumption, consumers engage in identity projects and seek ways to construct, enhance, transform, and maintain their individual and collective identities. In order to do so, they choose certain products, services, AND brands over others whose meanings they believe in aligning with their sense of self. This quest is a continuous and reflexive one in which individuals (re)construct their own narratives over their life spans with their consumption choices and socialization" (Hammack, 2008; Larsen & Patterson, 2018, 198). For consumers to be convinced in their abilities to construct and reconstruct their identities, they need to believe in their freedom in the marketplace in which they can practice choice.

The power of self-creation and transformation through choices made in the market has an ideological implication that highlights the consumer agency and equates consumption choices to "empowerment and emancipation" (Larsen & Patterson, 2018, 202). However, the structural power that the market holds interacts with the agents in the market, informs, shapes, and even dictates their decisions. The market necessitates consumers to become self-reflexive and enterprising subjects who

continuously monitor and regulate themselves. It requires them to put effort and work upon the selves they (re)construct, claim autonomy, identify with qualities such as responsible, productive, rational, self-reliant, self-regulating (Du Gay, 1996, 56-60). This enterprise assigns "a form of rule that is intrinsically 'ethical' in Foucault's sense of the term" (Du Gay, 1996, 60). Hence, making the right choice becomes an ethical responsibility in addition to the market's ascription of success to the choices made. When failure and success are decoded in a binary way and designed to be perceived as a direct consequence of having such qualities (Allen, 2014, 761), those who seemingly fail to make the right choices in the market are burdened with further pressure of getting blamed for the choices they made to be "individualized moral fault, a pathology, a problem of bad-choice, bad culture, a failure to be enterprising or to be reflexive" (Skeggs, 2004, 91).

In her book, A Burst of Light, fighting with liver cancer, Audre Lorde (1988) declares, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare". What Lorde -who was a self-described "Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet"- meant by self-care is not the same as the popularized and commercialized one especially on makeover reality shows. Instead, it was feminist, queer, and anti-racist. In contrast to the ideas propagated by neoliberalism, Lorde's self-care was about a sense of collectivity. Marketers, brands, and tastemakers have appropriated the term to utilize the self-care discourse in order to market many products, services, and practices. Scholars and journalists like Sara Ahmed (feministkilljoys, 2014) and Laurie Penny (The Baffler, 2018) criticized the appropriation and pacification of self-care; however, consumer researchers are yet to systematically study the phenomenon and the rise of the self-care market.

2.2. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is the idea that believes in economic liberalism and free-market capitalism. It suggests the interfering regulations by governments would be inefficient and ineffective compared to freely acting market dynamics. Here, the term liberalism is not a governmental doctrine or practice as opposed to conservatism. Instead, it is a critique of the government itself that means governing less and at a distance (Barry, Osborne, Rose, 1996; Sender, 2006). Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as follows:

"Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2).

Therefore, neoliberalism supports to minimize state interventions once the state creates the markets, in addition to its duties such as guaranteeing "quality and integrity of money", "[setting] up military, defense, police, legal structures", securing "private property rights", and guaranteeing "the proper functioning of markets" (Harvey, 2005, 2).

By the 20s and 30s, the laissez-faire doctrine proved unsuccessful and was marked

By the 1920s and 1930s, the laissez-faire doctrine proved unsuccessful and was marked by failures such as the Great Depression. This failure caused the switch to more centralized and collective planning attempts that led to Nazi Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Birch, 2015, 573). The neoliberal theory emerged as a response to the economic failures both in Europe and the United States. Burchell cites the German school Ordoliberalen and the Chicago school of economic liberalism as the emergence of this modern economic liberalism (Burchell, 1993, 270). The German School claimed that National Socialism was an "inevitable outcome of a series of anti-liberal policies" (Burchell, 1993, 270). These policies, such as Keynesianism in the United States in response to the Great Depression in the 1930s, were opposed by the Chicago School. The neoliberal doctrine merged the neo-classical economic principle of the free market and Adam Smith's idea of the "hidden hand of the market" (Harvey, 2005, 20-21).

In Europe, a self-identified liberal group of economists, philosophers, and historians that was "gathered around … Austrian political philosopher Friedrich von Hayek" formed the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 and received financial and political support (Harvey, 2005, 20-21). This group was considered "the epicenter of the neoliberal movement, according to some scholars" and acted as the "intellectual center" that the neoliberal movement lacked (Birch, 2015, 572-74). They sought ways to reconfigure and rework the state, as they believed the state and its interventions were neither redundant nor unwanted. In fact, this reconfiguration needed the state to ensure the rule of law and maintain a free market. According to Hayek, the society as a whole should not owe any individual anything, and the individuals would be happier as long as they claim responsibility for their fortunes "through markets" which

"[unleashes] the spirit of competitive enterprise that supposedly creates wealth" (Redden, 2018, 402). The Mont Pelerin Society had an international mix of members and helped generate other organizations and groups. In the following decades, in the United States, wealthy corporate heads and individuals notably supported the neoliberal doctrine in order to avoid possible state intervention and preserve their power.

In the 1980s, combined with populism, the neoliberal doctrine heavily informed Thatcherism in the UK and Reaganism in the US (Birch, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Mcmurria, 2008). Their policies involved privatization, marketization of public services and welfare, tax reduction, re-regulation, and championed minimum state intervention, which was practically deregulation (Jessop, 2016). The dismantling and reconfiguration of the welfare state under neoliberalism occurred "in order to enhance corporate profit rate" (Duggan, 2003, XI). Since the welfare state is withdrawn, the responsibility is individualized (Houghton, 2019). Neoliberalism has resulted in the "restoration of elite economic power through accumulation by dispossession" as "[w]ealth and entitlements were redistributed from the majority population to the rich" who hold the needed resources to "capitalize on market opportunities that public policies increasingly favor" (Redden, 2018, 401).

Although neoliberalism's economic interventions exist, dissimilar to a laissez-faire approach, they are kept to a minimum. Unlike former forms of laissez-faire liberalism, According to Foucault in The Birth of Biopolitics, neoliberalism tries to provide new ways to "reregulate the social to construct new market relations at every opportunity" (Redden, 2018, 404). Pointing out to the Chicago School's modeling

"all social relations and human action on neoliberal conceptions of markets",
Foucault argues the construction of self-responsible agents and neoliberalism
"[constitute] a shift away from forms of power that directly seek to shape the
behavior of individuals" (Redden, 2018, 404). It has moved from "national
government to public-private governance and entrepreneurial citizenship" (Bockman,
2013, 15).

Neoliberalism trusts in the capabilities and possession of knowledge of the private
parties engaging in the markets, compared to the states. Moreover, the states can be
influenced and become biased by the "powerful interest groups" that would disturb
the markets' efficient and effective functioning (Harvey, 2005, 2). Harvey (as cited in
Redden, 2018) states neoliberalism is "a class project designed to restore the incomes
and rates of return to capital owned by economic elites whose share of wealth was
threatened by redistributive Keynesian social democratic capitalism" (41). Therefore,
neoliberalism supports entrepreneurial individuals in a free, deregulated, and
privatized market practicing their agencies and freedom to choose. In this system, the
state's role is limited to establishing structures and legal organizations such as
military and police to ensure private property rights and facilitate a well-functioning
free market (Harvey, 2005, 2).

Neoliberalism is not an idea that only concerns the economies and economic
behavior of individuals. Because it limits state intervention and heavily relies on the
citizens' skills and "entrepreneurial" know-how, it is a system that diffuses the
everyday lives of the citizens. As Birch (2015) states, a definition for neoliberalism

that is unanimous among scholars is "the extension and installation of competitive markets into all areas of life" (572).

Neoliberalism proves to be omnipresent, as "[it] appears to be everywhere and everywhere appears to be neoliberal" (Clarke, 2007; 2008). In addition to the UK and US, from the post-Soviet states to traditionally social democracies, almost every state has embraced a version of neoliberalism, either voluntarily or responsively (Harvey, 2005). The 1990s is the decade for the fortification of neoliberalism as "successive governments across the political spectrum had endorsed related policies" and "the fall of communism signaled the apparent end of alternatives internationally" (Redden, 2018, 405). Neoliberalism is such a dominant ideology that it is almost unfathomable to consider any "political formations, discourses, ideologies and projects [that] are not neoliberal" (Clarke, 2007). Neoliberalism is hegemonic and universal because it is observed worldwide and able to operate and organize our practices, processes, discourses, and institutions (Clarke, 2008; Harvey, 2005). In fact, it is so embedded in our thinking that it neoliberalizes our way of thinking and "common-sense".

Neoliberalism aims to create individuals who believe they have agency and autonomy in authoring their own fortunes and biographies. It necessitates an exceptionally active and reflexive subjectivity. By ethically redefining its citizen as active through "a whole array of programmes", neoliberalism "train[s] them [in order] to equip them with the skills of self-promotion, counseling to restore their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, programmes of empowerment to enable them to assume their rightful place as the self-actualizing and demanding subjects" (Rose,

1996, 60). This active citizenship emphasizes subjects' self-responsibility and through the "respecification of the ethics of personhood" (Rose, 1996, 60) idealizes self-maintenance of self-governing as an ethical duty to one's self, shifting the welfare rationale to a self-enterprising one.

Due to the very mechanics of neoliberalism, subjects' "self-responsibility and self-fulfilling aspirations [get] deformed by the dependency culture, [their] efforts at self-advancement [are] frustrated for so long that they suffer from 'learned helplessness', [and their] self-esteem [are] destroyed" in the end (Rose, 1996, 59). Neoliberalism first obliges its citizens to actively work on themselves to become content with how they govern themselves, then makes it almost impossible to fulfill such expectations and keeps them in a loop of helplessness and low self-esteem. It veils the fact that citizens' low self-esteem is a direct consequence of the very stressful conditions neoliberalism itself creates and frames such failing and lack of self-esteem as a moral failing (Sender, 2006, 144). One can argue that "there is nothing personal about self-esteem" (Cruikshank, 1993, 328). Instead, it is "a specialized knowledge of how to esteem our selves, to estimate, calculate, measure, evaluate, discipline, and to judge our selves" (Cruikshank, 1993, 329). Hence, in a Foucauldian sense, it is a technology of self (Sender & Sullivan, 2008, 581). However, self-esteem (trap) does not merely provide a positive outlook on life. However, it becomes an impossible neoliberal demand to meet, which requires constant self-monitoring and self-assessment, then proper consumption to adjust accordingly. Moreover, when consumption equals positive changes and self-correction and where it is not simply possible to remain content, this system of governing (re)generates and reinforces the market and its commands. As new forms of failings emerge due to the ever-changing

circumstances of neoliberal life, new forms of remedies produced and offered by the market(s) keep emerging and expand the market in response.

In taking on Foucault's homo oeconomicus, Dilts (2011) states a shift from and transformation of classical liberalism to neoliberalism. Where the classical rational economic man pursues his interest, the neoliberal one becomes a person who "responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment" (Foucault, 2008).

Dilts (2011) suggests that homo oeconomicus is "a key term of Foucault's reading of neoliberalism as a governmental rationality" (131). He suggests the neoliberal human capital theories informed Foucault's move toward an analysis of subjectivity. These theories consider labor "an activity chosen from amongst substitutes" and separate labor from the production of a specific commodity that can be purchased in the market. In doing so, the wage is reconsidered as income, a return on a choice over other alternatives. This choice made by the laborer repositions the laborer as an "entrepreneur of themselves", not a "partner of exchange" (Dilts, 2011, 136).

The neoliberal self, in this perspective, produces while consuming. More specifically, productive consumption is "enterprise activity by which the individual, precisely on the basis of the capital he has at his disposal, will produce something that will be his own satisfaction" (Foucault, 2008, 226). Individuals, according to Dilts (2011), "invest in themselves through their consumption choices, conceiving of

themselves in a future-oriented way, sacrificing something now (in the form of opportunity cost) for a return in the future, i.e., treating themselves as capital in the classic sense" (137). The choices, the activities and practices of the subject(s), and their acquiring and accumulating skills and qualities help create a neoliberal subjectivity. The care of the self is a technology and practice to create subjectivity and is an ethical activity to conduct. In consumer research, Thompson and Hirschman (1995) study "socialized bodies" as discursive and social constructions of body, mind, and self, and reveal the ways "the individual becomes his/her own agent of surveillance conforming to normative conventions even when not being actually observed by another" borrowing Foucault's disciplinary gaze (149).

2.3. Governmentality

This research uses the terms government and governmentality in a Foucauldian sense. For Michel Foucault, government means the "conduct of conduct", and the processes and ways of doing things that "shape, guide, correct and modify" how the individuals' conduct themselves and of others (Foucault 1991; Gordon 1991; Burchell, 1993; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Foucault introduces governmentality in the 1970s while investigating political power (Rose et al., 2006), as he sometimes refers to government as "a way in which power is exercised over individuals" (Burchell, 1993). Governmentality "render[s] neoliberalism visible in new ways" (Rose et al., 2006, 97); therefore, it is crucial to understand how neoliberalism functions.

For the neoliberal systems to function well, with minimum state intervention and the expectation for entrepreneurial citizens, citizens need to conduct themselves well and

16

in a rational way, and take responsibility for the things covered by the states' duties before (Burchell, 1993, 271). The rationale of neoliberal systems requires autonomous individuals who embrace entrepreneurial characteristics and ask them to act as business entities that aim for efficiency and effectiveness in their conduct.

Neoliberalism supports an entrepreneurial culture that is free, individualized, and highly competitive. Individuals are asked to claim active involvement in the conduct incorporated into consumers' everyday lives because the state no longer handles the conduct. Although the systems describe this involvement as liberatory, there is a certain price the citizens have to pay to practice such freedom. Governmentality serves a purpose and carries particular objectives. Neoliberalism does not let individuals be by limiting the interventions by the government agencies. Governments do not cease to govern under neoliberalism, but they govern less and "at a distance" (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996). Therefore, it is not "a dismantling of government, but is a technique of governing" (Brown, 2005, 44). There is an expected outcome from the individual conduct; therefore, now-autonomized, actively-involved individuals need to be responsible for carrying out the conduct as well as reaching the expected outcome "in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action" (Burchell, 1993). Neoliberalism, therefore, "[assumes] … the importance of governing individuals by giving them the capacity to govern themselves" (Foster, 2016).

In order for the process of responsibilization to work, the individuals need to internalize the need to self-monitor and self-correct themselves. Miller's identification of "technologies of the self" (as cited in Sender, 2006) states these

technologies are a set of strategies to govern individuals at a distance. Miller (1993) posits responsible citizens apply these strategies to themselves in order to conduct themselves and transform their conditions "'into those of a more autonomous sense of happiness' (p. xiv)" (Sender, 2006). In other words, governmentality under neoliberal regimes raises individuals who can take care of themselves, govern themselves, and do not need to be governed by others. One of the main tools needed for such individuals is self-reflexivity so that they would be able to closely audit themselves and their daily lives and adjust any deviation from the ideal. The contemporary neoliberal ideology is "the bipartisan effort to 'reinvent' government (particularly in the United States) and to remodel the welfare state through dispersed networks of privatization and self-responsibilization" (Ouellette & Hay 2008, 473).

The current neoliberal regime privatized the welfare services and the citizens' problems. This works on many different levels: it decreases the liability and possible spending for the state and cultivates the entrepreneurial culture that would then create its own market. The individuals' well-being is now sought after and provided by themselves in the marketplace; hence it is commodified.

2.4. Governmentality in Makeover Shows

Reality television is a "neoliberal televisual form" that has advanced simultaneously to "the normalization of neoliberal common sense" (Redden, 2018, 405). The rise of makeover shows is also a byproduct of the dominant neoliberal ideology and governmentality notion. Notably, in the context of the United States in which the government is "reinvented" as a "neoliberal capitalist democrac[y]" (Ouellette &

Hay, 2008, 471; Ouellette, 2014, 93), makeover shows become an apparatus for raising responsible and proactive consumer-citizens from the audience.

Consuming this genre has a much more practical influence than providing "passive leisure", but within the neoliberal culture, they portray the idealized versions of "practice[s] that influence how people relate to objects and what they do with them" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, 912). These shows do not explicitly spread the neoliberal ideology per se; however, they provide a platform for portraying "the enactment of participatory games and lifestyle tutorials" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 472).

Providing a platform for making over people's health, outlook, or well-being, the genre echoes the neoliberal rationale of governing. By representing the blueprint of a succeeding individual, makeover shows depict the ideal way of living in a world where the markets provide endless options to individuals who continuously have to make decisions daily. In addition to mediating the options and decisions for consumers by representing the right choices and ways of consumption, the marketplace also informs the prescription to the problems it creates. The shows depict makeoverees as people who fail to make rational, informed, and beneficial (consumption) decisions, resulting in deteriorating personal, social, and professional lives.

The makeover transformation is only possible when individuals learn how to consume and make rational decisions for their lives properly. Transformation through consumption is in line with "other textual forms of consumer culture which

symbolically assign commodities an exaggerated capacity to improve individuals' lives" (Redden, 2008, 486).

Makeover shows establish causality between the unsuccessful citizenship/consumership and the personal failings of the individual and weave compelling personal narratives that the audience would invest. It is worth noting that "the makeover genre … is arguably the most consumption-friendly genre on television" (Gamson, 2005). What these shows arbitrarily conceal is the structural and systemic factors in play that cause unsuccessful citizenship/consumership in the first place (Wood & Skeggs, 2004; Press, 2011). The makeover reality shows privatize the makeoverees' problems by using such narratives that depict these problems as personal failure and negligence. The shows usually represent makeoverees as people who are careless, lazy, unambitious, indifferent, or ignorant. The structural determinants that are in effect are usually not mentioned and ignored. The makeoverees are expected to take full responsibility for losing control of their lives and correcting their mistakes. The makeover shows represent and promote an idealized person who proactively monitors their life, detects any imperfections, and takes corrective actions when needed all by themselves.

Moreover, the shows promise mobility in social position with the correct way of consuming as prescribed (Skeggs et al., 2008). Because of the causal relationship between the lousy consumership and personal failings, they assume, the hope of overcoming any obstacles through correct consumption is legitimized. Since the transformation is achieved through choices, makeover shows promote the idea that the individual has the freedom to make such choices. This assured freedom is a

matter of choice to practice or not. The ideal individual is expected to be aware of the freedom they hold, the alternatives they have, and expected to make rational choices that would facilitate self-transformation and maintenance.

Citing Bratich's idea of powers of transformation, Redden likens the premise of makeover shows to fairy tales that are constructed via a narrative and are "inherently optimistic" (Redden, 2008, 485). In order for the makeover shows to distill the neoliberal sensibilities and function well to create a neoliberal subjectivity, the shows "[produce] and [require]" the nemesis of this "demands self-disciplined, self-directed, willing [citizen]" who is seemingly failing (Sender & Sullivan, 2008, 580). Then, they teach that "through means of elective consumption", one can improve their "[fortune] in a market society" (Redden, 2018, 405). In the end, the representation of the makeoverees who manage to overcome all the obstacles thrown in their ways by working hard enough and learning how to self-govern, leading to proper consumption, "legitimates the neoliberal idea that anyone can make it, regardless of socio-economic resources" (Redden, 2018, 408).

The process of self-transformation and self-maintenance on makeover shows is a matter of personal ethics in the absence of reliable social welfare. By portraying the makeovers that require a transformation done by a self-enterprising and responsible subject who actively works for the makeover, these shows provide "technologies of the self" for both the makeoverees and the audience that can be utilized in order to "engineer better, more fulfilling lives, including "responsibilization" … and the internalization of surveillance (Sender, 2006, 142). By simply watching the shows, we, the audience, participate in the naturalization of surveillance (Couldry, 2008, 9).

This process assigns people as "managers of their own affairs" who need to act as if they operate as enterprises, responding and adapting to the markets' ever-changing conditions and neoliberal way of living in their everyday lives (Redden, 2008, 486). The shows represent an ideal person who is expected to monitor, regulate, and fine-tune themselves when necessary, using consumption choices and constantly checking an internal compass. A sense of ethical responsibility of oneself informs this ongoing process. Hence, makeover shows explicitly and implicitly convey that the transformation, care, and maintenance of the self is an autonomous and individualistic project, echoing very similar neoliberal behest. Therefore, the shows become the technologies of self-transformation and citizenship (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 472).

By watching the show, the audience is expected to engage with the content, internalize the messages conveyed, and become the active consumer/citizen who would learn from the pedagogies of self and particular lifestyles. They are expected to conduct their everyday lives that would fulfill the neoliberal project of producing reflexive citizens responsible for their upkeep (Redden, 2008). Since the predominant political and economic ideology and system is neoliberal capitalism, mass media, too, is a useful tool for propagating this system's ideas and reconstructing the discourse around it. McCracken (1986) posits that meaning existing in the culturally constituted world diffuses into the consumers' world in various ways, such as the fashion world and mass media. As Arnould and Thompson (2005) note in their historical account of the domain, consumer culture theory has been interested in "mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies" as a research program. Iqani (2018) states, "[a] large portion

of the media landscape … is comprised of material produced by corporate actors in the service of neoliberal economic goals" (275). The sort of self-care mass media cherishes is a product of neoliberal values and understanding. It tends to overlook the actual systematic and institutional reasons why one's life fails and leaves the work needed to be done to the individual themself.

Contemporary neoliberal discourse individualizes and privatizes social problems. The policies responding to the crisis in capitalism have (re)shaped and (re)emphasized a particular (neoliberal) subjectivity which prospers on "neoliberal consumption reproduc[ing] the neoliberal subject" (Datta & Chakraborty, 2018, 459). Neoliberal policies undermine the collective goals and atomize the individual, causing anxieties, insecurities, and uncertainties. Neoliberalism itself is a discourse that sets norms about success/failure, which has hegemonic ideas of aggressive individualism, sole trust in the market technologies resulting in efficiency, entrepreneurship both in individual and firm levels, "cut-throat competition" that leads to innovation. It also facilitates "the digitization and quantification of our everyday life". All of which have contributed to the formation of a neoliberal subject that continually invests in and works for "self-improvement to meet the goal of 'zero-imperfection' so that [they] can survive as a 'middle-class' person through the rough ride of our neoliberal times" (Datta & Chakraborty, 2018, 460-461). The ways neoliberalism commercializes and privatizes (self) care leave individuals responsible for fighting against the anxieties, insecurities, and uncertainties it creates. What Datta and Chakraborty (2018) characterize as "therapeutic consumption culture" under neoliberalism is the reason self-care has become so prominent in the zeitgeist and

contemporary discourse. The consumption of self-care becomes a way for 'neoliberal selves' to self-govern and compensate for what is not offered by political institutions.

In particular, television has a vital part in forming and shaping ideal citizenship/consumership/subjectivity. The cultural and informative power of television enables such diffusion. As the culture industries have grown, the neoliberal rationale of governmentality has been placed "within the cultural economy of serial entertainment and advertising" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 471). Makeover reality shows can be considered the "quintessential technology of citizenship of our age" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 472). These shows have the social currency in the neoliberal age, where the importance of self-responsibility and self-enterprise as ethics of the ideal subjectivity is continuously conveyed. The makeover shows act as the "civic laboratories" for experimenting and assessing the neoliberal subjects' self-governance that is also informative and training for the audience. They also "[coordinate] non-state resources (money, expertise, outreach) for achieving the ethic of self-sufficient citizenship" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 472). What the welfare state would consider public services are weaved into the private everyday life practices and "privatized networks of self-care" on makeover reality shows where "lifestyle governance and everyday regimes of self-care" is televised as a form of technology of education and governance (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 474).

Lewis (2007) criticizes this phenomenon and claims "[c]entral to the makeover-oriented culture of late modernity is the idea that we as individuals can be reduced down to a mappable set of "problems" that can be addressed through recourse to various types of expertise, and in turn, can be made "better" through the makeover

process" (287). Makeoverees and the audience go on a journey in which the makeoverees' lives are self-making "projects". Moreover, the assumption in self-responsibilization of maintenance and betterment is that all consumers have the equal capability and "access to cultural resources for self-making" which is a context and structure blind idea that neoliberal discourses often employ (Skeggs, 2004; Larsen and Patterson, 2018).

2.5. Failure and Low Theory

Because the public services are privatized, and the governing of their everyday lives is now expected to be handled by the citizens themselves, neoliberal policies require citizens to be "the entrepreneur of himself or herself" (Gordon, 1991, 44). Therefore, it becomes an individual responsibility to maintain one's well-being and self-conduct. Because the individuals are believed to be free to choose rationally, they are considered to solely have the agency in "invent[ing] (and reinvent[ing]) their own life 'biographies'" (Lewis, 2008, 443). When one fails to keep up with the necessities of such policies and sensibilities, this failure is considered a personal one (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Sender, 2006). It means the individual cannot fulfill the ethical responsibility of taking care of themselves and that "failure is the failure of will" (Redden, 2018, 406). The representation of such failure is not different on makeover shows.

Not all parts of makeover TV are purely and inherently neoliberal. They do not always explicitly propagate neoliberalism. Nevertheless, with "the organizing effects of specific kinds of narrative" that is informed by the dominant discourse and

ideologies, makeover shows "neoliberalizes" cultural content and cultural practices represented on these shows which "have broader meanings, histories, and potentials" (Redden, 2018, 410). Therefore, a neoliberal reading of such cultural texts is not only possible but also necessary.

Makeover shows become a microcosm where failure is displayed publicly in order to construct neoliberal subjectivities so that such subjectivities can be performed and the wrongs can be righted. When the individuals fail to have a self-optimizing, responsible, entrepreneurial subjectivity that is up to par and acceptable in accordance to the idealized self in the dominant discourse, the "makeover's ethic of self-made welfare" is that these people have no one to blame but themselves (Redden, 2018, 406).

Jack Halberstam states that "failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well" (Halberstam, 2011, 3). Because the hegemonic discourses and norms are inherently heteronormative, queerness essentially has "failure" in its codes. Under a system where individuals are responsible for their own well-being and success and where anything is possible if one puts enough effort regardless of any structural inequalities, "toxic positivity of contemporary life" puts individuals under a magnificent pressure of having the right attitude and trying hard until fulfilling the norms and expectations that code success –hence failure- in a peculiar way. The same approach applies to the neoliberal ideology and its agenda as well. Skeggs (2014) (as cited in Larsen and Patterson, 2018) posits that those who do not possess the necessary resources or access "to narrate their identities through consumption" or for those who have been excluded from such identity projects under a neoliberal

capital regime, opting-out -in other words, "resistance"- could be "possible in the rejection of the neoliberal agenda and in protest against the system" (204).

Adapting from Stuart Hall, Halberstam offers low theory that "tries to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony" (Halberstam, 2011, 2). Halberstam believes failure can "poke holes" in this toxic positivity and disturb the hegemonic and static understanding of failure and success. Hegemony according to low theory, hegemony does not necessarily produce and transmit power forcefully, but it creates a complex system which constructs interconnected discourses that justify this very system and acts as common sense once internalized by the individuals within the system. Therefore, a hegemonic ideology becomes taken-for-granted which low theory chooses to defy and not register this logic.

The hegemonic discourse is a heteronormative, neoliberal capitalist one where success means "specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" (2). According to Duggan (2003), the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and system advocates "a leaner, meaner government …, a state-supported but "privatized" economy, an invigorated and socially responsible civil society, and a moralized family with gendered marriage at its center" (10). However, both neoliberal capitalism and the notion of reproducing heteronormative families are being challenged and under pressure, considering the shrinking economies, collapsing financial markets, and increasing divorce rates. Therefore, the author suggests that we employ a critical approach to the long-standing fixed standards that constitute success and failure. In a willingly failing, queer manner, one can find

"more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world"
(Halberstam, 2011, 2-3). However, this queer theorization of success and failure that
disputes the hegemonic understanding would be the antithesis of mainstream
makeover shows where the only way of being is a neoliberal existence that mandates
economic, social, and cultural capital acquisition where the meanings and values of
these capitals are ever-changing.

In conclusion, the extant research reviewed above provides an understanding of the
state-of-the-art about the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and one of the apparatuses,
makeover shows, it has generated in order to govern less and from a distance. The
neoliberal governmentality, combined with the heteronormative nature of the
dominant neoliberal discourse, reinforces the binary codes of success and failure
based on reproductive maturity and wealth accumulation. Queer theory, on the other
hand, offers alternative definitions and ways of being as a counter-discourse to the
hegemonic neoliberal ideology. These studies altogether illuminate the neoliberal
self, governmentality, cultural intermediaries' role within such a discourse, and
heteronormative dynamics at play represented on Queer Eye.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Context: Queer Eye

While introducing low theory, Halberstam (2011) explains the aim of this theory is "to locate all the in-between spaces" where it is possible to defy the neoliberal dichotomy of failure and success, where "losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing" are not but desired (2). Historically and categorically, high theorization mostly employs highbrow concepts and contexts. On the other hand, low theory has the ability to challenge the hegemonic, customary ways of knowledge production and deliberately choose the products and contexts of low culture. In the spirit of queering the knowledge production in the domain and "murking the waters", this study chooses Netflix's Queer Eye as its research context.

Queer Eye is a makeover show broadcasted on Netflix. The show, originally called "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" was broadcasted on Bravo in the US between 2003 and 2007. The show dropped "for the straight guy" in the title along the way (2005). The show's premise was initially transforming a straight guy by the "Fab 5" –a team of five gay guys who had expertise in food, grooming, style, design, and culture. However, the Netflix remake (2018) extends the makeover candidates to various gender identities and sexual orientations, though the majority of the makeover candidates are still straight men. The original version of the show has been studied by many scholars (Keller, 2004; Hart, 2004; Clarkson, 2005; Gamson, 2005; Sender,

2006; Lewis, 2007), focusing on the representation of consumer masculinities, portrayal of the power dynamics between straight and gay men, the gendered nature of lifestyle expertise, and makeover process as a neoliberal project. This study aims to analyze the recent Netflix version, which claims to be an updated version of the original run and fight for "acceptance", not "tolerance". Self-care is a more prominent concept in the Netflix iteration compared to its predecessor. This focus is consistent with the popularity of self-care in the cultural discourses and as well as the macro-level discourses that neoliberal ideology forges. Therefore, this context enables the study to examine and unpack the intersection of self-care with neoliberal themes previous studies mapped out both in the case of Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (Sender, 2006) and other makeover shows, while it also outlines the newly prominent phenomenon of self-care acted through consumption.

The Fab 5 consist of five queer experts. The only two people of color in the Fab 5 are the style expert Tan France, a British-Pakistani cisgender gay man, and the culture expert Karamo Brown, a Black American cisgender gay man. Jonathan van Ness, grooming expert, is an American genderqueer person who has come out as non-binary in 2019 (Out Magazine, 2019). Bobby Berk, the design expert, is an American cisgender gay man, and Antoni Porowski, the food and wine expert, is a Polish-Canadian cisgender gay man.

Like many other makeover shows, Queer Eye imposes a particular destination point, which is not a place/lifestyle the makeover candidates can naturally arrive/obtain. The show markets a "self-made" person whose life gets better almost overnight with a queer magic wand. The emphasis is made on the self-made aspect of the process

because, as many recent makeover reality shows, the problems and lacking aspects of one's life are privatized in line with neoliberal claims. The show represents the average person who is "domestically challenged" (Sender, 2006). After successfully constructing the failed consumership, the show represents the accurate ways of using the products, "not only what to buy". The "training in correct consumption is ideally suited for the endless expansion of market", yet this training and pedagogy have crucial implications: it reconfigures the average consumers into "more effectively self-monitoring citizens" (Sender, 2006, 140). The tutorials and representation of correct consumership on the show advertise certain technologies of the self that would assist "the neoliberal imperative to cultivate an autonomously calibrating self within a framework that privileges consumer choice over other modes of citizenship" (Sender, 2006, 142).

Queer Eye presupposes an already existing failure in its makeoverees' lives. The conditions of their physical appearances, wardrobes, houses, refrigerators, and even self-esteem are problematized in a way that calls for urgent measures and corrections. According to the show's framing, these people fail because they cannot conduct their own lives with the expected know-how and rationale in consumption. Because there is a direct link between consuming poorly and failing, the show also suggests that proper consumption creates positive change (Sender, 2006, 134).

Queer Eye, just like many other lifestyle brands and culture intermediaries, heavily uses the self-care language that highlights the necessity of constant and proactive monitoring and manicuring of one's self, which is very in line with the neoliberal subjectivity. With the popularization of the term self-care, the Netflix version brands

itself as the advocate of self-care and repackages the makeover process as a refinement through the practice and its complementary products and services. Makeover shows position self-care as "a strategy of freedom and empowerment" as well as one's ethical duty in the idealized neoliberal sense (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 475). The neoliberal agenda values self-actualization, self-realization, self-responsibility, self-enterprising all through the free and rational choices made due to an ongoing self-monitoring and maintaining process. The makeover reality shows are "an attractive partner for a policy agenda that seeks to deputize private administrators of welfare" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, 475).

In the show, the Fab 5 promote a right way of living, more specifically consuming so that the (straight) guys who are the makeover candidates can overcome the obstacles keeping them from having a good life. Moreover, through self-care, which corresponds to a particular set of products, services, and practices, or in short, a particular lifestyle, these candidates are portrayed to overcome the hurdles in their lives and learn to love and care for themselves. Therefore, consumption becomes a tool for self-care, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Although each episode has a different plot and a different purpose for the makeover, mostly the expertise of Fab 5 is "put … to work to reform a heterosexual masculinity" (Sender, 2006, 132).

Queer Eye presupposes the superiority of the queer men's taste and promises betterment in the (mostly) straight guy's life through being judged and helped by the Fab 5. The narrative of queer men having better taste and consumer expertise is nothing new and can be found in pop culture. By positioning "the queer" as proficient in taste, the show perpetuates this very stereotype. The Fab 5 have cultural,

economic, and even symbolic capitals, whereas the makeover candidates mostly lack all of these capitals. Here, the Fab 5 are the cultural intermediaries who mediate the makeoverees' consumption and the meanings they find in products (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991). Their (re)construction of symbolic meanings of commodities in a world where the change is constant shows and indirectly teaches the makeoveree and the audience how to position themselves. It negotiates new and changing meanings in this dynamic field and ways to be reflexive (Redden, 2008, 491). In other words, their role is much more significant than making over a person's life.

Possessing the capitals mentioned above and having the expertise in their related areas, the Fab 5 "facilitate broader processes of taste discrimination" by ascribing superior value and meaning to a particular thing over others and "guide the ordinary persons through a series of consumer choices" that would then be in line with the preferable way of living and consuming they suggest is the ideal (Redden, 2007, 152). They do not merely share useful tips that would better the average consumers' and audience's living conditions. Their pedagogic function is displaying various ways to "accrue social status through mastery of cultural codes" and "shaping the perceptions and preferences" of the makeoveree and the audience that would eventually mobilize them toward the "desired routes" of consumption (Maguire & Matthews, 2010; Redden, 2008).

By employing media, in this case, TV, the cultural intermediaries can ascribe meaning, shape taste(s), and create a hierarchy among various tastes. They teach "middle-classness" to makeoverees and the audience and do so "in the name of individual self-development" and "the power of consumer-based lifestyles" (Redden,

2008, 490-92). Because they are positioned as the experts who possess the tacit knowledge of the ideal way of living, the "validity or rationality" as well as the intentions of their "absolute external authority" is "can never be questioned" (Couldry, 2008, 10). Moreover, the "as if-ness" of reality television genre echoes with the neoliberal values and dynamics that require "compulsory self-staging … and regulation by unquestionable external authority mediated via equally unquestionable norms" (Couldry, 2008, 11). The makeoverees are expected to willingly conform to these values the show promotes.

The sort of self-care Queer Eye cherishes is a product of neoliberal values and understanding. It tends to overlook the actual systematic and institutional reasons why one's life fails and leaves the work needed to be done to the individual themself. The burgeoning makeover reality programming has provided a platform for performing the neoliberalism's sermon of self-improvement.In these shows, "lower-middle and middle-class makeover candidates are exhorted to work on themselves" and actively engage with a self-making process (Sender, 2006, 134). The show's experts seemingly perform the makeover by renovating the straight guy's home and clothing. Nevertheless, the makeoverees are the ones who have to achieve the actual self-work and transformation.

Nevertheless, the show's idealized lifestyle and way of consumption reached through the makeover mostly overlook the class aspect and the affordability/sustainability of that ideal. It shows the "before" part and a week of training where the makeover candidates borrow the "critical queer eye" optics. Although the consumption habits promoted can be afforded by a particular class with enough flexible and disposable

capital, this is seldom mentioned in the show. The idea that one can build and express an identity through consumption realistically has its constraints. However, the makeover dream fails to discuss these limits while depicting consumption as the ultimate remedy.

3.2. (Discourse and) Critical Discourse Analysis

In a Foucauldian sense, discourses are "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them" (Weedon, 1987, 108). Blunt et al. (2003) suggest discourses in Foucauldian terms can be seen as "the frameworks that define the possibilities for knowledge" that are "[sets] of 'rules' (formal or informal, acknowledged or unacknowledged) which determine the sorts of statements that can be made" (11). These rules decide what truth is or what constitutes legitimate, superior/inferior.

In the documentary, Edward Said: On 'Orientalism' directed by Sut Jhally (1998), Said defines discourse as "a regulated system of producing knowledge within certain constraints whereby certain rules have to be observed". These definitions above emphasize the relationship between language, knowledge (production), and power, as well as the multiplicity of extant discourses. There is not a universal discourse that defines the truth. In fact, there are various discourses that dictate our understandings of things, "even whether things can be understood to exist or not", and not an overall truth (Blunt et al., 2003, 11). Power is inseparable from discourses, as "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power" (Foucault, 1978, 101). In this perspective, power is

relational and "a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents" (Weedon, 1987, 113). It is not only strengthened by the discourse but is also weakened, "expose[d], render[ed] … fragile" or handicapped (Foucault, 1978, 101). In other words, "…any struggle for power is a struggle over language and knowledge, over discourse" (Blunt et al., 2003, 11).

Neoliberal ideology, too, has responding discourses that (re)produce and reinforce itself. Moreover, since neoliberalism is the dominant ideology (Navarro, 2007, 47), it produces the dominant discourse(s) that hold(s) the hegemonic power. By conducting a critical discourse analysis (CDA), this work aims to dissect self-care/makeover construction as the ideal consumption practice. It also aims to unveil the underlying ideological discourses that mediate the consumers' thoughts, practices, and actions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Caruana et al., 2008) in a way that would "systematically [relate] specific structures" represented on Queer Eye "to structures of the socio-political context", "not limit[ing] [the] analysis to [these] structures of text" (Kravets et al., 2020, 4). CDA is a method employed to perform "analysis of various forms of social inequality and injustice" (Lazar, 2007, 142).

Within one of the thematic frameworks, mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies", CCT studies "the systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions" that would support the interest of dominating parties in society (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, 874). This line of research conceptualizes the consumer as "interpretive agents"who construct meaning through different activities that interact with and are informed by the

hegemonic and alternative representations of different ideologies, ideals, and lifestyles they come across in mass media, fashion world, and other products of entertainment and cultural industries. The meaning-making and identity-constructing consumer is fed by the socio-economic ideologies such as patriarchy and masculinity (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), neoliberal capitalism or cultural industries and their products that "systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of identity projects" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 874; McCracken, 1986).

The scholars working in this domain often "read popular culture texts (advertisements, television programs, films) as lifestyle and identity instructions that convey unadulterated marketplace ideologies and idealized consumer types" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 875; Hirschman, 1988; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998; Stevens & Maclaran, 2012). In order to reveal the ways the neoliberal capitalist system facilitates consumer identity projects, consumer culture theory scholars engage in "decoding and deconstructing" the normative technologies and mechanics of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 875). The role that the markets play in mediation this line of consumer culture research relies on has been commented on and criticized for feeding back into the neoliberal ideology itself (Askegaard, 2014; Fitchett et al., 2014). A critical discourse analysis would be able to respond to such critique and fulfill its purpose of deconstructing the ideologies in play.

Although gender has been a topic discussed in marketing and consumer research, feminist and queer studies have been mostly "muted, implied or sidelined" (Hearn & Hein, 2015, 2). Although there have been some works utilizing queer theories

(Goulding & Saren, 2009; Kates, 1999) and studying queer identities (Sender, 2004; Visconti, 2008), there is still uncharted territory in which it is possible to intersect queer theory. Queer theory considers sex and gender as a "social construct that is unstable, fluid and subject to regulation through power/knowledge discourse" (Hearn & Hein, 2015, 8). It challenges and "troubles" the stable, fixed, and binary identification and codification of gender (Butler, 1990) that enables to "[destabilize] the disciplinary power of heteronormativity … when … LGBTQI+ experiences are [politicize]" (Hearn & Hein, 2015, 8). Such troubling provides alternative ways of being for "gendered bodies that contest hierarchical binaries" (Hearn & Hein, 2015, 8). Lazar (2007) offers a "feminist critical discourse analysis" perspective, emphasizing feminist orientation. Cameron (1998) (as cited in Lazar, 2007) explains the founders and prominent scholars of CDA are "all straight white men" who often fail to credit feminist and queer bodies of work in their works, deliberately omitting such epistemologies.

While engaging with feminist and queer scholarly conversations, this study heavily draws from the feminist and queer bodies of work to engage them in marketing and consumer research. It follows feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007), acknowledging the feminist in its approach. Because of the power dynamics of neoliberal discourse that reinforces the dominance of heteropatriarchy social order, employing FCDA to examine a seemingly queer text informed by that particular discourse would enable to display the sentimentalities and ideological framework in effect (Griffin, 2007; Lazar, 2007).

3.3. Data Selection/Sampling

The first season of Queer Eye premiered on February 7, 2018, with all eight 45-minute long episodes simultaneously released on the platform. There have been five seasons with 47 episodes released so far, with the sixth season confirmed. Moreover, in 2019, the Fab 5 visited Japan for the spin-off, Queer Eye: We are in Japan! for a four-episode mini-season. However, the format of the show is a very standardized one, not so different from an average makeover reality show format where the experts visit the makeoverees' houses; problematize various aspects of their lives, and provide tutorials and pedagogy of an idealized lifestyle and corresponding ways of consumption.

The uniformity of the episodes, as well as the scope and limitations of the research, justifies choosing the first season as the data sample to be analyzed. While analyzing the data, in addition to the textual source, which is the subtitles for each episode, visual material –the video of the episodes- was closely studied, focusing on the body language and facial expressions. The personal information such as names, gender identities and sexual orientation, age, locations, marital status, and occupation of each makeoveree was recorded, as well as the desired outcome from the makeover, the mission. The assessed and races are noted in, too (Table I).

The Fab 5's reactions to the makeoverees' belongings and lifestyles were also recorded with a detailed description. The products and the routines for consuming said products they suggested, too, were recorded. With this bottom-up approach, emergent themes were determined and listed, then with a top-down approach where

"the researcher's understanding of the discursive and social contexts" inform the

process (Kravets et al., 2020, 5), the constructed discourse was linked to the

mediating ideologies and other discourses at play from which the show draws.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Queer Eye is a designedly uplifting show where the experts (the Fab 5) vow to makeover the participants' lives in drastic ways with seemingly and convincingly little effort. They find their makeover candidates in horrendous conditions, with almost all parts of their lives failing. Each member of the Fab 5 has particular expertise –namely grooming, style, design, food, and culture. When they concurrently work on their "hero," as if the makeoveree makes a pit stop at the end of an episode, all failing parts of their lives are well-functioning better than ever.

The Fab 5 cherish individuality and uniqueness as though one's idiosyncratic identity is the very thread that ties every moving part of one's life together. Therefore, the show does not promise a complete transformation, but rather a refinement that would reveal the personality that has been long untended. The premise of one's makeover is teaching the makeoverees how always to find ways to love themselves and show this self-love and appreciation in the form of self-care. They are fierce advocates and the poster children of the self-care movement since the show premiered on Netflix. This peculiar practice of self-care, however, broadly equates to the consumption of particular products and practices. The Fab 5 teach the makeoverees how to actively monitor their lives and take the necessary precautions so that things would not fall apart.

They provide them a toolbox filled with ripe avocados, beard oil, moisturizers, and colorful patterned shirts to be French-tucked to deal with lack of confidence and self-esteem and social anxiety and isolation, coming out or fatherhood -of six, no less. While doing so, they (re)construct the hegemonic neoliberal discourse that supports (i) responsibilization of self-care, (ii) the positive outlook and self-esteem required to engage in identity projects, and (iii) a heteronormative mindset even though they share a queer identity and the show seems to work as counter-hegemonic.

4.1. Responsibilization of self-care

Neoliberal governmentality has transformed its citizens into "autonomous, self-governing individuals via the extension of markets that "[incentivize] entrepreneurial behavior [and] restore the values of freedom, self-reliance, and personal responsibility" (Foster, 2016). In its original run, Queer Eye (for the Straight Guy) was criticized for propagating neoliberal sensibility. Sender (2006), for instance, states that "reality television's proliferating subgenres have expanded the range of sites for neoliberal exhortations to improve the self" (136). The makeoverees who are often lower or middle-class citizens learn to work on themselves to become a better version. The show's experts upgrade and renovate the straight guy's home and clothing, but the makeoveree needs to do the real work. The show suggests that social, cultural, and economic capital are in abundance and easy to obtain by working on the self-transformation. Nevertheless, it suitably disregards the actual systematic and institutional reasons why one fails or lacks such capital, nor does it address the makeover's affordability or sustainability into the ideal self. The particular lifestyle and consumption practices portrayed in Queer Eye are sustainable by a particular

group of consumers who have the necessary financial means; this aspect of the makeover is rarely mentioned. The idea that one can build and express an identity through consumption has its constraints. However, the makeover dream fails to discuss these limits while depicting consumption as the ultimate remedy. In episode 1, Jonathan van Ness claims, "You can reinvent yourself and learn new things whenever you want," as if such reinvention is effortless or requires no resources. This claim suggests that it is only a matter of wanting and deciding to change, leaving the burden and hard-work to the individual who is considered the responsible party.

In the first episode -aptly titled "You Can't Fix Ugly"- the hero, Tom, is described as someone who "does not seem to care about his appearance" by the Fab 5's style expert Tan. One of his friends complains that he wears the same pieces of clothing, rotating between them. After meeting Tom, the Fab 5 prophesy Tom's house would be "a little bit dirty, a little bit covered in smoke" … "a little like his beard," assuming that the way one presents themselves is homogenous in each part of their lives. "How you take care of yourself is how the world sees you," aphorizes Jonathan van Ness, which is something Tom poorly does by the Fab 5's standards.

Depicting the hero as someone helpless or lost, as the show does each episode, indicates when one is not proactively working on their life or fails to be self-governing, it only means they lose control of their own lives. Hence, the way the show discursively constructs the neoliberal subject suggests, "if one fails, there is no one to blame but oneself" (Türken et al., 2015, 38). When one slips out of this proactive subjectivity that constantly self-examines, self-governs and self-corrects,

they find themselves in a rut where they become a "creature of habit". For Tom, it is the same food and cocktail he orders at the bar where he is a regular, or his worn-out recliner, that, according to Karamo of the Fab 5 symbolizes "sitting in [his] house, not going out in the world, feeling alone". Once the Fab 5 throws the chair in the trash, a door to Tom's "brand new life" is suddenly opened. To get out of this rut, one should make an effort, and make it visible and communicate this effort to the world. Therefore, if Tom wants to succeed, he should "roll up the sleeves of his shirts" so that it would imply he puts some thought into his looks.

Moreover, Tom needs to follow a morning ritual where he applies face and body sunscreens, then the beard oil so that his beard, which the Fab 5 once likened to a tumbleweed, to look tame. God forbids Tom should leave his apartment without putting on a frozen face mask or applying the "green stick" to avoid inflammation and flare-ups caused by his Lupus, or he would be perceived as someone who has given up. It is important to note that, although the brand of this green stick was not disclosed in the episode, according to the Business of Fashion (2019), "after it was revealed in an interview that [van Ness] applied Cover FX's "Correct Click" stick", the product sold out "within hours".

Queer Eye does not only makeover people's lives and be their savior; it also successfully "shifts products" to its audience. Reportedly, the original run of the Queer Eye For the Straight Guy (Scout Productions, 2003–2006) helped increased sales of the placed products significantly. The Netflix version maintains its power and ability to be a marketplace for products.

The hero in the second episode, Neal, similar to Tom, reportedly wears the same clothes and is performing very poorly in the grooming department. His friend who nominated Neal for a makeover confides that he would "pick an outfit for a period of time, and that is what he exists in".

Intensifying their harsh critiques, the Fab 5 find Neal's place "disgusting", "nasty," and "gross" and call him "Yeti", because he does not tend his place nor his appearance. He is groomed to be "commercially successful," and taught how to maintain his now-tamed look, and introduced to a ritual consisting of a beard brush and lotion. Near the end of the episode, Neal gives an uncharacteristically sentimental speech to the Fab 5. In his speech, he admits, although his week with the Fab 5, at first, felt like it was "highlighting ... what was wrong with [his] life," he then realized "it was showing [him] … how good [his] life could be if [he] just cared". We, the audience, are convinced that this makeover was successful since we heard Neal uttering these words. As he learns from a week with the Fab 5, when one is more autonomous and responsible toward self-improvement, there is "a glimmer of hope there could be a different option for you".

In episode 5, the wife of the makeoveree Bobby Camp nominates him. They have six children, and his wife believes Bobby "never takes time for himself". Being a drafter at an engineering firm and a shelf-stocker at a home improvement store, Camp works two different jobs in addition to co-managing a household of eight. Once the Fab 5 arrive at the Camps, however, the "chaos" becomes a source of awe. The Fab 5 does not see it as a reasonable consequence of life the Camps lead. While the makeoveree is likened to a homeless person with holes and stains on his clothes, the house is

declared "a house of hoarders" and an "anxiety panic attack in action". In fact, "disarray" is the kindest word uttered by the Fab 5 in their first encounter with Mr. Camp. Bobby Camp, then, confides in the Fab 5 about his outlook, admitting he indeed neglects his own appearance and usually wears hand-me-downs. He explicitly explains his priorities regarding budget management and says, "If I am gonna spend money on clothes, it is gonna be for my wife, for the kids [sic]". However, his compromise is definitely unacceptable for the Fab 5, whose version of reality is clearly clouded with the show's agenda. Tan, the styling expert, wisely recalls a past relationship where his partner left him solely because he stopped caring for himself. Tan was told "the reason why he [was] let go" was because he let himself go. Hence Bobby Camp is supposed to "keep it tight" for his wife.

For the Fab 5, one has the responsibility to engage in self-care so that their partners would "look at [them] and think their partners respect them enough to make an effort". After all, the neoliberal discourse necessitates personal responsibility as a way of governing individuals (Foster, 2016). Although Bobby Camp works two different jobs, gets back home around 4 am and sleeps for 2 hours until it is time for breakfast for the children before school, this effort, just like any other housework and parenting, is not visible enough to be appreciated. In utilizing his evidently limited resources, Bobby Camp is found guilty of letting himself go.

At the end of each episode, the Fab 5 members share some tips and life-hacks for the audience. In episode 5, the tip is a breathing technique that would "break up a stressful day". The deliberate juxtaposition of the struggles of a father of six children juggling two jobs and his family and this meditative breathing technique suggests

that it is only a matter of taking a moment for breathing when being in the lower side of the middle class becomes asphyxiating. It suggests the overwhelming realities of such a lifestyle can be overcome by self-practices that require autonomy.

Like many other makeover reality shows, Queer Eye promises a self-made personal upgrade, or as Antoni of the Fab 5 puts it, "the possibility of a different kind of life". However, the primary condition for entry into this Promised Land is one's constant work on one's self. As the neoliberal self-made subject, the makeoverees need to become inventive, innovating, self-enterprising, to channel their resources into self-transformation and work-on-oneself so that they can satisfty the contemporary requirements neoliberalism imposes (Türken et al., 2015). Queer Eye suggests that the moment one loses motivation for or focus of this endless entrepreneurship, their lives start disintegrating.

Queer Eye only shows the "before" part and a few days of training where the makeover candidates borrow the optics of the "critical queer eye" to learn how to work on their selves to transform it. The Fab 5 identify and map out the problematic aspects of the makeoverees that can be overcome by the queer expertise. Treating its makeoverees' lives as "therapeutic self-making "projects", Queer Eye forces the makeoverees and the audience to be "enterprising" in order to "empower' themselves by finding better and smarter ways of living" (Lewis, 2007, 287).

In episode 7, the makeoveree Joe Gallois is a failed comedian who lives with his parents in his thirties. His occupation enables the Fab 5 to treat his identity and

personality as a corporate entity. Their solutions to his failings are "networking" and "self-branding," which are very prominent in the neoliberal discourse.

In episode 8, the Fab 5 helps a firestation raise money for its training programs. However, in the classical Fab 5 fashion, they teach the firemen how to "self-care". As Jonathan van Ness posits, "when you have a stressful job, you have to create little pockets of joy in your life to take care of yourself". The Fab 5 believe the stress of a job where the stakes are actually life and death, a mani-pedi and a face mask will do. The secret is the "calming properties of essential oils" promoted by the extravagant Jonathan van Ness.

In episode 5, the makeoveree Bobby Camp talks about his family's limited resources and the need for prioritizing budget management. He suggests he usually wears second-hand clothes because he needs to spend the money on his six children first. He and his wife cumulatively have three different wages from their jobs, and self-evidently they can only make ends meet. Jonathan van Ness suggests Bobby Camp create "a time in his day" only for himself because he is "worth investing a few minutes in". He concludes, "it is not vanity, it is self-care".

The solution the Fab 5 brings to his problem is to shop at Target where he can afford "everything in here," claims Tan France. This straightforward solution is believed to be not thought of by Bobby Camp. Queer Eye usually fails to tackle the issues related to class. However, when it tries to address such inequalities, it adopts a patronizing tone. Bobby Camp is told, at Target, that "your biggest issue in the past has been that you are wearing really big clothes". Having to work two jobs or getting

a two-hour sleep on average seems not as urgent as his lack of success or eagerness in wearing to his body type. All the purchasing decisions made at Target on behalf of Bobby Camp are for the sake of functionality and organization purposes; the Fab 5 makes clear. The discipline of organizing is what the Camps miss in their house, according to the Fab 5, and items that would prevent the clutter present at their house would be the magic wand the family desperately needs.

The Fab 5 wants to ensure the makeoverees and the audience what they exhibit, the performance of related capital, is affordable, easy to access, and obtain. Only by watching the show or letting the Fab 5 do their magic a person gets to get a full makeover from the outside and within by this exchange of social capital. It is almost always unaddressed how one actually gains this social capital in the first place, so the consequential relationship between class and social capital is obscured.

Although their roles are very narrowly defined –and no member has any children-, the Fab 5 make parenting suggestions when the opportunity presents itself. At one point, the Fab 5 even suggests that the lack of organization causes chaos in their family because the children do not know structure. They claim the six children "crave structure". After being provided an organized space that is not cluttered, chaos is averted.

Every decision made in the renovation and redecoration heavily relies on the middle-class aesthetic the show likes to promote. The justification and rationalization of the decisions are made explicit. In episode 6, while redecorating Remington's room, Bobby suggests "when you are picking out materials for a room, you need contrast to

draw the eye around the room"; hence he likes "doing darker floors and lighter things on the top".

In episode 7, since the makeoveree Joe Gallois is about to move to his parents' basement with lower ceilings, the Fab Five advise that he use lower cabinets as well that would make the most out of the space.

Neoliberalism, in a Foucauldian understanding, is not merely an economic and political system. It is also a particular way of governing individuals with the minimum intervention that would cost the state but still allows it to hold and perform its power upon the citizens. While doing so, neoliberalism relies on the idea of an autonomous, active, and responsible citizen who believes to be free and have agency, mostly in the decisions made and actions taken in the marketplace shaped by the very ideology. The show's attempts, its explicit suggestions, and specifically the presence of the Fab 5, who have a particular cultural capital that deems them superior, reinforce the personal responsibility and agency advocated by neoliberalism.

4.2. Positive Outlook and Self-Esteem

For Queer Eye to convince the makeoverees and the audience that a change is feasible, the show needs to sell a positive outlook that would enhance the makeoverees' self-confidence and self-esteem. In doing so, the show sells the idea that change, the makeover, is possible because the makeoverees are strong and able enough to do so and that it always starts with them and is bound by their levels of self-belief or self-confidence. Hence, says Jonathan van Ness in an attempt to inspire

the makeoveree #1, Tom, "… no matter how anyone is born, whatever anyone's appearance is, there is only so much you can do. One thing you have power over, but you have to work at it, is confidence". Much like any other part of his life, he is expected to believe in his power and the obligation to actively work on his self-confidence to improve. The Fab 5 reminds Tom that he has so much to offer to the world, yet "if you do not make it seem that you have a lot to offer, no one gives you the time of day". Therefore, confidence becomes a tool to convince people one deserves their time, interest, and respect under the Fab 5's regime. When one lacks such self-confidence, the Fab 5 concludes that one builds walls and stays distant.

The makeoveree #2, Neal is found to be lonely because he is insecure. His insecurity prevents him from making real connections, being vulnerable or open. Neal believes his distance is a "control [thing], power thing; it is a comfort thing, protection thing". The Fab 5, on the other hand, is determined to change Neal's perception of his own decisions, advocating for working on self-confidence so that he would not end up lonely. Renovating, redecorating, and trying kickboxing out would somehow solve this problem by helping him let his walls down and taking out some of the anxiety he has. In the Fab 5's preaching, self-confidence becomes a prerequisite for well-functioning social relationships. Therefore, in this logic, it can be deduced that if one performs poorly in the social sphere, it is because they do not put the required effort to develop self-confidence and a positive outlook to project their good inner natures and qualities.

In episode 5, Bobby Camp is repeatedly told about his biggest problems by the Fab 5, who are positioned as the all-knowing gurus. In one moment in the episode, the

Fab 5 state, Bobby's most significant issue is his clothes that are too big for his size. In another moment, they revise their diagnosis and decide Bobby's biggest problem is his lack of self-love and self-care. He is encouraged to have the confidence to try new things, such as wearing shirts with floral prints and patterns, and build himself by "using stripes". The seemingly deep and essential problems are almost always solved by very vain and usually unrelated suggestions such as consuming the right products.

In episode 6, confidence is coded in a gendered way. In this particular episode, the main goal for Remington's makeover is to become "a type of man that is confident enough to be able to build an empire for a family". Having lost his father and grandmother, Remington is now expected to reclaim the role of the "man of the house" by the Fab 5. Karamo posits, "If [Remington] is gonna step in as the man of this house, he has to be proud of himself, confident. That is what is gonna let everyone know. 'This is the man we need to look up to' [sic]". The form of confidence the Fab 5 seek after has the very hegemonic, heteropatriarchal neoliberal undertones which the study discusses in detail below.

In episode 7, the Fab 5 tries to distinguish between style and fashion. Style is what is permanent. It is coded in one's DNA, so it has input in one's identity and is informed by this said identity, whereas fashion dictates trends. Although the makeoveree Joe Gallois lacks both a sense of fashion and style, he is advised to obtain style since style means confidence -which he also lacks- and choosing what is appropriate for his body type and age.

In the last episode of the first season, the makoveree Jeremy is after a makeover of the fire station where he works. However, Queer Eye finds ways to personalize this journey for the audience. For Jeremy to represent his fire station, he needs to take care of himself and his appearance. When Tan France takes him shopping, Jeremy admits he had not thought he was built for what "the clothes sold in the store were built for," that he had felt intimidated. Even when the show's focus is seemingly helping the fire station with fundraising, the Fab 5 manage to preach.

Neoliberal narratives often set self-esteem as the destination point for a personal transformation journey, an asset that needs to be acquired and kept in possession. The consumer/citizen who engages with this quest tries to gain related capital and use the market-mediated resources they have to reach a desired level of self-esteem. This quest is atomized and responsibilized for the individual that the states manage to govern at a distance through this particular technology of the self, which realizes the fundamental neoliberal requirements. Queer Eye's rationale fulfills this prophecy and teaches various ways of consumption to be used in the search for self-esteem.

4.3. Heteronormativity in Queer Eye

Although it is a highly produced show, the world Queer Eye constructs is very similar to the one in which we exist that the impositions of neoliberal capitalist ideology define. For the neoliberal system to sustain and reproduce itself, it needs to be considered and internalized as common sense by its members. What is deemed desirable and ideal by neoliberal common sense is attributed to such merits based on

its ability to contribute to the cultivation and preservation of the ideology's dominance.

Neoliberalism defines success very narrowly and in a binary way. One is a failure if they do not have a significant contribution in spinning the wheels of neoliberalism. According to the hegemonic ideology and the discourses it produces, we all live under a heteronormative neoliberal capitalist regime. Therefore, such a regime would only (re)produce a discourse of success in heteronormative and capitalist terms, meaning one is deemed successful as long as they can offer "specific forms of reproductive maturity" and to achieve "wealth accumulation" (Halberstam, 2011, 2).

A makeover format such as Queer Eye that is solely based on the neoliberal dichotomy of success and failure heavily relies on and utilizes the hegemonic discourses of success while depicting the states of failure (before) and success (after). Although the show itself is called Queer Eye and employs five queer experts, the prescription for success on the show is less than queer and much more coded in a neoliberal way. Although the first time the Fab 5 arrives at a makeoveree's whereabouts we hear *Wham Bam* by Clooney, where the band cheerfully sings "Wham bam here I am! / Goddess of the glitter glam", the glitter and glam are only saved for the Fab 5 to break the ice and support their performance of queerness.

The heteronormative, capitalist discourse informs the tutorials of beings and doings on the show, the idealized lifestyles, and corresponding consumption practices. In episode 1, the mission for the makeoveree, Tom is basically getting him back with his ex-wife. From the decoration of his "rented basement apartment," which is

unanimously condemned and ridiculed by the Fab 5, to his closet, to his kitchen skills are all redesigned and reconfigured in order to fulfill the heteronormative requirements imposed by neoliberalism. Tom had not only wandered away from the ideal consumer/citizenship in his everyday consumption decisions and practices, but he had also committed one of the greatest crimes under the neoliberal regime, getting multiple divorces.

His failed consumership the show portrays is proof of his failing regarding heteronormativity. It is also a factor contributing to his inability to establish a heteronormative romantic relationship. In other words, the "rut" he has stuck is fed by his loneliness, and the loneliness reinforces the rut in which the Fab 5 found him. The Fab 5 approve only a minuscule of Tom's belongings after a detailed assessment. Not so surprisingly, it was his exes who had bought or given these belongings to him. Once his partners, who were all women, were out of the picture and he was left to his own devices, he majorly failed at self-care. Here, such care is coded as feminine. Women in his life had provided such care before. Now, an all-queer team of experts substitutes for those women. He is required to transform into a state that was up to par with his former, partnered, put-together self so that he would be able to have a romantic partnership and fulfill his role as a straight man. The rest of his belongings are explicitly, loudly, queerly mocked, and despised. Owning multiple pairs of unattractive "jorts" -jean shorts- according to the Fab 5, is the gateway to damnation. Although it does not seem well-maintained or clean, Tom's recliner chair is not to blame when it comes to his romantic life or lack thereof. It has turned him into "a creature of habit," which is apparently to be avoided according to the Fab 5. It is, after all, his responsibility to be active, not only mentally but also physically. Being

active means that he still cares about himself and how he is perceived, that he deserves other people's, more particularly potential partners', attention.

His makeover is designed to bring romantic satisfaction back into his life. Bobby, the design expert, replaces the old recliner with two brand new chairs. Replacing the old chair is a gesture of opening Tom's mind and heart, according to the Fab 5. The deadly sin of being lonely is curable with an attitude change and the corresponding consumption choice. His closet is updated with "hip but age-appropriate" choices that would look like he puts "thought into his looks" that are also date-appropriate. During the Fab 5's first walk-around in the house, Tom laments that he broke his back some time ago and has been in pain ever since. His health condition sensibly limits his mobility. He recalls a recent relationship that was ended because his partner wanted to be with someone who could be physically more active. Even though it is not bodily possible for him to engage in such activities, the Fab 5 find a way to frame this as a lack of adventurism, a matter of choice, and personal lacking. While wrapping up the episode, Bobby of the Fab 5 wisely shares the moral of the makeover. "All human beings have a commonality;" says Bobby, "more so than anyone thinks. We are 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 does not matter if it is gay or straight. A common thread that holds every human together is that we just wanna [sic] be loved".

Although this is a heartfelt sentiment on paper and acts as the show's mission statement, it hints Queer Eye's drawback: not acknowledging any structural differences and difficulties. Love, particularly the romantic kind, is promoted as the

ultimate need of human beings. All the improvements made on the show are used to contribute to heteronormative relationship building, in this case, very explicitly.

Although the show's title is Queer Eye and noticeably not Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, the show mostly casts straight-identified men as its heroes in its first season. The Fab 5 conduct a makeover on only one gay man out of eight episodes. However, in the later seasons, the show adds variety and diversity to its selection of makeoverees and represents various gender identities and sexual orientations.

However, diversity and representation do not automatically provide counter-hegemonic depictions or discourses. In episode 4, the makeoveree, AJ is a Black gay man. He confesses that he is "very self-conscious of looking gay," that "people can tell [his] preference just by [his] clothes." He refers to a particular style as "how-gay-people-dress" that he wants to avoid because he is not out to everyone in his life. To be able to cover his sexual orientation, he deliberately chooses clothes that are not form-fitting or age-appropriate. While discussing his style with Tan, the styling expert, he warns Tan that he does not want to look "feminine," that he wishes to remain "original". What can be a much-nuanced discussion about the distress and fear of being perceived as feminine due to misogyny or racial dynamics and masculinity remains a relatively shallow pep talk. Tan affirms that being one's "true self" should not offend anyone, and if anyone is "concerned," then it is "on them". This very simplistic, reductive, and politically blind take on gender identities -and in AJ's case, race- does not offer a counter-hegemonic, queer understanding of existing in the world.

As Halberstam (2011) posits, "gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals" from a feminist perspective (4). "The queer art" of choosing to fail to aid-and-abet and perpetuate heteropatriarchy is a deliberate (queer) decision. Queer Eye, on the other hand, accepts AJ's very heteronormative understanding of gender roles and identities and frames it as individuality and authenticity. Representing the experience of a Black gay man from Atlanta, Georgia, on a show called Queer Eye in 2018 has a significant meaning, mainly because of the show's legacy for the queer community, the conjuncture and zeitgeist then in the United States. The centuries-old ideologies such as misogyny, homophobia, and racism warrant a well-developed and refined conversation, particularly because the show ostensibly tackles such issues. Nevertheless, the show decides to follow a neoliberal path and arrives at a solution that is framed with individuality. This is insensitive, to say the least, if not problematic because it completely ignores the history and context of gender, homophobia, and their intersections with race in America.

Although this particular makeover's primary mission is to help AJ come out to his stepmother, who became a widow after AJ's father's passing, it does not engage with a counter-hegemonic discourse while seeming like a story of individual fulfillment and self-realization about his sexual orientation on the surface.

In episode 5, the makeoveree, Bobby is the father of six. His case might be the paramount representation of heteronormative neoliberal values in a nuclear family setting because he and his wife have chosen to have six children and contribute to the neoliberal capitalist system's reproduction requirements. Bobby works two different

jobs and barely takes time for himself. He gets a two-hour-long sleep a night on average, trying to juggle his responsibilities as the "head of the household". Bobby admits spending any resources they have on his children or his wife. He prefers to allocate the budget for his family's needs while he manages with hand-me-downs. In his makeover, the main mission is to "refine" him so that he would be able to look good, make more time for his romantic relationship with his wife, while setting up new standards for his children so that their family looks well-composed, all on a tight budget. He is told by the Fab 5 that he needs to love himself and invest more in self-care, as his only issues are in these areas.

The structural reasons that force him to work two jobs in order to create a steady income stream in addition to his wife's job so that they would be able to take care of a family of eight are left undiscussed. After all, class is nothing but a mentality that could be overcome by hard work and enough self-esteem. When economically struggling, the American middle class is advised to shop at Target. The Fab 5 has nothing to offer but floral prints and breathing techniques for income inequality in the United States. He is being made over so that he would be able to fulfill his paternal role in the family while making it look effortless.

The makeover hero in episode 6 is Remington, who wishes to be "a type [of man] that is confident enough to be able to build an empire for a family", inspired by his own father. The Fab 5 does not find anything troubling with his much-gendered ambition. In fact, they support his aspiration ("I like that," says Tan).

Transitioning into the making-over state, the Fab 5 announce their heteropatriarchal route to Remington's metamorphosis. Tan claims "clothes maketh the man," referencing Mad Men's Don Draper, who is the poster child of American masculinity. Karamo proclaims, "If [Remington] is gonna [sic] step in as the man of this house, he has to be proud of himself, he has to be confident" so that everyone would know "this is the man [they] need to look up to". Remington is a Black man, same as Karamo, who is the only Black member of the Fab 5. Nevertheless, instead of an authentic discussion about the hardship of being a Black man in America and its implications, Karamo burdens Remington further with the idealized Black masculinity that is worthy of respect. Remington lives at his grandmother's house, who passed away, and has kept the items belonging to his mother who lived there before marriage and decoration as it was. The Fab 5 repeatedly ridicule this decision and make a mockery out of the "femininity" of the place. They are puzzled by a "ceramic kitten" and "a ton of hats under a grown man's bed". They question what kind of man would like to sleep in "satin and lace". Bobby, the design expert, calls the room Remington stays "girlie" because of the furniture and the pink and purple paint and announces he wants to paint the room a "masculine navy blue". The hardware used in repurposing the furniture makes it "masculine" so that he can "bring a girl into [the] room". Jonathan van Ness reminds Remington that "self-care and grooming [are] not mutually exclusive with femininity or masculinity," but reassured that manicure and pedicure are acceptable for a manly man. Karamo takes Remington to whiskey tasting, which immediately prompts Don Draper and men of Mad Men. Karamo posits if one is to drink whiskey, one needs to "understand why," to "have some history behind it" as such knowledge would "[elevate] Remington as a man and shows that [he is] stepping into [his] own manhood". This surface

knowledge is told to be of help with his dating life with women. The binary of pink and blue, and feminine and masculine, is a caricature, yet the Queer Eye turns blind to such cliché. After his makeover, although keeping his grandmother's spirit, the house becomes "a man's home". Remington is asked if "his father would be proud" of "the man he has become". Although his mother is still alive, the makeover's success is evaluated by the hypothetical paternal approval.

A makeover orchestrated by a group of queer experts should not reconstruct toxic masculinity, yet it almost exclusively chooses to do so. At one point of the makeover, Tan announces that he is "sending a memo to every man in the world" that "making an effort with [their] wardrobe does not make [them] a wuss". The show and the Fab 5 repeatedly reassure the makeoverees and the (men) audience that self-care and betterment do not challenge or threaten their manhood. A show designed to be and has the potential to be remarkably queer chooses not to represent contemporary (American) masculinity's fragility and absurdity. After they complete their mission, while watching the big reveal of Remington's makeover on a screen in their loft, the Fab 5 are proud to see the manly Remington they helped create. He is no longer the "little boy Remy," but a man reborn.

Makeover shows construct failure as not rationally practicing freedom of choice, which is one of the main promises of neoliberalism. They publicly pathologize, even shame the consumption choices their makeoverees make (Redden, 2008; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). The show's title is Queer Eye, and it employs five queer people as its experts who perform the makeovers. Nevertheless, the show's binary take of success/failure is very much in line with the hegemonic neoliberal discourse instead

of an alternative, countervailing queer discourse. By registering to the stereotypical

treats and values ascribed to gender performances, identities, and sexual orientations,

and mainly employing heterosexual people as its makeoveree heroes, the show is

"fundamentally concerned with heteronormative family values" (Gorman-Murray,

2006, 231) and fortifies the hegemonic discourse.

DISCUSSION

5.1. Conclusion

Makeover reality shows, a product of popular culture under the neoliberal regime, can be considered a "technology of the self". The sub-genre supports the neoliberal governmentality and portrays "lifestyle, taste, domestic space and … relationships as sites for personal transformation," all according to idealized ways of consumption (Tincknell, 2011, 87). These shows, as a product of mass media, educate and represent "the regime of visual media governmentality" (McRobbie, 2020, 96). The sub-genre acts as the platform to convey "neoliberal values of disciplined, self-monitoring, responsible citizenship" (Sender, 2012, 8) and has a pedagogical role in identity and citizenship formation.

The process of self-made transformation, betterment, and maintenance Queer Eye portrays is a consequence of personal responsibility and hard work under the neoliberal regime. Likewise, failure is coded as the direct result of "individual shortcoming or weaknesses" (McGee, 2005, 13). This hegemonic ideology considers one's conduct of the self as "a work of art" where a particular, idealized aesthetic of self is obtained through diligent work and reinvention when necessary. The ceaseless self (enterprising) is "belabored" so that one seems the best version of themselves, that the "human capital" can be "developed and exploited" by the neoliberal capitalist system (McGee, 2005, 175).

As theorized and shown by many scholars cited in this research, the hegemonic neoliberal capitalist system and ideology necessitate personal responsibilization and a quest for self-esteem as a technology of governing, which is termed as (neoliberal) governmentality. In its eight episodes, the show portrays eight different individuals' biographies using its standard formula. First, it positions the initial state in which makeoverees were introduced as the failing state. This failure is defined in a strictly neoliberal capitalist way. They fail to serve the hegemonic system by not contributing to either the reproduction of the heteronormative reproduction or lack of wealth accumulation capabilities. After an intensive week of proper consumption pedagogy and tutorial demonstrated and taught by a group of queer people, the makeoverees are shown to succeed to be active members of the idealized, hegemonic system.

While doing so, the show adapts self-care as the way for self-transformation. Queer Eye assembles the practices built around taking care of oneself in a particular way that champions the individualized and commercialized version of the act of caring. This care is sought after to reach the idealized level of self-esteem, which is another tool neoliberal ideology uses to "govern at a distance" (Rose, 1999).

Neoliberal ideology is innately heteronormative so that it can (re)produce and reinforce itself, as the research establishes. Queer Eye and the Fab 5 that are the perfect representatives of the hegemonic ideology in effect, as shown, reflect this aspect of it, despite their queer DNAs. The identities that the dominant system

actively builds through the makeover process are informed by and have the essence of neoliberal subjectivity.

This research deliberately chooses a makeover reality show, Queer Eye, as its context, building on Halberstam's (2011) low theory that favors low culture products in order to generate alternative ways of knowledge production based on alternative ways of beings. As the show uses the word queer in its title and employs five queer experts as the Fab 5, the team of experts on the show, conducting critical discourse analysis unveils the counter-queer narratives and discourses constructed and used by the show.

The hegemonic neoliberal discourse constructs the self as "autonomous … and self-governing" that (re)produce a very masculine take on self-transformation through self-investment "because this idea of the self conceals the labors of care—often … the labor of women—" (McGee, 2005, 23). The makeover shows occasionally employ queer people as "tastemakers" and experts, which are prominent constructs in the mainstream consumer culture in line with the feminine codes of care (Philips, 2008; Sender, 2012, 8). While the advice and expertise offered by the queer people aim to overcome the "guilt and anxiety" (Philips, 2008, 121) imposed by late modernity under neoliberal capitalism, the neoliberal logic reproduces and "maintains structural asymmetries of power … that manifest in … everything from sexism to racism, from homophobia to poverty" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, 135).

The critique made in this research aims to provide space for an alternative, queer being regarding the sense of success/failure and ways of consumption and livings that try to maintain such an understanding.

5.2. Contribution

The rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s has created new markets that (new) consumers can act upon and be mobilized. Moreover, it centralized and attributed a vital part to the consumer who "[interacts] in private, free and competitive markets as the primary agency for social action and well-being" (Fitchett et al., 2014, 4). CCT is the dominant neoliberal system's product and not a commentary or critique (Fitchett et al., 2014). CCT's conceptualizing and theorizing of the consumer, therefore, is informed by the neoliberal ideology and narratives that favor individuality, emphasize agency, and construct a consumer that (re)acts in privatized free markets using market-mediated (re)sources. Therefore, the consumer culture at hand and consumer culture theory reinforce and are reinforced by the hegemonic ideologies that mediate self-centered, accumulation-driven, individualized actions. Due to the reduction or dismantling of the social welfare they could rely upon, they have internalized these values and lost their sense of community. Such a regime responsibilizes, atomizes, and moralizes self-care -or the care of the self as Foucault puts it. In other words, neoliberalism has "[transformed] individuals from … collective subjects, linked to other citizens in relationships of solidarity embodying social commitments and moral bonds, to self-governing individuals who must enterprise themselves by way of their own aptitudes and talents" (Foster, 2016). Within consumer research and CCT literature, neoliberal ideology's macro-level

impact has been studied and discussed (Giesler & Veresiu 2014; Veresiu & Giesler, 2018; Coskuner-Balli, 2020). This research engages with this vein of research in the consumer culture theory literature by displaying the underlying neoliberal discourses at play, how it mediates the audience's actions, decisions, attitudes, and beliefs in the marketplace and the utilization of neoliberal governmentality in a cultural/entertainment product, Queer Eye.

In The Care Manifesto (2020), the Care Collective –whose mission is to provide a "queer–feminist–anti-racist– eco-socialist political vision of 'universal care'''- unveil the ways neoliberalism harms the notion of care. "Neoliberalism," they state, "has neither an effective practice of, nor a vocabulary for, care". It is an "order concerned only with profits, growth and international competitiveness". It merely normalizes "abject failures to care at every level by positing them as necessary collateral damage on the road to market-oriented reforms and policies" due to the cuts made in welfare states. The neoliberal regime systematically erases "all forms of care and caring that do not serve its agenda of profit extraction" while creating "market-mediated and commodit[z]ed care" as depicted by Queer Eye and the Fab 5.

The Care Collective use the AIDS crisis to exemplify "the failures of both neoliberalism and hetero-patriarchal kinship". A system that heavily relies on the capability of the market to respond to any changes or developments happening in the real world efficiently and effectively could not take care of the victims of the virus. This was the case not only because of the exclusivity of privatized health care systems. The extant structures neoliberalism (re)produces are heteropatriarchal and work against the racialized and marginalized communities who were asymmetrically

impacted by the virus and the discourse around it. The Care Collective suggest "multiplying our circles of care" and "expanding our notion of kinship [would] achieve the psychic infrastructures necessary to build a caring society that has universal care as its ideal".

The kinship they refer might have been provided by the Fab 5, who are explicitly, loudly, and unapologetically queer. "Families of choice," a very queer concept common due to the necessity and camaraderie in the community, might be an example of such expansion. However, the Fab 5 does not offer the free, mutual, universal care one might look for, especially when labeled as a failure by the societal norms shaped by the neoliberal heteropatriarchal values. It is not only expected for the citizens/consumers to take care of themselves with no help but also is the ideal way. Therefore, the group of experts in a makeover reality show is employed to portray the "technologies of the self" that would facilitate neoliberal governance. The Fab 5 are not the advocates of self-care for better, well-cared-for, realized subjects, but the latest iteration of a neoliberal army designed to be the disseminators of the neoliberal sensibilities and values. This study aims to provide a critical analysis of the show and a macro phenomenon to unravel the hegemonic ideology and its discourses that feed the show.

While doing so, the study engages with the discussion regarding the neoliberal vice and tendency of CCT and contributes to the feminist and queer conversation under marketing and consumer research (Hearn & Hein, 2015). Coffin et al. (2019) calls for a future in marketing and consumer research that can go towards and beyond "LGBTQ+ studies". This research speaks to that very gap in the domain and asks for

further research that utilizes an intersectional perspective to enrich the extant literature. The research also empirically addresses queer phenomenology and low theory by exemplifying a context and discourse that is self-identified as queer that employs a countervailing hegemonic mechanism.

5.3. Further Research Directions and Limitations

As many scholars have called for intersectional studies in marketing and consumerresearch and knowledge production (Hearn & Hein, 2015), future studies can employ feminist and queer epistemologies and pedagogies. Such an intersection would enrich the research done in the area and provide a better understanding of the current consumership(s) and offer better commentary and critique to the hegemonic ideologies and discourses for alternative and hopefully better ways of beings and doings.

There have been 47 episodes produced, a total of five seasons. The framework and format of the show follow a narrowly defined formula of makeover reality shows at large. Therefore, the study limits its analysis with the first season released in 2018. Therefore, by not conducting an exhaustive analysis, the study trades off the possibility of covering every individual narrative that has a unique story to tell about various identities.

Moreover, the research acknowledges that race has a crucial multiplying effect on the consequences of neoliberalism. There is a significant and urgent discussion regarding race and racial representations on Queer Eye, both for the racialized members of the

Fab 5 and the makeoverees. The extant literature insufficiently discusses and

articulate the impacts of the dominant neoliberal heteropatriarchal discourse on such

individuals. There is potential for future research to closely examine racial aspects of

popular culture products that reinforce and are reinforced bythe hegemonic

discourse.

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Table I: Comprehensive list of makeoverees

Ep #	Episode Title	Name	Gender identity and sexual orientation	Age	Location	Race	Marital Status	Occupation	Mission of the makeover
1	You Can't Fix Ugly	Tom	Cisgender man / heterosexual	57	Dallas ,GA	White	Single	Not specified, but working	Going out on a date with his ex wife to a car show
2	Saving Sasquatch	Neal	Cisgender man / heterosexual	36	Atlanta, GA	Indian-American	Single	App developer	Launching his app while gaining his self-esteem and confidence back
3	Dega Don't	Cory	Cisgender man / heterosexual	36	Winder, GA	White	Married	Police officer	Making over his house and outlook to reflect his unique self in a more refined and age appropriate way

4	To Gay or Not Too Gay	AJ	Cisgender man / gay	32	Atlanta, GA	Black	In a relationship	Civil engineer	Helping him come out to his step-mother and have an upgraded living space and wardrobe representing him properly
5	Camp Rules	Bobby	Cisgender man / heterosexual	48	Mariette, GA	White	Married	Drafter in an engineering firm and shelf stocker at a home improvement store	Decluttering and reorganizing his house, as well as re-do the wedding ceremony and photoshoot he had failed to organize 12 years ago
6	The Renaissance of Remington	Remington	Cisgender man / heterosexual	27	Atlanta, GA	White	Single		Redecorating his grandmother's house that he lives in, so that his masculinity and personality would be reflected, that would eventually help him enhance his self-esteem

7	Below Average Joe	Joe	Cisgender man / heterosexual	33	Norcross, GA	Black	Single	Comedian	Helping him brand himself and his comedy act, as well as helping with his confidence
8	Hose Before Bros	Jeremy	Cisgender man / heterosexual	Not specified	Covington, GA	White	Married	Fireman	Organizing a fundraiser for the firehouse as well as refining his style and showing the importance of "caring"