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Fashioning Our Selves:
Power, Gender and Normalization in Personal Makeover Television Shows

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Abstract

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By Yael D Sherman

Makeover shows reflect and rearticulate classed and gendered ideals of self, promoting self-improvement through classed gender projects. As normalization primers, makeover shows incite our desire to fashion ourselves and teach us how to shape our selves according to classed gender ideals. In this dissertation, I analyze the workings of gender, normalization and power in four personal makeover shows, *What Not To Wear (WNTW)*, *10 Years Younger (10YY)*, *The Swan (TS)*, and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (QE)*. I argue that the forms of power used to transform participants are tied to both gender and class. With regard to class, I argue that on *QE* and *WNTW*, middle-class participants are transformed into self-enterprising subjects under a neoliberal regime, while on *10YY* and *TS*, working-class participants submit to a fixed feminine ideal under an authoritarian regime. With regard to gender and power, the female-oriented makeover shows target the body and the self through objectification, while *QE* does not. That is, while female-oriented makeover shows define women's self through their appearance, *QE* works on men's actions, promoting self-improvement through caring for the self across a range of traditionally feminine domains. However, while female oriented makeover shows all make appearance the measure of femininity, they idealize different constructions of the body and articulate femininity differently. The meaning of femininity is defined through agency and ambition in *WNTW*, self-respect and respectability in *10YY*, and as being (and finding satisfaction in being) a beautiful object to-be-looked-at in *TS*. Makeover shows teach us how to fashion ourselves, but the selves we are to work on are always already defined through gender and class. In these "postfeminist" times, women are still defined through the body, while men are defined through performance. As makeover shows repetitively normalize participants according to classed and gendered ideals, they attempt to shape the desire, knowledge, and agency of spectators.

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Fashioning Our Selves:
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Introduction

As I sat in the movie theater, watching *Sex and the City: The Movie*, I found myself alternately longing to look like Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie and being disgusted by her tiny body. Seeing her clad in only panties and a tank-top, I was shocked by how gaunt she looked, how small she was, and how much she resembled a little girl. Her body seemed sad to me, the product of endless diet and exercise. But watching her fill the screen in spectacular clothes and gorgeous shoes, I immediately wanted to look like her, like that. I pictured myself skinny, wearing fabulous clothes and high heels. I found myself thinking that I needed to lose at least ten pounds and what could I do to lose that weight? I could try to eat smaller portions and maybe start exercising at the gym again, in addition to my yoga practice... perhaps I should go on a serious diet. Even as I recognized the tight grip of normative standards on her ridiculously small body, her clothed body seemed fabulous, elegant, and desirable. Even after a lifetime as a feminist, my self-definition as an academic, and two years writing about gender normalization, Carrie's gorgeously constructed body in clothes provoked my desire to (re)fashion myself through working on my body: her image flipped my self-normalization switch.

Sex and the City: The Movie seduced me into self-fashioning. Sarah Jessica Parker's glamorized image was so persuasive and powerful, not because it uniquely spoke to me, but rather because it repeated the classic representation of ideal femininity. As a woman, I have already been socialized to define myself through my appearance and to identify with the glamorized images of other women. The movie did not need to convince me; it merely reactivated and directed those desires. I already knew what I

needed to do to fashion myself as a feminine woman. Prompted by the image of the glamorous woman, I imagined making myself over.

We all must fashion ourselves but such “self” fashioning is both gendered and classed. The language of self-fashioning is individualizing, seemingly democratic in its imperative to work on the self. As Meredith Jones argues, we are constantly exhorted to work on and improve ourselves in “makeover culture;”¹ however, Jones ignores the fact that the “self” is defined through gender and class. Men are defined by their performance and women by their appearance, while class defines the content and meaning of that performance or appearance. The definition of gender identity as “men act and women appear”² is based on women’s structural dependence—the 19th century assignment of men to the public sphere and women to the private sphere. Feminism has challenged (and continues to challenge) this social structure and its supporting discourses, but even after the impact of second-wave feminism, the maxim that “men act and women appear”³ holds true. Against Susan Bordo and Dennis Allen, who both argue that consumer capitalism has equalized the sexes, such that both men and women are judged and defined by appearance,⁴ I argue that popular culture relies on and reproduces the definition of men through performance and women through appearance.

While the *structure* of gender as “men act and women appear” is upheld in popular culture, the *content* is by no means stable or fixed. The meanings of femininity

¹ Meredith Jones, *Skintight* (New York: Berg, 2008).

² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1990), 47.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Susan Bordo, *The Male Body* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999); Dennis Allen, “Making Over Masculinity: A Queer “I” for the Straight Guy,” *Genders* 44 (2006).

and masculinity are constructed through a process of “articulation”; that is, femininity and masculinity each take on meaning through being linked with other elements in an assemblage.⁵ The media champions and circulates competing ideals of femininity, promoting different images of the feminine body, different means of attaining femininity, and different ends and meanings of femininity. These ideals vary by class. Similarly, the content of masculine “performance” is contested and classed in popular culture. Despite the leveling effects of feminism and consumer capitalism (or perhaps as a reaction to the changes caused by second-wave feminism), models of selfhood-- who one should be and how one should work on oneself—are gendered and classed.

In this dissertation, I analyze power, self-fashioning, and normalization through four Reality Television personal makeover shows. I examine makeover shows not because they are aesthetically significant, but because they enact the process of enculturation. Makeover shows are *normalization primers*; they reflect, re-articulate, and reinforce cultural ideals. Makeover shows transform and normalize participants, mandating (classed versions of) femininity for women and masculinity for men. Makeover shows are fascinating because they speak to and activate our desire to be the ideal wo/man through repetitively making participants into the “ideal” wo/man. In transforming participants through show-specific formulas, they teach us how to fashion ourselves. Makeover shows are ethical texts; they are about who we should be and how we should work on ourselves. Both didactic and persuasive, makeover shows promise happiness for those willing to follow the formula. This, of course, is not to say that

⁵ Stuart Hall, “On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall” edited by Lawrence Grossberg. in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. D Morley and K.H. Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 131-150.

makeover shows are automatically successful in leading audiences to adopt particular ideals and modes of self-fashioning; audiences may read such shows critically or against the grain. However, makeover shows are powerful precisely because they sell normalization as entertainment; under the guise of frivolous distraction, makeover shows crystallize and circulate cultural ideals of “self”-fashioning along gender and class lines.

Makeover shows enact enculturation through four aspects. First, through the formal properties of television; second, through the narrative of the makeover—the transformation from one state to another; third, through defining the means and ends of femininity (and with regard to *Queer Eye*, masculinity); and fourth, through each show’s apparatus of power—that is the set of mechanisms of transformation that each show uses to transform its participants. In the sections below, I review each aspect.

The Form of Television

Like film, television is made up of moving images and sound. As in film, these images and sounds are arranged to tell a story to the watching viewer. While film is identified with the institution of the cinema, television is identified with the private space of the home.⁶ The film screen is large and the image has a high-resolution, while the television screen is a good deal smaller and has a lower resolution (even though televisions have been getting larger and clearer in recent decades). Television, unlike film, has a “live” or “present” quality, even when it has been pre-recorded.⁷ In the

⁶ For a historical analysis of the introduction of television into the household see: Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁷ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television” in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Robert Allen (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 203-246.

cinema, once one sits down before the film screen, one watches as the film is projected. In contrast, when one turns on the television, one can change channels, temporarily leave the room, or turn off the television. One can channel surf or ritualistically watch TV over dinner; one can devotedly follow a program or tune in occasionally. Different television programs tend to provoke different patterns of viewing and fandom.⁸

Spectatorship is the site where the “real” viewer rubs up against the subject position constructed by the institution of cinema or television.⁹ Spectatorship is a central concern of Film Studies. Drawing on structuralism and psychoanalysis, Christian Metz and Jean Louis Baudry theorize the cinema as an apparatus, which produces the spectator-subject through activating fundamental psychic processes.¹⁰ As Laura Mulvey argues, these theories of spectatorship assumed a male spectator.¹¹ According to Mulvey, narrative film creates a masculine viewing position defined by voyeurism or fetishism: a male subject gazes at an objectified woman. However, as others have pointed out, Mulvey did not make room for a female spectator in her groundbreaking essay. Later, examining melodrama, Mulvey argues that female spectators oscillate uneasily between an unsustainable transvestite identification with the active male position and

⁸ One can always tune into a sitcom because nothing really changes, but one might not want to watch a dramatic serial out of order. The release of television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Wire* to DVD enables and rewards devoted viewing. Makeover shows tend to incite occasional viewing.

⁹ Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34-47.

identification with the passive female position.¹² Tanya Modleski argues for a more fluid, bisexual identification.¹³ Mary Ann Doane theorizes that, in addition to these two positions, female spectators could don a masquerade of femininity, creating distance from the image on screen and enabling a non-masochistic mode of feminine spectatorship.¹⁴ Moving away from gender identification, Gaylyn Studlar argues that spectatorship is passive and masochistic.¹⁵ Similarly working against gender identification, Elizabeth Cowie, reworking Jean LaPlanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, argues that the spectator can take up every position in the scene of the “fantasy.”¹⁶ In short, these diverse theories of spectatorship highlight the ways in which cinematic institutions and the structure of film speak to psychic structures and incite particular kinds of viewing and engagement.

The notion of the spectator has been vexed in Television Studies. The psychoanalytic model of the television spectator is the “distracted viewer” who does not “gaze” but merely “glances” at the television screen.¹⁷ The television spectator does not identify with the mastery of the look itself or with a specific character on screen, but instead identifies with multiple, shifting positions.¹⁸ Similarly, Raymond Williams

¹² Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 122-130.

¹³ Mayne, 71.

¹⁴ Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60-71.

¹⁵ Mayne, 71.

¹⁶ Mayne, 88-89.

¹⁷ While the filmic spectator takes on the look in a regression to the Lacanian Imaginary, television lacks the power to fascinate viewers; it can be turned on and off by the user, the room does not completely darken, and the image is not projected from behind the viewer’s head. Flitterman-Lewis, 217.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

describes television as a “flow” which spectators could move in and out of.¹⁹ Unlike film and spectators of film, television and television spectators are seen as predominantly domestic, feminine, and passive;²⁰ they absorb images in an endless flow. This conceptualization of television spectatorship devalues the visual field of the small screen and ignores the ways in which narrative hails the viewer. Indeed, under this model, all forms of television and all television shows are rendered the same. Against this totalizing conception of television, John Caldwell argues that television attempts to grab and hold viewers’ attention through digital manipulation, the use of graphics and inserts, and the development of different aesthetic styles, as seen in the visual complexity of shows such as *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse* (1986-1990).²¹

Given the devaluation of television under a psychoanalytic model, it is not surprising that most work on television has proceeded not out of psychoanalytic film theory, but out of British Cultural Studies, specifically the Birmingham School. While theories of spectatorship highlight the institutional and textual contexts, Cultural Studies highlights the reception context. Cultural Studies calls attention to the active, interpreting viewer. As Stuart Hall argues, a text may have a “preferred” or dominant reading, but the reader or viewer can critically or subversively read the text.²² Here, the “reading” of the text is an interaction between a specific social subject and the text. While theories of spectatorship tend to ignore differences of race and class, cultural studies highlights the

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Television* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁰ Spigel.

²¹ John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

²² Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding” in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 166-176.

viewer's social location. However, as Charlotte Brundson points out, this approach often uses a strategy of "redemptive reading" in which "bad" texts are saved by "good" audiences.²³ Drawing from Cultural Studies, television scholarship has investigated audience reception. However, when television is analyzed only in terms of audience response, narrative and formal elements are often neglected. In an interesting theoretical move, Ien Ang broke new ground when she analyzed the responses of actual viewers to *Dallas* through a psychoanalytic model of spectatorship.²⁴ Ang analyzed the audience's pleasure of identifying with Sue Ellen, a self-destructive tragic character. I believe that there is a place in Television Studies for analyses of audience response and spectatorship, as well as fusions of the two.

Against both the psychoanalytic model and the audience model, I argue that television spectatorship must be examined rather than assumed or discarded. I argue that different television shows provoke different modes of engagement and incite different forms of identification and the gaze. I analyze the subject created by television programs—one side of spectatorship—through an analysis of both the visual field—editing, mise-en-scene, staging—and narrative. With regard to television makeover shows, I argue that it is very difficult for the spectator to maintain a critical or ironic distance; like reality programs in general, the television makeover show is spectacular

²³ Charlotte Brundson, "Text and Audience" in *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*, ed. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Creutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 116-129.

²⁴ Ien Ang, "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy" in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Charlotte Brundson, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 155-166.

and emotional.²⁵ Following Studlar and Cowie, I move away from gendered determinants of the gaze: I argue that the (female) spectator is invited to alternately identify with the participant and objectify her with the show, through the show's "cultural gaze."²⁶ The gaze of objectification is a rejection of identification with the participant and an identification with the position of the show; identification with the participant involves imagining oneself in her place on the show.²⁷ However, as I show, class complicates the dynamics of objectification and identification. Both objectification and identification train the spectator to take up particular forms of the cultural gaze towards herself and others.

The Narrative of the Makeover

While the makeover show is a recent phenomenon, the makeover itself has deep roots in American culture. In the U.S. mythos, anyone can remake him/herself and succeed in the world.²⁸ As Kathy Peiss argues "[i]n the coloring and countering of facial surfaces, a woman could not only change her looks but remake herself and her life chances."²⁹ The makeover narrative didactically re/presents this belief in the possibility of self-fashioning and self-transformation. In this section, I trace the history of the

²⁵ Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower, 2005).

²⁶ With regard to the majority of makeover shows, the spectator (and the audience) is female. *QE* is the exception as the textual subject is male while the audience is mixed. The term "cultural gaze" is from Bordo 1999; I discuss it in "Femininity," below.

²⁷ I discuss the use of objectification as a technique of power in "Makeover Television Shows," below.

²⁸ As Dana Heller argues, reinvention is central to the American mythos. "Before: 'Things Just Keep Getting Better...'" in *The Great American Makeover*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-7.

²⁹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 144.

makeover in the U.S. through various media, showing how makeover television shows are similar to and different from preceding forms of the makeover.

The makeover has been used as a device in advertising, magazines, films, and television talk shows. Cressida Heyes traces the first “makeover” back to a 1924 flyer for a Homely Girl Contest, where a plastic surgeon promised to turn an ugly girl into a beauty.³⁰ Even in its earliest form, this version of the makeover contains elements fundamental to the makeover today. The flyer shows both the importance and the malleability of appearance. It also highlights the role of the expert in the makeover. Most importantly, the flyer links the makeover with both advertising, and consumption. However, while the flyer relies on the notion of the makeover, it primarily works through suggestion and imagination. The defining images of the makeover—the “before” and “after” images—are absent from this flyer.

Kathy Peiss traces the first proper “makeover” to a special story on the “Made-Over Girl” in *Mademoiselle* magazine in 1936.³¹ An ordinary reader of the magazine, nurse Barbara Phillips wrote to *Mademoiselle*, asking for advice on how to improve her looks. While she described herself as unattractive and too skinny, she wrote to the magazine in the hopes of being improved and transformed: “I want to be good-looking, well dressed and have at least a chance of giving Kit Cornell [Katherine Cornell] a run

³⁰ Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96.

³¹ Peiss 1998, 144. However, Sarah Berry argues that makeovers were a staple of Hollywood fan magazines in the 1920s and 1930s. She traces the first use of the term to January, 1939. *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

for her money.”³² Here, Phillips uses a stage star as the feminine ideal by which she measures herself. In addition, Phillips believes that make-up and clothing, expertly applied and chosen, will make her as beautiful as her ideal image. In 1936, then, appearance is already constructed as constructed.³³ *Mademoiselle* takes up the challenge of making Phillips over and in doing so, sets up many of the key elements of the makeover. First, the makeover requires the use of a disciplinary gaze to constitute and analyze the body. Phillips was evaluated and turned into a “series of parts to be overhauled.”³⁴ Second, the editors instructed Phillips to maximize her good features and minimize the bad through clothing and makeup, transforming specific parts of her body to achieve a feminine whole. Third, the “after” image was portrayed in Phillips’s glamorous photo spread. Fourth, an editorial explained how the look was achieved, step by step. Phillips’s makeover is *didactic*, an example that ordinary readers can and should follow.

The “Made Over Girl” was to be the first subject of many such makeovers in women’s magazines.³⁵ The makeover feature reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁶

³² Barbara Phillips as quoted in Kathryn Fraser, “‘Now I am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies...’ Ovid, The Metamorphoses” in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 177.

³³ For the transition in the early twentieth century to a common-sense understanding that (female) appearance is constructed for public display see: Kathy Peiss, “Making Up, Making Over; Cosmetics, Consumer Culture and Women’s Identity” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 311-336.

³⁴ Fraser 2007, 177.

³⁵ For a discussion on the makeover in magazines see: Kathryn Fraser, “The Makeover and Other Consumerist Narratives” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2002). For a discussion of how the makeover operates within women’s magazines more generally, see Ann-Marie Braithwaite, “From Makeovers to Making Over: Bodies, Agency, and Popular

Indeed, Marsha Cassidy argues that the term “makeover” became part of the standard vocabulary of women’s magazines in the 1980s.³⁷ The depiction of the makeover at this time shifted to *only* before and after pictures; images of the process vanished entirely. One now had to imagine the process of transformation through the instructions provided in the accompanying editorial. Like the magazine makeover, the television makeover show invites identification with the “after” image, shaping the desire to consume and therefore appear as the makeover subject appears. Fraser argues that the magazine makeover was sold as a kind of “empowerment” for women: women could become powerful become through becoming appealing to men.³⁸ While sexiness may function as “empowerment” as Fraser claims with regard to magazine makeovers, the meaning of femininity varies across television makeover shows. Fraser incorrectly applies her analysis of magazine makeovers to television makeover shows because she leaves out the question of power and assumes that femininity has only one meaning.³⁹ In contrast to the static images of the magazine makeover, the focus in television makeover shows is on the *process* of the transformation—*how* the participant is transformed inside and out.

The makeover also served and still serves as the guiding narrative of many women’s films. Kathryn Fraser argues that *Now, Voyager* is explicitly about the

Feminism in Women's Beauty Magazines” (Ph.D diss., The University of Rochester, 1998).

³⁶ Fraser 2002.

³⁷ Marsha Cassidy, “The Cinderella Makeover: *Glamour Girl*, Television Misery Shows, and 1950s Femininity” in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 125-140.

³⁸ As Fraser notes, this kind of “empowerment” reflects the new femininity espoused by Helen Gurley Brown in her groundbreaking work *Sex and the Single Girl* and in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*. Fraser 2002.

³⁹ Fraser 2007.

makeover, while Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell argue that the film is the first to use the makeover as plot.⁴⁰ Fraser argues that *Now, Voyager* operates as a didactic text for women viewer, writing that "...what women are being sold in the women's picture is a desirable/desiring femininity embodied by the female star and represented in terms of consumption."⁴¹ That is, Bette Davis's character, Charlotte Vale, models endless middle-class consumption as an ideal mode of femininity, teaching women both to buy and what to buy. Although Charlotte does not get the man in the end, male desire is central to her formation as a feminine subject—for Fraser, as a subject at all. Consumption is thus the way for women to become subjects, for it is through consumption that women can become beautiful and be desired by men. Drawing on Mary Ann Doane, Fraser argues that *Now, Voyager* is about magical transformation through consumption, which is sold to female spectators through advertising tie-ins and the film itself as a "shop window."⁴²

Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell argue that two fairy-tales are at the heart of the movie makeover: Cinderella and Pygmalion.⁴³ In the Cinderella-themed makeovers, the protagonist's true beauty is revealed and rewarded. In the Pygmalion-themed makeovers, the protagonist is transformed at the hands of a man into a middle-class feminine subject. For instance, in *Pretty Woman*, Edward Lewis (Richard Gere) raises Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) up in class and marries her. Vivian also changes Edward by

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell, *The Makeover in Movies: Before and after in Hollywood Films, 1941-2002* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004).

⁴¹ Fraser 2002, 114.

⁴² Fraser 2002, 113-114.

⁴³ Fraser (2007) also names Pygmalion as the ur-text of the television makeover show. The problem with applying this model to interpret television makeover shows is that it ignores the workings of power and agency, by framing the makeover as a story about male desire.

enabling him to become more emotionally open.⁴⁴ The movie ends with a romantic, fairy-tale union, as Edward Rides up in a white car to take Vivian away from a life of prostitution. Change in identity is signified and made possible through change in Vivian's appearance: appearance and identity are tied together. Here, Pygmalion is successful in creating the ideal woman, even as he is challenged by her. For Ford and Mitchell, the makeover enables romance, but it is always the woman who must be made-over for the man. The movie makeover, in both these analyses, requires women to be beautiful and situates femininity firmly in relation to male desire.

Movie makeovers are fairy-tales that speak to cultural fantasies around gender. Unlike makeover shows, they are not about changing ordinary women, but about showcasing a star's "essential" femininity, attractiveness, and star power. Both makeover television shows and makeover films construct a feminine ideal through the makeover. Both address a female spectator, speaking to and channeling women's desire. Like the magazine makeover, both teach women how to consume in order to be beautiful. Both attach women's identity to and through their appearance. Unlike the magazine makeover, both showcase the process of transformation. However, the movie makeover situates the power to transform the woman in the hands of a man as part of the heterosexual trajectory, while the makeover show relies on experts to transform the participant, rendering the relationship of transformation a professional one. The forms of power at work in the transformation are also different: power is modeled as privately patriarchal in the movie makeover, while power operates in various disciplinary ways in the television show. The end of the movie makeover is a narrative end, a fairy-tale romance; the end of

⁴⁴ Ford and Mitchell.

the makeover show is the transformation of a person through feminization (for women) or masculinization (for men.) Unlike the fictional films, makeover shows are a form of reality television in which power acts on and “transforms” real people.

Kathryn Fraser convincingly argues that the makeover is implicitly at work in advertisements. As she points out, many advertisements use “before” and “after” images and *all* advertisements operate as “after” images.⁴⁵ The advertisement stimulates desire, suggests an ideal, and a way to approach that ideal, just like the makeover.

Advertisements offer identity to the consumer, linking identity to women’s sense of themselves as “objectified surfaces.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Fraser suggests that women are blank slates to be defined by magazines and commodities. Again, women’s identity is tied to appearance. Like advertisements, makeover shows stimulate consumption. However, makeover shows engage with identity on a deeper level and link appearance to self and identity in complex and powerful ways. Makeover shows are about the process of transformation; they use power to transform real individuals, while advertisements traffic in fantasy.

The makeover made the move to television in two forms before the current wave of makeover shows erupted in the early ’00s. First, the “misery shows” of the 1950s such as *Glamour Girl* and *Queen for a Day* both preached transformation through consumption.⁴⁷ As “misery shows,” these two shows gave voice to women’s unhappiness

⁴⁵ Fraser 2002, 60.

⁴⁶ Goldman as quoted in Fraser 2002, 60.

⁴⁷ Cassidy and Amber Watts, “*Queen for a Day*: Remaking Consumer culture, One Woman at a Time” in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 141-158. According to Cassidy, while *Glamour Girl* had decent ratings, it ran for only a year, 1953-1954. According to

and linked, as Mimi White argues, confession to curative consumption.⁴⁸ In *Glamour Girl*, four participants competed for the chance to be made-over by telling their sad stories. The winner won a day of beautification and pampering and then returned to show off her new look and outlook on the show the next day. As Marsha Cassidy argues, “Evoking these perceived connections between the inner and outer self, a winner’s revitalization on *Glamour Girl* was presented as reflecting a much deeper transformation.”⁴⁹ Like modern day makeover shows, a feminine appearance was promoted as the route to happiness through the work of one’s appearance on one’s self. Cassidy argues that glamour was intended to resuscitate or enable marriages: femininity here operates within the model of competition in the private sphere for men and security. Like modern day makeovers, the “after” image operates as spectacle. The made-over contestant serves as a point of identification, encouraging not just consumption but endless work on the self through working on one’s appearance. While *Glamour Girl* and to a lesser extent, *Queen for a Day* presaged modern makeover shows, they operate more like magazines, highlighting the “before” and “after,” rather than the process.

The makeover reappeared on television in the form of short segments on various talk shows in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁰ As Amanda Gallagher and Lisa Pecot-Heber argue, “[t]he concept of making yourself over entirely was articulated again in the 1980s and

Watts, *Queen for a Day* began as a radio show and was broadcast nationally from 1956 to 1964. Though condemned by social critics, it had very strong ratings.

⁴⁸ Cassidy 2006 and Watts 2006 both cite Mimi White, *Teleadvising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ Cassidy, 126.

⁵⁰ Such makeovers are still a part of talk shows like *Oprah*. More recently, the makeover appeared as a short segment on *Fashion Police*.

1990s with the televised makeover becoming a staple on daytime television talk shows (e.g., *The Jenny Jones Show*.)⁵¹ Individuals are shown before, once or twice during the makeover itself, and after. The segments are typically short and spectacular, just another variety act. Individuals are rehabilitated through the makeover. This form of the makeover directly preceded the television makeover shows and set up the entertaining spectacle of watching normalization. However, in comparison to television makeover shows, the talk show segments lack narrative, attention to process, and a developed discourse of transformation.

The modern television personal makeover show is a phenomenon of the '00s. The first television makeover show was *Mission Makeover*, a makeover show for troubled teens that aired from 1998 to 2002. The next major makeover show was *A Makeover Story*, which debuted in 2000 on TLC and ran for five seasons before it was cancelled. Makeover shows exploded onto television in the U.S. between 2003 and 2008. In September, 2006 there were *eleven* personal makeover shows being broadcast in the United States. TLC boasted of four: *A Makeover Story*, *What Not to Wear (WNTW)*, *10 Years Younger (10YY)* (in rerun), and *Covershot*. Style boasted of five: *How Do I Look*, *Ambush Makeover* (in rerun), *The Look for Less*, *Style Her Famous* and reruns of ABC's *Extreme Makeover*. *Queer Eye* (formerly *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) aired on Bravo. After a long hiatus, MTV was again showing new episodes of *I Want a Famous Face*. Some of these shows borrowed from formats in other countries: both *WNTW* and *10YY* originally hail from Britain and were remade in the U.S. Cancelled makeover

⁵¹ Amanda Gallagher and Lisa Pecot-Hebert, " 'You Need a Makeover!': The Social Construction of Female Body Image in *A Makeover Story*, *What Not to Wear*, and *Extreme Makeover*," *Popular Communication* 5(1) (April 2007): 60.

shows, which aired in the last five years include *Head 2 Toe*, *The Swan*, *Extreme Makeover*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*, *Makeover Manor* and *Style Court*. New makeover shows (2008) include *Tim Gunn's Guide to Style* (Bravo), *How to Look Good Naked* (Lifetime), *Style Her Famous* (Style).

Why did makeover television shows explode in the '00s? While it is not possible to answer this question with certainty, I speculate that a mix of political economy, genre innovation, the intensification of self-fashioning and image-oriented culture, and rising anxiety over women's equality played into the creation and the popularity of the makeover television show genre. With regard to political economy, makeover shows, like all reality television shows, are cheap to produce and do not require recognized writers.⁵² The television writer's strike of 1998 may have spurred network and cable interest in developing other formats. In addition, makeover television sells products within the show itself, enabling money to be made via product placement.⁵³ Second, reality television emerged as a distinct mode of television programming. While quiz shows and talk shows both featured "real people," the notion of "reality television" emerged in the 1990s and exploded at the turn of the century.⁵⁴ Reality television features "real people" being

⁵² Toby Miller, "Metrosexuality: See the Bright Light of commodification Shine! Watch Yanqui Masculinity Made Over!" in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 105-122.

⁵³ June Deery, "Trading Faces: The Makeover Show as Prime-Time 'Infomercial,'" *Feminist Media Studies* 4.2 (2004): 211-14.

⁵⁴ For academic analyses of reality television, see: Biressi and Nunn 2005; James Friedman, ed., *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, eds., *Understanding Reality Television* (London: Routledge, 2004); Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

filmed in a variety of constructed circumstances. Third, makeovers speak to the concerns of a culture driven by image and self-fashioning. While U.S. culture has been image-oriented since the early 20th century, the domination of images has intensified in the present day U.S.⁵⁵ Fourth, as women have gained freedom and equality, thanks to feminism, the push to contain women through beauty also intensified.⁵⁶ Makeover shows may be a response to this anxiety and a way of making beauty culture compulsory for women. Makeover shows may in fact be an attempt to stabilize gender in the face of feminist challenge and the fading of many gender norms.⁵⁷ Finally, as discussed above, makeovers had been featured on television, primarily as short segments on talk shows. The factors listed above, and likely others, led to the innovation of a new genre: the Reality Television personal makeover show.

Femininity

In order to analyze how femininity functions as a mode of self-fashioning in makeover shows, it is necessary to define and historically situate femininity. Hegemonic femininity defines what it is to be a woman in a given society.⁵⁸ In the 19th century in the U.S., the primary domain of femininity began to shift from domesticity to appearance. Women began to define and measure themselves predominantly through their self-fashioned

⁵⁵ Susan Bordo, "In the Empire of Images" in *Unbearable Weight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xiii-xxxvii.

⁵⁶ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

⁵⁷ Judith Roof, "Working Gender/Fading Taxonomies," *Genders* 44 (2006): 1-33.

⁵⁸ I address masculinity in Chapter Four, "Learning to be a Man in *Queer Eye*."

appearance.⁵⁹ In the 20th century, beauty—variously defined across race, class and time—became a defining aspect of womanhood.⁶⁰ Over the last century, the definition of femininity through appearance has threaded through changing constructions of femininity, taking on more or less weight in particular historical moments. While femininity-as-beauty is rooted in women’s structural dependence, this form of femininity does not simply evolve over time in response to a changing social structure. Rather earlier ideals impact and contradict newer ones. Constituted in discourse, the *meaning* of the feminine body is not static or progressive, but rather variable, contested, and non-linear. By the late 20th century, the body had emerged as central to the definition of femininity, but why and for whom must women be beautiful is both contested and classed.

Dependency

Women’s identity is tied to appearance not because women are “naturally” vain, but because women are evaluated by and valued for their appearance. Separately, John Berger and Sandra Bartky analyze the structure of femininity in very similar terms: as a doubled subjectivity in which the feminine person is both watcher and watched, ‘surveyor and surveyed,’ subject and object.⁶¹ Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir, Bartky argues that given women’s ‘life situation’,

Knowing that she is to be subjected to the cold appraisal of the male connoisseur and that her life prospects may depend on how she is seen, a

⁵⁹ For instance, Joan Brumberg chronicles a shift in the work of self-improvement from character in the nineteenth century to body in the twentieth in her analysis of girls’ diaries. Joan Brumberg, *The Body Project* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

⁶⁰ Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); Wendy Chapkiss, *Beauty Secrets* (Boston: South End Press, 1986); Wolf.

⁶¹ Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38–41; Berger, 40.

woman learns to appraise herself first. The sexual objectification of women produces a duality in feminine consciousness. The gaze of the other is internalized so that I myself become seer and seen, appraiser and the thing appraised.⁶²

Similarly, Berger argues that “ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life [marriage].”⁶³

Women learn to ‘survey’ themselves because they know they are ‘surveyed’ by men and their future (marriage) is determined by how she appears to men. Women use beauty to manipulate men, because men value women’s beauty. This is an example of what Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr call the passive power of beauty: women work on their appearance to influence the way men see them.⁶⁴

Berger, Bartky (and de Beauvoir’s) arguments all rely on the notion that women are fundamentally dependent on men. Berger and Bartky ignore class differences and social change. The woman at the center of their analyses is really a white heterosexual middle-class construct of Victorian times.⁶⁵ Such women were economically, politically, and socially dependent on men: they had no choice but to marry. With the emergence of separate spheres, women had access to men and men had access to resources.⁶⁶ A woman’s appearance was likely not the only attribute that was evaluated with regard to a potential marriage, but it is the attribute that women could best control. Appearance

⁶² Bartky, 38.

⁶³ Berger, 46

⁶⁴ Lakoff and Scherr.

⁶⁵ Historian Lois Banner claims that with industrialization in the early 19th century, beauty became the province of women and adornment became an important part of women’s lives. *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁶⁶ As Susan Bordo argues, the emergence of separate spheres led to the definition of men as “productive” and women as “consuming.” *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999).

became central to femininity as a result of women's structural dependency: women were *commodities*. Berger and Bartky argue that this form of femininity persists due to the objectification of women in popular culture; because women are valued as beautiful things, they value themselves as beautiful things.⁶⁷ Although women are no longer dependent on men, the self-objectifying subjectivity of femininity persists because it is upheld in discourse.

In another essay, Bartky moves away from the argument that women are intimately dependent on men, arguing instead that self-objectification or self-surveillance is the product of "the modernization of patriarchal power."⁶⁸ Drawing from Foucault's work on the panopticon, Bartky argues that women are produced as disciplined docile bodies through the panopticon. Bartky applies the notion of discipline to femininity, arguing that women's bodies are fragmented and analyzed in popular culture such that an entire range of products has been developed to "help" women deal with their "problem areas."⁶⁹ Women police their own bodies according to the "panoptical male connoisseur [who] resides within the consciousness of most women."⁷⁰ Women watch themselves from the perspective of the "male connoisseur" because they are everywhere watched; discipline is "institutionally unbound."⁷¹ A failure to perform femininity may result in being shamed, disciplined, or worse yet, "the refusal of male patronage," which is "a very severe

⁶⁷ As Laura Mulvey (2000) memorably argues, women are objectified in film, turned into spectacle for the male gaze.

⁶⁸ Bartky, 63.

⁶⁹ Mary Ann Doane makes a similar argument in *The Desire to Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 31.

⁷⁰ Bartky, 72.

⁷¹ Bartky, 75.

sanction indeed in a world dominated by men.”⁷² For Bartky, patriarchy both causes and benefits from women’s obsessive self-surveillance, as “[t]his system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men.”⁷³ Indeed, “this self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy.”⁷⁴ However, while Bartky argues femininity is required of women, she also maintains that for even successfully beautiful women, their efforts result in “little real respect and rarely any social power.”⁷⁵ Writing in 1988, Bartky overlooks changing social conditions by attributing a widespread public dependence of women on men. She also overlooks the extent to which both women and men monitor women; for her, the gaze is resolutely male. In this analysis, femininity is inevitable, oppressive, and the product of patriarchy.

According to some theorists, the definition of femininity through beauty works to reinforce women’s subordinate and dependent status.⁷⁶ Women are compelled to objectify themselves and this inevitably limits and/or hurts women. Iris Marion Young argues that “[w]omen in sexist society are physically handicapped” because in objectifying themselves, women learn to treat their bodies as things, “fragile encumbrances.”⁷⁷ Susan Brownmiller argues that

...for every adjustment a woman makes to prove her feminine differences adds another fine stitch to the pattern: an inhibition on speech and

⁷² Bartky, 76.

⁷³ Bartky, 75.

⁷⁴ Bartky, 80.

⁷⁵ Bartky, 73.

⁷⁶ Bartky; Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985); Lakoff and Scherr; Wolf.

⁷⁷ Young, 153 and 147.

behavior, a usurpation of time, and a preoccupation with appearance that deflects the mind and depletes the storehouse of energy and purpose.⁷⁸

To be constantly concerned with appearance saps one's ability to do anything, but for Brownmiller it is mandatory; women are compelled to perform femininity lest they be accused of being "mannish or neutered."⁷⁹ Naomi Wolf argues that beauty is *used* to contain women.⁸⁰ Like Brownmiller, Wolf argues that the pursuit of beauty saps women's energy and renders them insecure and dependent on male approval. Likewise, Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr argue that the pursuit of beauty (re)produces women's helplessness and passivity.⁸¹ For these theorists, femininity is essentially for men or profits men, while women are rendered dependent by the pursuit of beauty.

The Cultural Gaze and Self-Fashioning

Against the definition of the self-surveying gaze through men or the "panoptic male connoisseur," the gaze can be understood as a *cultural gaze*.⁸² While Bartky and Berger ground the gaze in social structure—in women's dependence on men, Susan Bordo grounds the gaze in culture. Like Bartky, Bordo draws on Foucault to argue that women survey themselves. However, for Bordo, the "cultural gaze" is the evaluative gaze modeled in popular culture and taken up by both women and men. Popular culture provides the standard that we use to judge ourselves and each other. As Bordo argues, women attempt to meet standards of femininity *not* to please or manipulate men but "for me": "In these constructions, 'me' is imagined as a pure and precious inner space, an

⁷⁸ Brownmiller, 221.

⁷⁹ Brownmiller, 15.

⁸⁰ Wolf, 7.

⁸¹ Lakoff and Scherr.

⁸² Bordo 1999; Bartky, 72; Mulvey 2000.

‘authentic’ and personal reference point untouched by external values and demands.”⁸³

As Bordo sarcastically points out, “me” is in fact shaped by culture; desire does not spring from some mysterious inner well, but in reaction to images and ideals embodied in popular culture. As Mary Ann Doane argues, women consumed and “bought” the image of the feminine ideal themselves.⁸⁴ For Bordo, self-surveillance is not compelled out of dependency as it is for Berger and Bartky, but out of a culturally-conditioned desire to meet the ideal for oneself. The desire for beauty is the product of a culture that judges women by their appearance.

Against the argument that beauty is purely a limiting practice that renders women dependent and helpless, women find pleasure and a sense of agency in fashioning themselves.⁸⁵ For Radner,

...to construct *herself* as beautiful, to reproduce *herself* as the image of the beautiful and to mistake that image as the *self*, produces a moment of gloriousness in which the role of the man is... marginalized⁸⁶

Radner highlights women’s pleasure in rendering themselves beautiful and notes that this pleasure is not about performing for the male gaze, but simply for oneself. When one’s identity is staked on beauty, being beautiful is itself rewarding. Kathy Peiss highlights the pleasures of playing with make-up as a sensuous and artistic experience as well as a site of agency.⁸⁷ Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath, and Sharon Smith argue that

⁸³ Susan Bordo, “Braveheart, Babe, and the Contemporary Body” in *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*, ed. Erik Parens (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 193.

⁸⁴ Doane, 24.

⁸⁵ Bordo 1993; Chapkiss; Peiss 1998; Hilary Radner, *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁸⁶ Radner, xii, italics hers.

⁸⁷ Peiss 1998.

advertisements in women's magazines (in the 1980s) position the female body as a "locus of freedom as well as sexual pleasure" for women.⁸⁸ These theorists highlight the fact that constructing one appearance *feels like* a site of personal expression, control and freedom, even as one is culturally defined through the body and the standards one uses for oneself are shaped and promoted in popular culture. As Bordo argues, working on one's appearance is a matter of both power and pleasure; neither cancels the other out.⁸⁹ The practice of beauty is both limiting and "empowering"; beauty requires time and energy, but the expenditure of time and energy on oneself can feel liberating and pleasurable.

While Susan Bordo and Mike Featherstone argue that self-fashioning is post-modern, part of the reduction of depth to surface and the body to cultural plastic,⁹⁰ femininity became tied to self-fashioning in the late 19th century. Although Lois Banner argues that beauty and adornment became important to women in the early 19th century, Kathy Peiss places the emergence of self-fashioning—working on the self through working on one's appearance—in the late 19th century. Peiss argues that

...a critical new element was advanced in the late nineteenth century: that making up was preparation for women's legitimate public performances. This view implied a degree of agency, self-creation, and pleasure in self-representation. For the nascent beauty industry, this became the new paradigm of female appearance.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath, and Sharon Smith, "Commodity Feminism," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1991): 338.

⁸⁹ Bordo 1993, 27.

⁹⁰ See Bordo 1993 and Mike Featherstone, "The Body in Consumer Culture" in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. Mike Hepworth, Mike Featherstone, Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 170-96.

⁹¹ Peiss 1996, 322.

Following stage stars, women made themselves up for their performance in the public sphere. As Peiss argues, “[m]akeup contributed to the constitution of women’s identity, no longer to its falsification.”⁹² This new understanding contradicted earlier notions that the outside reflected the inside and that “paint” (or makeup) was deceptive artifice. Under this new understanding, the surface of the body was constituted as malleable, shaped by one’s will and artistry. Makeup became a route to both *transformation* and *self-realization*. One became a woman through applying makeup or fashioning oneself, which meant that to be a woman, one had to use makeup and fashion oneself. Women made-up the surface of their bodies to meet the twinned demands of beauty and womanhood. Examining girls’ diaries, Joan Brumberg argues that while in the 19th century, girls worked on themselves through improving their character, in the 20th century, girls worked on themselves through improving their appearance.⁹³ Feminine self-fashioning is grounded in the assignment of beauty to women, but blooms with the new conception of the malleable body in the 20th century. As women identify their inner selves with their bodies, working on the body becomes a way to work on and fashion the self.

The Fashion-Beauty-Complex

In addition to being “for” men or women, the definition of women through their appearance profits what Sandra Bartky calls the fashion-beauty- complex.⁹⁴ The mass cosmetics industry promoted the notion of “beauty for all,” which meant that one had to be beautiful.⁹⁵ As Mary Ann Doane argues with regard to women’s films in the 1940s,

⁹² Peiss 1996, 330.

⁹³ Brumberg.

⁹⁴ Bartky.

⁹⁵ Peiss 1996, 323.

The very familiarity and banality of such ploys should not blind us to the overwhelming intensity of the injunction to the female spectator-consumer to concern herself with her appearance—an appearance which can only be fortified and assured through the purchase of a multiplicity of products.⁹⁶

The notion that one can become beautiful through product use is predicated on the notion that one is inadequate the way one is.⁹⁷ As Bordo argues “...we are not permitted to feel satisfied with ourselves and we are ‘empowered’ only and always through fantasies of what we *could* be.”⁹⁸ Women’s inadequacy fuels consumption and the fashion-beauty complex.⁹⁹ Advertisements promise that we can meet the ideal through images of commodified women, creating anxiety while offering to alleviate it through purchase. The body is fragmented, broken into pieces, while hundreds of consumer solutions offer to solve each problematic piece.¹⁰⁰ As Doane argues

The ideological effect of commodity logic on a large scale is therefore the deflection of any dissatisfaction with one’s life or any critique of the social system onto an intensified concern with a body which is in some way guaranteed to be at fault. The body becomes increasingly *the* stake of late capitalism.¹⁰¹

The fact that women’s identity is staked to the body renders women perpetually vulnerable to narratives of self-improvement through consumption. Women endlessly

⁹⁶ Doane, 30.

⁹⁷ Bartky, 72; Wolf; Bordo 1998 .

⁹⁸ Bordo 1998, 209.

⁹⁹ Wolf, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 47; Doane, 32. Plastic surgery is now a mainstream option for normalizing the body. See: Virginia Blum, *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Deborah Covino, *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004); and Jones 2008.

¹⁰¹ Doane, 32.

consume commodities in hopes of reaching a retreating ideal, while the fashion-beauty-complex profits.

Race, Class and Beauty

While this is how many theorists discuss femininity and self fashioning—that women do it for men, women do it for themselves (in relation to cultural ideals), and that the fashion-beauty-complex profits from it either way—these lines of thinking do not take race or class into account. Beauty ideals are raced.¹⁰² As Kathy Peiss shows, beauty practices among women of color in the early 20th century were designed to make women of color look more beautiful—that is, a bit whiter— through straightening hair (also a practice of Jewish women) or bleaching skin. While this ideal, the ideal of the “brown girl,” was contested by Afrocentric ideals in the 1910s and 1920s, it proved dominant.¹⁰³ Although mainstream beauty ideals in the African American community were influenced by white beauty standards, “the culture of beauty asserted desires for dignity, respect, and social participation in a world in which these basic human imperatives were all too often denied.”¹⁰⁴ Beauty culture was an important part of racial uplift in the early 20th century: beauty contests, products formulated for black women, and beauty-industry philanthropy were all a part of the program of uplift. Black women found agency and pride in fashioning themselves —dressing fashionably, straightening and styling their hair, and using makeup— in the late 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁰⁵ Although beauty ideals were

¹⁰² Lola Young, “Racializing Femininity” in *Women’s Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, ed. Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (New York: Cassell, 1999), 67-90.

¹⁰³ Peiss 1998, 208.

¹⁰⁴ Peiss 1998, 235.

¹⁰⁵ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Peiss 1998.

influenced by white standards,¹⁰⁶ self-fashioning was an important aspect of individual self-respect and racial pride in resistance to demeaning white stereotypes of black women.

Femininity is also classed. Over the last century, black and white middle-class women reformers have critiqued black and white working-class women for their “excessive” femininity. Class interrupts the male-female dynamic of femininity as middle-class women gaze at and objectify working-class women. In the early 20th century, white factory girls scandalized white middle-class female reformers with their bright many-colored dresses, French heels, and flamboyant hats.¹⁰⁷ The factory girls drew their ideal from movies and books and constructed themselves as “ladies” through their own rules of self-fashioning.¹⁰⁸ Middle-class reformers critiqued working-class women for being frivolous and spendthrift and tried to interest them in “serious” occupations, but working-class women resisted such reform efforts and particularly the false-binary of labor activism and working-class femininity. For working-class women, performing femininity was a part of labor activism; they held onto their dignity as women through putting together feminine outfits with the money they had earned. Femininity was tied to their status as *working* women. Similarly, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, working-class black women dressed-up as a way of claiming their dignity and were

¹⁰⁶ Writing about Black women in the South, Hunter argues that African Americans created an alternative beauty ethos that celebrated Black women. Hunter, 183.

¹⁰⁷ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

criticized by black middle-class reformers for their vanity.¹⁰⁹ Despite dominant middle-class discourses, white and black working class women found pleasure, agency, and dignity in constructing themselves as feminine according to their own models.

The middle-class critiques of working-class women are telling. In the 1920s, working-class women imitated movie stars and drew condemnation as whores or delinquents for their “excessive” use of makeup, including “thick layers of face powder and rouge, painted bow lips, and beaded eyelashes.”¹¹⁰ Working-class femininity tends to be critiqued as unrestrained, disrespectful and excessive: too brightly colored, too many flourishes, too sexy, too glamorous, and too revealing. In contrast, middle-class femininity is naturalized as normal or invisible: it is restrained, respectable, dignified. Working-class femininity is branded as the sexual body, which allows middle-class femininity to occupy the unmarked space of the natural. While styles of working-class femininity have changed over the last hundred years, the distinction between working-class and middle-class femininity remains. Although the working-class has largely become invisible in the United States, feminine ideals are still classed. As I argue in this dissertation, depictions of working-class femininity are much more closely tied to the sexual body than depictions of middle-class femininity in the media.

Femininity in the Public Sphere

Because femininity is defined through the private realm, feminine appearance tends to become particularly important when women enter the “masculine” public sphere. The 1910s and 1920s, World War II, and the post-second-wave period are all marked by

¹⁰⁹ Hunter, 182.

¹¹⁰ Peiss 1996, 327.

women's mass entrance into the public sphere and the increased importance of beauty for women. Kathy Peiss argues that in the late 19th century:

The proliferation of cosmetics in the consumer market coincided with women's new relationship to the public sphere: their expanding but contested participation in economic, political, and social activities formerly understood in cultural terms as masculine.¹¹¹

Women must put on femininity when they are in danger of losing it through participating in the public sphere.¹¹² As women gained greater social and political independence in the 1920s and after the second wave, the grip of power on women's bodies tightened.¹¹³ According to Wolf, beauty becomes more central to femininity when other feminine limitations are broken.¹¹⁴ When women gain greater independence and move *en masse* into the public sphere, appearance maintains women as feminine.

Femininity can take on two contradictory meanings in the public sphere. First, in relation to fears about women leaving the private sphere, beauty functions to *disguise* women's ambition. As Brownmiller argues, "its [beauty's] strategic use is often good camouflage for those wishing to hide their ambition from public view."¹¹⁵ Similarly, Joan Riviere argues that "womanliness" *always* functions as a mask to disguise women's intelligence and ambition.¹¹⁶ This use of beauty relies on the notion that feminine women are passive, selfless and lack ambition: beauty is the mark of femininity that allows women to disguise themselves, even as they pay homage to it. In performing femininity

¹¹¹ Peiss 1996, 326.

¹¹² Berry, 173.

¹¹³ Bordo 1993, Wolf 10-11.

¹¹⁴ Wolf, 10-11.

¹¹⁵ Brownmiller, 221.

¹¹⁶ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986).

one becomes visible as object/body rather than subject/mind. Women could use femininity to get away with “masculine” pursuits because femininity signifies frivolousness and a lack of ambition.

In contrast, femininity can further advancement in the public sphere, not because it disguises ambition, but because it *represents* ambition. As Chapkiss argues, “[d]ress is success.”¹¹⁷ In the late 1920s, cosmetics were advertised to Black women as a way to gain self-confidence and present oneself as modern and respectable.¹¹⁸ As Bordo argues, appearance is taken as evidence of will and agency.¹¹⁹ In this construction, femininity means that one takes care of oneself, that one is a self-enterprising, self-fashioning individual, in charge of one’s destiny. Femininity no longer denotes identification as object/body or dependency, but the work of the mind and the will on the body. Under neoliberalism, middle-class femininity denotes agency and ambition.

Despite the impact of second-wave feminism, women’s identity is still staked to the body. Although the definition of femininity through the body is rooted in dependency, this definition of femininity intensified after the second wave. As Wolf argues, after the work of second-wave feminism, “[t]he Feminine Mystique evaporated; *all that was left was the body.*”¹²⁰ However, as I have shown, the meaning of that body is by no means static or linear. Femininity can be conceived as a performance for men or a way to manipulate men. Femininity can be for women’s own narcissistic pleasure. Femininity is a site of agency; femininity is a site of oppression. Femininity is the product of

¹¹⁷ Chapkiss, 81.

¹¹⁸ Peiss 1996, 330.

¹¹⁹ Bordo 1999.

¹²⁰ Wolf, 67.

dependency and a form of social control; femininity is a way of achieving success in the public realm. Femininity disguises and announces ambition. Femininity is the body; femininity marks the control of the mind over the body. Femininity requires a set of actions, treating the body in habitual and repeated ways to attain a mythic norm. It is both voluntary and compelled, a site of pleasure and pain, success and shame. Women must fashion themselves through working on the body, but the body is constituted differently and given different meanings across class.

In this postfeminist neoliberal moment of anxiety and gender instability, makeover shows repetitively mandate femininity for women through the body, even as they redefine femininity, proposing different means, ends, and meanings of femininity. Perhaps makeover shows are popular precisely because they resolve the question of femininity, but the plethora of shows, all with competing ideals of femininity, only intensifies the confusion over femininity.

Personal Makeover Shows

I take up the question of self-fashioning, gender, and normalization through analyzing four personal television makeover shows. My methodology is defined by first, a comparative approach to makeover shows, and second, analyzing makeover shows through close reading in terms of power, ideology, and gender. First, I approach television makeover shows as a genre, that is, as a set of shows which can be distinguished from other television shows. As I discuss in the “The Makeover Narrative,” above, what makes personal makeover television shows different from other makeover media is the fact that makeover shows make an intervention into reality and make the

process of that intervention visible. Makeover shows transform real people according to each show's particular gendered and classed ideal. While reality television makeover shows are scripted, formulaic and edited, it is in fact the formula—the specific array of mechanisms of transformation—that defines each show and sets the genre apart from other forms of the makeover. This definition eliminates television programs which only occasionally feature makeovers, like *America's Next Top Model* or *Oprah*. I limited my analysis to U.S. shows, which allows me to generalize for the U.S. I concentrated on the time period between 2002 and 2007, the peak of the makeover show format in the U.S.¹²¹ I choose not to look at celebrity-imitation makeover shows, like *I Want a Famous Face*, because they mix two genres: the makeover show and the celebrity profile, like E!'s *True Hollywood Story*.

I analyze four makeover shows in order to investigate the similarities and differences between makeover shows. To enable comparison, I chose shows which featured women only (*The Swan*), men only (*QE*, at least for the first couple of seasons), women and men (*WNTW* and *IOYY*), middle-class individuals (*WNTW* and *QE*), and working class individuals (*IOYY* and *The Swan*).¹²² I also chose shows that had a significant televisual impact: a long run, as is the case for *WNTW* and (in re-runs) *IOYY* or a great deal of media hype and a high number of viewers, as was the case for *The Swan* (at least in the first season, when almost 15 million viewers watched)¹²³ and *QE* (which

¹²¹ I did not look at *A Makeover Story* because it was earlier than my time period.

¹²² Makeover shows are not segregated by race the way they are by class and gender. There is one exception: a show by and for African-Americans—*Makeover Manor*—but it had a very short run—only one season—and little televisual presence.

¹²³ Rick Kissell, "'Swan' on the Nose," *Daily Variety* (April 12th, 2004), 6.

also had a significant run.)¹²⁴ I chose U.S. shows that were significant, diverse, and narrowly defined the makeover genre.

My study is distinguished by this comparative approach. Many makeover show critics make broad claims about the genre based on one or two shows. On one hand, many critics argue that all makeover shows are neoliberal, explicitly or implicitly based on *QE* and/or *WNTW*.¹²⁵ However, as I show, *The Swan* is authoritarian. On the other hand, many critics draw from *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover* to argue that makeover shows objectify and transform women in obedience to heteronormativity and patriarchy.¹²⁶ For instance, while Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert analyze three shows—*A Makeover Story*, *What Not to Wear*, and *Extreme Makeover*—they implicitly allow the last show stand in for all three, arguing that women are made to be beautiful for men, to be worthy of men, and to be able to get a man.¹²⁷ However, in *WNTW*, femininity enables women to “enterprise themselves” and get ahead in both the public and the private

¹²⁴ *QE* helped make Bravo. In August of 2003, *QE* “set a Bravo-record with 2.8 mil [viewers], up 62% week-to-week.” *Variety* 391:11 (August 4th, 2003): 4. *QE* was also shown on NBC in August of 2003, reaching a peak of 7.6 million viewers. *Variety* 392:2 (August 25th, 2003): 26. *WNTW* helped save TLC after *Trading Spaces* fell from popularity. *WNTW* averaged around 2 million viewers in its first season. *Broadcasting & Cable* 134:18 (May 3rd, 2004): 24-25.

¹²⁵ James Hay, “Overhaulin’: TV and Government,” *Flow TV* (2/4/2005); Gareth Palmer, “‘The New You’: Class and Transformation in Lifestyle Television” in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2004), 173-90; Guy Redden, “Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture” in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 150-164; Martin Roberts, “The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in What Not to Wear” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Anna McCarthy also argues that makeover shows are neoliberal but points to the “torture” in some shows as evidence of the complexity of neoliberalism. “The Republic of Tyra,” *Flow TV* (4/1/2005).

¹²⁶ Fraser 2007; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert; Roof 2006. Roof generalizes her findings to *QE* and argues that men are made over for marriage as well.

¹²⁷ Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert, 76.

spheres, with an emphasis on developing aspirations and ambition in the public sphere. In both cases, critics ignore the shows which do not fit their conclusions. While these two claims are the most prevalent, critics make many other inaccurate claims about makeover shows in general, ignoring differences between shows.¹²⁸

In failing to analyze makeover shows comparatively, these critics miss similarities and differences between shows. The differences between *QE* and *WNTW* on the one hand and *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover* (or *IOYY*) on the other are based on class: the former make over primarily middle-class participants while the latter make over primarily working-class participants. Working class women are objectified in patriarchal ways, while middle-class women and men are not. The difference is not one of gender alone, but of class *and* gender. As a result of only analyzing one or two shows, many critics miss class differences in makeover shows.¹²⁹ For instance, Misha Kavka acknowledges that class is important for British shows, but asserts that class is irrelevant for U.S. shows.¹³⁰ Most critics also miss gender differences, both because they privilege one show over another and because very few critics analyze both *QE* and a female makeover shows.¹³¹ The question of how gender is articulated in makeover shows is obscured by this either-or focus. Only by situating a particular show in the context of other makeover

¹²⁸ For instance, June Deery argues that makeover participants are “generally made over because they perceive themselves to be inadequate,” which again, is not the case on *QE* or *WNTW*. “Interior Design: Commodifying Self and Place in Extreme Makeover, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, and The Swan” in *The Great American Makeover*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 164.

¹²⁹ Deery 2006; Fraser; Heller; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert; Redden; Roberts; Roof.

¹³⁰ Misha Kavka, “Changing Properties: The Makeover Show Crosses the Atlantic” in *The Great American Makeover*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹³¹ *QE* is distinguished by a great deal of critical attention, almost none of which situates it in relation to other makeover shows. See Chapter Four for a review of the literature on *QE*.

shows can the central project of a particular show be divined: comparison makes significant differences visible. In examining and comparing a diverse group of makeover shows, I make visible how class and gender are articulated through the central ideal and forms of power at work in each show.

I use “close reading” as my method of analysis. I “read” the dialogue, the narration, staging, the mise-en-scene, the camera movements, and editing. This multi-level reading required taking extensive notes, pausing, rewinding, and re-watching scenes and episodes numerous times. I developed hypotheses through writing about the show and then checked my hypotheses by watching different episodes of the show. I watched a significant number of episodes for each show. For *WNTW*, the longest running makeover show in my dissertation (2003 to the present), I watched about one-third of episodes before 2007 or around fifty episodes. For *10YY*, I watched between a third and a half of all episodes or about forty episodes. For *The Swan*, which had only twenty-one episodes in two seasons, I watched every episode. For *QE*, I watched about half of all episodes, or about fifty episodes. I used a different algorithm for choosing the number of episodes, because the shows varied so much in the total number of episodes made. I choose the episodes more or less at random, recording episodes on and off over four years, with the exception of *The Swan*, which I purchased as a DVD box set.¹³² Watching so many episodes for each show trained my eyes. I learned to see what the formula was, what was normal, what was unusual, and what was important for the show as a whole. Gender and

¹³² I started my research on what would be my dissertation in Spring 2004.

class emerged as the two most important variables distinguishing the formula of transformation across makeover shows.¹³³

The second primary difference between my analysis and that of other critics is that I put power—the question of how the participant is actually transformed in the show—at the center of my analysis. I “read” makeover shows in relation to power, ideology, normalization, gender, and class. Analyzing the set of mechanisms of transformation of each show reveals *how* power functions on the show: how bodies are constituted and rendered analyzable and desirable; how relationships between the inside and the outside are constructed; how the self is understood; and how we are to govern ourselves. The classed and gendered ideal at the heart of each show is defined through its formation, that is, through the forms of normalizing power brought to bear upon the self. Power and ideology are woven together: as I show, the mode of self-government (ideology) is tied to *how* the participant is transformed. While some critics discuss governmentality, nearly all fail to make the link to the mechanisms of transformation.¹³⁴

¹³³ The sexuality of the participants is assumed to be straight, with the exception of *QE*, which directly invokes sexuality and very rarely features out gay men as participants. Makeover shows are not segregated by race (with one short-lived exception, discussed above), but are primarily white—about one-fifth of participants are people of color. I address the ways in which beauty ideals are raced, but the treatment of participants of color *within* makeover shows is outside the scope of this dissertation.

¹³⁴ Hay; Redden; McCarthy. Roberts attempts an analysis of power with neoliberal governmentality but misreads the British *WNTW* as a “cop show” in which participants are coerced. Palmer (2004) is the only critic who links neoliberal governmentality to mechanisms of transformation. Palmer argues that the secret footage is designed to make the participant monitor herself.

Most critics have analyzed makeover shows in relation to narrative, discourse, ideology, or what the show means, rather than how it *works*.¹³⁵

Each show uses a set of mechanisms of transformation to make-over the participant. These mechanisms make use of three kinds of power: scopic forms of power, confession, and interpersonal interaction. First, to analyze scopic forms of power, I draw on Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Laura Mulvey.¹³⁶ While all three theorists are grounded in Ferdinand de Saussure, Foucault does not share Lacan and Mulvey's grounding in Sigmund Freud, while Foucault and Lacan do not share Mulvey's feminist orientation. While Foucault and Lacan theorize about subject formation in reality, Mulvey analyzes the construction of spectatorship and subjectivity with regard to film. Despite their differences, all three provide ways of thinking about how vision shapes subjectivity and agency. Rather than practicing theoretical orthodoxy, I draw on the insights of Lacan and Mulvey through a Foucauldian notion of power as *productive*.

¹³⁵ June Deery (2006) makes claims about how power works without ever analyzing the mechanisms of transformation. She makes general claims about power that are not true in all makeover shows. At the same time, Deery, as well as Roberts, asserts that everything is surface and therefore there is no transformation of the inner self. Cressida Heyes and Jack Bratich analyze makeover shows as "fairy tales" and overlook the mechanisms of transformation. Jack Bratich, "Programming Reality: Control Societies, New Subjects and the Powers of Transformation" in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Heyes, 2007. Brenda Weber explicitly dismisses the study of power as "red herring" in "Beauty, Desire, and Anxiety: The Economy of Sameness in ABC's Extreme Makeover," *Genders* 41 (2005): 47. Many, such as Judith Roof, do not discuss power at all.

¹³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michel Foucault. "Body/Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 55-62; Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 1-7; Mulvey 2000.

Objectification establishes the participant as defective according to a particular bodily ideal and therefore in need of a makeover.¹³⁷ Drawing on Mulvey and Foucault, I argue that in female-oriented makeover shows, objectification constitutes the body and renders it analyzable in relation to a desirable ideal.¹³⁸ Mulvey argues that in narrative cinema the male gaze—modeled by men within film and taken up by the male spectator—objectifies and fragments women, turning them into fetishized body parts.¹³⁹ The gaze modeled in female oriented makeover shows is not the male gaze but the *cultural gaze*. The gaze is not used to turn women into sexy objects for men, but to turn women into analyzable bodies. The gaze is not the *sole* property of men in the shows, but is embodied by the hosts, the experts, or members of the public.

Each female-oriented makeover show makes use of particular apparatus of viewing to objectify and analyze the participant. For instance, in *IOYY*, the participant is put on display in a glass box on the middle of the street. The host asks members of the public to say why the participant looks old. As the public critiques the participant, pointing out the marks of age, the camera fragments the participant's body and shows the body part under discussion. Here, the gaze is channeled through spectacle, directed by the host of the show, embodied by the public, and materialized in the edited footage. Each apparatus of the gaze constitutes a particular body, analyzed in relation to a particular

¹³⁷ Misha Kavka (2006) also notes that the participant must be fragmented by the experts before she can be transformed. However, the participant is not fragmented in this manner in *QE*. Kavka does not elaborate on how bodies are fragmented or how that fragmentation *functions* to affect the participant or spectator. Kathryn Fraser also argues that makeover shows proceed from the assignment of defect. Fraser 2007, 192.

¹³⁸ The body is momentarily objectified on *QE* through the look of the gay male hosts, but the body is not the target of power on *QE*.

¹³⁹ Mulvey 2000.

desirable ideal, such as the look of youth in *10YY*. Once fragmented and analyzed through the lens of a particular feminine ideal, the participant's body appears to be defective.¹⁴⁰

As I discuss above, the evaluative gaze is modeled in the show and is intended to be taken up by the female spectator. The mode of objectification sparks the participant's and/or the spectator's desire to have a particular body. As Foucault argues, "power is strong.... because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge."¹⁴¹ Here, power constitutes the participant's body and incites the participant's/spectator's desire to make the participant/spectator to be like the ideal body of the show.

The gaze is not just turned upon participants; in *WNTW* and *QE*, it is also internalized by participants.¹⁴² While Mulvey analyzes the male gaze, she does not analyze how women respond to the gaze. As I discuss above, Bartky and Bordo draw on Foucault's notion of the panopticon to analyze how women use the "male gaze" to police themselves. This concept of the gaze proves much more productive in analyzing makeover shows. The panopticon is a specific form of the gaze: the judging gaze of the other is internalized and turned upon the self. As Foucault argues, the panopticon is a

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Gailey argues that the fragmentation of the participant is a form of abjection that produces the participant as *deviant* for the watching spectator. This is true for female oriented makeover shows. However, Gailey does not analyze how makeover shows speak to the participant's desire or reshape her body-image. "Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology" in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Heller, Dana (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 107-118.

¹⁴¹ Foucault 1980, 59.

¹⁴² Gareth Palmer argues that surveillance is used on the British version of *WNTW* to make the participant watch herself from outside herself. Palmer 2004. Deery (2006) and Redden (2007) argue that makeover shows teach participants to survey themselves, but they do not specify how this works in any specific show. However, neither *10YY* or *TS* makes use of a panopticon.

technology for producing disciplined, docile bodies.¹⁴³ The panopticon is based on Jeremy Bentham's prison design, in which the cells of the prisoners are arranged around a central tower, so that they cannot see each other nor the occupant of the tower. Because they do not know if they are being watched or not, they always act as though they were being watched. As a result, they police themselves. Individuals can now be counted on to watch, control and manage their bodies in accordance with norms. Discipline requires learning; as the participant is disciplined, s/he develops new capacities.¹⁴⁴ In *QE* and *WNTW*, the hosts watch the participant through the eye of the camera, metaphorically occupying the central tower. The participants learn how to watch themselves through the gaze of the hosts. However, the object of "self" surveillance is not the same on the two shows; in the former it is performance, while in the latter, it is the clothed body. Though the panopticon disciplines participants in both shows, it produces different sorts of "docile bodies."

Makeover shows have a panoptic effect even when the show itself does not make use of the panopticon; watching someone be watched and criticized teaches the spectator to watch and criticize herself. Surveillance is a key aspect not only of makeover shows, but of all reality television. Stuart Ewen argues that "television was the cornerstone of suburban panopticism; it organized an individuated population around the hub of a reliably centralized source of authority."¹⁴⁵ Here, television sets forth the norms which are imitated by the watching families. But as Mark Andrejevic argues, Reality Television offers the fantasy of being watched oneself, being on television, as a form of authentic

¹⁴³ Foucault 1995, 138.

¹⁴⁴ Heyes 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 231.

self-expression.¹⁴⁶ Gareth Palmer traces the link between reality police shows and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), arguing that surveillance becomes linked to safety as we are taught to monitor ourselves. For Palmer, “television itself functions as a synopticon in that it offers the opportunity for the many to look at the few... [and] we are encouraged to learn the lesson of self-discipline.”¹⁴⁷ In watching others be humiliated on different forms of reality television, we learn to police ourselves. Similarly, Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette argue that reality television creates a panoptic society by teaching us think of ourselves as always watching and being watched in return for security and safety.¹⁴⁸ Makeover shows also normalize surveillance and self-surveillance; they promise safety, security and *happiness* as the result of surveillance, for both the participant and the spectator.

In addition to techniques of objectification and the panopticon, scopic power works through mirrors on female-oriented makeover shows. I draw on both Lacan and Anne Hollander to analyze the use of the mirror. For Lacan, the ego is formed through (mis-)identifying with the whole body in the mirror; the identification with the whole body in the mirror is driven by a fear of the body falling to pieces.¹⁴⁹ The mirror is the site where the subject is formed. For Anne Hollander, the mirror enables one to govern

¹⁴⁶ Mark Andrejevic, *The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Gareth Palmer, *Discipline and Liberty: Television and Governance* (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2003), 148.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, introduction to *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 1-15.

¹⁴⁹ Lacan.

one's image.¹⁵⁰ In *WNTW*, the mirror is used to break apart the participant's body image and to teach the participant how to shape her body through clothes.¹⁵¹ In contrast, on *TS*, mirrors are withheld from the participant for three months to render her incapable of governing her image. The use of mirrors enhances learning and agency on *WNTW*; the lack of them on *TS* leads the participant to hand over her control of her image to the experts. In all the female makeover shows, participants are led to see themselves as "whole" in the mirror after the makeover. As they jubilantly identify with their new appearance in the mirror, they are reborn as subjects. Inside and outside are mutually imbricated in transformation. The mirror is a powerful technique for breaking apart and bringing back together mind and body, inside and outside, self and appearance; it is used to make female participants into new subjects.

Second, in addition to scopic power, confession is also used as a mechanism of transformation. Drawing on Foucault, I analyze how confession works to produce the "truth" of the participant's self in different shows.¹⁵² I also draw on Mimi White, who argues that the confession is linked to commodity consumption in popular culture.¹⁵³ In makeover shows, the confession produces the truth of the flawed self, which the makeover, and commodity consumption, remedies.¹⁵⁴ In *IOYY* and *TS*, confession establishes the "defect" of the participant and her pain in knowing it; it justifies the

¹⁵⁰ Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Avon, 1980).

¹⁵¹ Palmer argues that the 360 degree mirror on *WNTW* is used to make the participant watch herself from outside of herself, but he does not analyze it in relation to self-government or the destruction of the participant's body image. Palmer 2004.

¹⁵² Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹⁵³ White 1992.

¹⁵⁴ Gailey (2007) argues that confession produces the participant as deviant in cosmetic surgery makeover shows.

makeover. In *WNTW*, the participant's transformation is made "authentic" through a series of confessions over the course of the show, beginning with resistance and ending with joy in the discovery of her "new self." There is no use of confession in *QE*. In contrast with the objectification of the participant, confession also allows the audience access to the participant as a subject. The confession (re)establishes intimacy and sympathy with the participant, thus intensifying identification with her makeover journey. The confession is a key aspect of the apparatus of power in both *IOYY* and *TS*.

Finally, in addition to scopic power and confession, the third form of power used to transform participants is interpersonal interaction. This form of power covers both domination and gentle instruction. *TS* uses a particularly bare and brutal form of bullying and coercion. Participants are yelled at, threatened, mocked, and harangued into submitting. In contrast, *QE* makes use of caring conversation, in which the hosts discuss the participant's hopes and fears, and instruction, in which the hosts teach the participant how to master a task. In *QE*, the participant is gently led to learn new things, with the assumption that he wants to learn, while *TS* demands obedience and crushes resistance. Though the emotional valence of the two shows are very different, both rely on one-on-one interaction to shape the participant. Personal interaction is also part of *WNTW* and *IOYY*, but those shows rely more heavily on other forms of power. Interpersonal interaction, in very different forms, is a key aspect of power on both *QE* and *TS*.

Each apparatus of power creates a field in which the participant has a particular kind of agency. *WNTW* and *QE* both create situations in which the participant must learn to master a new discipline or disciplines. In these two shows, agency functions through learning, and the participants develop new capacities. Both *QE* and *WNTW* work through

the participants' freedom to render them self-enterprising. They rely on a neoliberal model of governance. In contrast, *IOYY* and the *TS* both create situations in which the participant must submit her body to the ministrations of others. In obeying and enduring pain, the participant's body is reshaped by experts. Agency is present in these shows, but it takes the form of obedience or disobedience, rather than learning and mastering. *IOYY* and *TS* make use of authoritarian forms of governmentality. Class, not gender, dictates this split: *QE* and *WNTW* both feature primarily middle-class participants while *IOYY* and *TS* feature primarily working-class participants. Different forms of governmentality produce different kinds of subjects, with different kinds of agency.

Governmentality

Self-fashioning is directly related to the Foucauldian notion of government: governmentality shapes how one conceives of, analyzes, and works on the self towards particular ends. For Foucault, government is “the conduct of conduct.”¹⁵⁵ As Mitchell Dean explains, “[c]onduct’ here refers to our behaviors, our actions and even our comportment, the articulated set of our behaviors.”¹⁵⁶ As Foucault argues, “[t]o govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.”¹⁵⁷ That is to say, “...government entails any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of

¹⁵⁵ Foucault as quoted by Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordo, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2. See also: Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2006).

¹⁵⁶ Dean, 10.

¹⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 221.

our behavior according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends.”¹⁵⁸

Government relies on and works through our freedom and agency; it shapes and “work[s] through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs.”¹⁵⁹ As Foucault argues, governmentality is the “contact between the technologies of domination of others [technologies of power] and those of the self.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, governmentality shapes conduct through normalizing systems of power.

While government refers to a general approach of rule, different regimes of governmentality can be specified: liberal, neoliberal, and authoritarian governmentality.¹⁶¹ Liberalism begins with the critique of Sovereignty and its rule over individuals. Liberalism governs through processes in the economy, society and population: civil society is conceived as a realm outside the government with its own natural laws, which must be deduced and respected. As Nikolas Rose argues, “Persons and activities were to be governed *through society*, that is to say, through acting upon them in relation to a *social* norm, and constituting their experiences and evaluations in a *social* form.”¹⁶² Liberalism makes use of bio-political regulation, fostering life at the level of population, while critiquing and limiting biopolitics through the language of

¹⁵⁸ Dean, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Dean, 11.

¹⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 19.

¹⁶¹ These regimes are all modern regimes of governmentality. For a discussion of the historical evolution of government, see Gordon and Dean.

¹⁶² Nikolas Rose, “Governing Advanced Liberal Democracies” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 40.

rights and liberties.¹⁶³ Indeed, under liberalism, liberty had to be safeguarded “so that the natural processes of the economy and the population might function effectively.”¹⁶⁴

While liberalism “presents itself as a critique of excessive disciplinary power in the name of the rights and liberty of the individual... the generalization of discipline is a condition of liberal government.”¹⁶⁵ As Rose argues,

Liberal strategies of government thus becomes dependent upon devices (schooling, the domesticated family, the lunatic asylum, the reformatory prison) that promise to create individuals who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves.¹⁶⁶

Individuals are governed through their freedom, but they must be disciplined to govern themselves and seek out their best interest (and some cannot be trusted to govern themselves, as I discuss below.) In other words, norms are central to liberalism; as Dean argues, even laws function like norms under liberalism. Liberal governmentality is defined by the pull between two ideals: “the shepherd-flock” and the “city-citizen”¹⁶⁷: administering life on the social level to socially-formed individuals on one hand and securing the right of disciplined citizens to govern themselves on the other.

Neoliberal governmentality is a variant of liberalism, but one that has jettisoned the notion of society and turned liberalism’s critique of rule upon itself. Situating itself in opposition to the welfare state, neoliberalism does not seek to govern through social processes but through reflexive “government of government.”¹⁶⁸ Rooted in the

¹⁶³ Dean.

¹⁶⁴ Dean, 117.

¹⁶⁵ Dean, 113.

¹⁶⁶ Rose, 45.

¹⁶⁷ Dean, 132.

¹⁶⁸ Dean, 149.

assumptions of classical economics, neoliberal policy champions the principles of the market as the solution to the “problem” of government and what is portrayed as the ever-growing state.¹⁶⁹ As exemplified by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism calls for privatization, deregulation, “free” trade, the global expansion of markets, and the destruction of social safety nets.¹⁷⁰ Though these policies are undertaken under the masquerade of a value-neutral expertise that will “...promot[e] universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe” they actually work to maximize profits and concentrate wealth.¹⁷¹ According to Lisa Duggan, the key terms of neoliberalism are “*privatization and personal responsibility*”;¹⁷² as the state does less, citizen-subjects must do more.

As a mode of governmentality, neoliberalism “governs at a distance”¹⁷³ “...through the regulated choices of individual citizens.”¹⁷⁴ Neoliberalism seeks to “actively create the conditions within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is possible,”¹⁷⁵ recasting the citizen as a rational consumer and enterprising agent.¹⁷⁶ As social services like schools or hospitals are turned into competitive markets, the citizen becomes a

¹⁶⁹ Graham Burchell, “Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27.

¹⁷⁰ Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

¹⁷¹ Duggan, 10.

¹⁷² Duggan, 14. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷³ Rose, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Rose, 41.

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, introduction to *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

¹⁷⁶ Gordon 1991, 44.

consumer whose choices shape those services. Consumer choice powers this mode of governmentality; the citizen must be made to make choices, as such newly-made markets depend on the consumer to act on her/his rational desires. Consumption is rendered central to personhood and citizenship. As Nikolas Rose argues:

The enhancement of the powers of the client as customer—consumer of health services, of education, of training, of transport—specifies the subjects of rule in a new way: as active individuals seeking to ‘enterprise themselves,’ to maximize their quality of life through acts of choice ...¹⁷⁷

The ideal citizen-subject of neoliberalism is the “actively responsible individual”¹⁷⁸ who seeks self-mastery and self-fulfillment. Individuals lacking the self-esteem to act on his/her own behalf must be “empowered” through being given the opportunity to make choices; “social” problems vanish in the focus on the individual. Neoliberal governmentality works through indirectly shaping the choices and desires of the empowered” citizen-subject.¹⁷⁹ Like liberalism, neoliberalism governs through the freedom of citizens; however, under neoliberalism, “freedom” is understood in market terms. Neoliberalism jettisons liberal notions of the social and communal obligation in favor of individualism and market-based freedom.

Authoritarian governmentality is defined by the rejection of “limited government characterized by the rule of law that would secure the rights of individual citizens.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, nothing prevents the ruler from “interven[ing] in the intimate lives” of his subjects.¹⁸¹ Authoritarian regimes do not govern through the freedom of their citizens, but

¹⁷⁷ Rose, 57.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Rose, 57-58.

¹⁸⁰ Dean, 147.

¹⁸¹ Dean, 145.

through the obedience of their subjects. They attempt to neutralize opposition to their authority. They rely on “sovereign elements...[like] decree, interdiction, punishment and reward” to rule.¹⁸² While the “...authoritarian form of rule is composed, like liberal rule, of bio-political and sovereign elements,” unlike liberal rule, there is no check to either bio-politics or sovereignty. Under an authoritarian regime like Nazism, bio-political racism resulted in genocide to “cleanse” the “population” in an articulation of “race, blood and fatherland.”¹⁸³

However, as Dean points out, liberal forms of rule, including neoliberalism, can contain authoritarian forms of government. As Dean argues,

The former’s [liberalism’s] emphasis on governing through freedom means that it always contains a division between those who are capable of bearing the responsibilities and freedoms of mature citizenship and those who are not.¹⁸⁴

Liberal forms of rule justify authoritarian rule for those deemed incapable of acting as mature citizens. Neo/liberalism justifies “disciplinary, bio-political and even sovereign interventions”¹⁸⁵ into the lives of those deemed incapable and inadequate. For instance, being on welfare might be enough to lose citizenship status. For those deemed improvable, authoritarian intervention will attempt to “foster... capacities of responsibility and self-governance,” that is, to turn them into disciplined liberal citizens.¹⁸⁶ However, neo/liberal regimes can turn to “...sovereign interventions to

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Dean, 147.

¹⁸⁴ Dean, 146.

¹⁸⁵ Dean, 134.

¹⁸⁶ Dean, 146.

confine, to contain, to coerce and to eliminate... those deemed without value.”¹⁸⁷ The check of rights and liberties is only for those deemed capable of governing themselves: neo/liberalism justifies authoritarian intervention into the lives of those defined as incapable of governing themselves.

Media shapes the “conduct of conduct.” With regard to neoliberalism, Rose argues that the “mass media of communication” “can translate the goals of political, social and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals...”¹⁸⁸ James Hay was one of the first to use neoliberalism to analyze how the media works. Drawing on Rose, Hay argues that television, as separate from the state, enables “both living and governing at a distance.”¹⁸⁹ In his groundbreaking work *Discipline and Liberty*, Gareth Palmer discursively analyzes “processes of government” through police television shows, reality television and Judge TV.¹⁹⁰ Palmer argues that these shows shape the conduct of the spectator, arguing that they teach us to police ourselves, survey ourselves, and enterprise ourselves. Laurie Ouellette offers an excellent analysis of neoliberalism in *Judge Judy*, arguing that this program and others like it “...train TV viewers to function without state assistance or supervision as self-disciplining, self-sufficient, responsible and risk-averting individuals.”¹⁹¹ Reality television as a whole has been a rich site for analyses of governmentality, primarily through neoliberalism. My

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Rose, 58.

¹⁸⁹ Hay, 59.

¹⁹⁰ Palmer 2003, 3.

¹⁹¹ Laurie Ouellette, “‘Take Responsibility for Yourself’: *Judge Judy* and the Neoliberal Citizen” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 232.

work builds on these pioneers and extends the analysis of governmentality. I argue that both authoritarian and neoliberal modes of government are at work in makeover shows.

The Chapters

In my first chapter, “Neoliberal Femininity: (Re)Fashioning the Self in *What Not to Wear (WNTW)*,” I argue that middle-class participants are taught to survey and dress themselves according to middle-class feminine norms in order to do well personally and professionally. Feminine self-surveillance is put to work under a neoliberal regime, as the discipline of femininity is used to form ambitious, enterprising, and ‘empowered’ feminine subjects. Here, objectification enables agency and ambition. Femininity is rearticulated under neoliberalism as the work of the self-enterprising (female) citizen.

In my second chapter, “Caring for the Self in *10 Years Younger (10YY)*,” I argue that the show “takes care” of working-class women so that they will be able to “care for” themselves. In this show, working-class people are poor or struggling because they have failed to care for themselves and have allowed themselves to look old and worn. The show effaces social barriers by analyzing problems in relation to biography. Under a neoliberal frame, the participant’s lack of self care is used to justify an authoritarian intervention. The participant must submit to a painful transformation in which the marks of class, stress, and life are erased from her body. By making the participant look “normal” or middle-class, feminine and younger, the participant will be “empowered” to care for herself and act as a neoliberal citizen.

In my third chapter, “Beautiful Submission: Authoritarian Normalization in *The Swan (TS)*,” I argue that the worst of pre-feminism femininity returns: working-class participants must submit and actively work hard, inside and out, to become beautiful and

“glamorous.” On this show, beauty is not individualized, but is a fixed standard applied to each participant through invasive plastic surgery, diets, and extensive exercise. The participant is remade according to this fixed standard under an authoritarian regime. Through surrendering herself to the “program” and obeying the dictates of the experts, the participant is made into the “ideal” woman. The end of femininity in *TS* is being (and finding satisfaction in being) a beautiful object to-be-looked-at.

Finally, in my last chapter, “Learning to be a Man in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (QE)*,” I argue that in this male-oriented makeover show, men are not defined by their bodies, as the female participants are in the shows described above, but by their performance. However, the content of that performance is now defined through traditionally ‘feminine’ realms such as cooking, interior decorating, grooming, dressing, and managing relationships. Under a neoliberal regime, middle-class male participants must learn to perform in these realms in order to do well personally and professionally. Masculinity is redefined under neoliberalism, even as the evaluation of masculinity by *performance* is upheld.

My dissertation is about how culture shapes desire. Makeover shows not only teach us to shape ourselves through reflecting and articulating cultural ideals, but they also incite the desire to fashion ourselves according to those gendered and classed ideals. As makeover shows normalize participants according to classed gender ideals, they make the achievement of those ideals seem both doable and desirable. Even as makeover shows use the language of empowerment, they tie women’s identity more tightly to their appearance. Makeover shows teach us how to fashion ourselves, but the selves we are to work on are always already defined through gender and class. In these “postfeminist”

times, women are still defined through the body, while men are defined through performance. Makeover shows repeat, rework, and amplify these cultural ideals, shaping desire through a narrative of normalization.

Chapter One: Neoliberal Femininity: (Re)Fashioning the Self in *What Not to Wear*

“I noticed since the makeover I definitely feel a lot different in my clothes. I feel a lot more powerful. I can still be unique and different and look like somebody who’s fun without all that mess. It’s a lot more clean and it actually makes me feel more in control. I think in the past when I was dressing young, I kind of felt young. I had thought about law school in the past and now it seems a lot more doable.”¹

On *What Not to Wear* (WNTW) participants are made over into neoliberal middle-class feminine subjects. The show’s participants are those who have failed to appropriately perform femininity and those who have failed to care about their appearance. WNTW educates the taste of the former through the ideals of middle-class femininity and teaches the latter to invest themselves in their appearance. The participant is objectified and taught to objectify herself under a feminine panopticon. The participant’s body image is broken and reconstituted through mirrors as she is taught to disinvest from her “before” image and re-invest her identity in her new feminine appearance. Feminine self-objectification has been viewed as the product of female dependency and the performance of feminine appeasement.² However, in WNTW, feminine self-objectification is put to new work under a neoliberal regime, as the discipline of femininity is used to form ambitious, enterprising, and “empowered” feminine subjects.³ The traditional definition of femininity through submission,

¹ Sohni, 2005.

² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Susan Brownmiller, *femininity* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984); Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as Masquerade” in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986).

³ While Martin Roberts argues that the British WNTW is also neoliberal and “empowers” participants, he describes empowerment as being appealing to men, echoing Berger and

dependency, and the private sphere is countered by *WNTW*'s articulation of femininity with ambition. Fashioning one's appearance according to middle-class femininity is rewritten under neoliberal discourse as a way to improve the self and one's opportunities. Within the narrative of the show, femininity is paradoxically both achieved and innate: femininity is both a useful tool and an inescapable truth. *WNTW* maintains and intensifies the feminine link between appearance and identity for women, even as it redefines femininity through neoliberal discourse.

The Show

What Not to Wear is a popular makeover show, which teaches unstylish individuals how to dress and style themselves according to middle-class norms. The show is hosted by Stacy London and Clinton Kelly, two stylists with big personalities. *WNTW* is primarily set in Manhattan, both in the *WNTW* studio and on the streets of the city. *WNTW* has been on the air in the U.S. and Canada since 2003; at the time of this writing, it is in its fourth season. *WNTW* is the longest running of any U.S. television makeover show; by that standard, it is the most successful.⁴ *WNTW* is addressed to female viewers, as evidenced by the fact that the show generally features women, stars a woman and a gay man,⁵ and is a makeover story, a narrative associated with women. In addition, the

Bartky. This mode of femininity however, is *not* neoliberal. He does not account for how the participants are taught to govern themselves. "The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in What Not to Wear" in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴ As of July, 2008, *WNTW* is on the air and producing new episodes.

⁵ Gay men are so often presented on film and television programs as a woman's best friend as to be a cliché. See: Susan Bordo, "Gay Men's Revenge" in *The Male Body* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 1999), 153-167. Clinton Kelly is an out gay man. See: Mike Fleming, "You and Yours, Only Better. Gay-Inclusive Cable Makeover Shows

show is addressed to middle-class viewers, as evidenced by its location on cable television, the predominance of middle-class participants, and its aesthetics. The show's format hails from Britain, where it was originally developed on the BBC. As Martin Roberts points out, the BBC has a public-service mandate which, after deregulation, was translated into "improving" the self.⁶ While the American version plays on the commercial television cable channel TLC, it too claims a kind of public service mandate for itself as "The Learning Channel," promising viewers that it will teach and improve them. *WNTW* operates a didactic intervention for both participants and (middle-class, female) viewers.

The narrative structure of the show is made up of roughly nine segments. First, the *set up*, where the omniscient narrator—Adam Harrington— describes the story in a nutshell and Stacey and Clinton watch the secret footage of the participant. Second, *the threshold*, in which the participant is offered \$5,000 for a new wardrobe if she agrees to be on the show. Third, *objectification*, in which the participant views her secret footage. Fourth, *breakdown*, in which the participant's clothes are thrown away, her image critiqued, and new rules of dressing are explained. Fifth, the participant *exercises* her new knowledge by shopping with and without the help of Stacy and Clinton. Sixth, *stylization*, the participant is subjected to hair-cutting and the application of makeup. Seventh, the *first reveal*, in which the participant identifies with her new image. In the eighth segment, the participant rejoins her friends and family with her new look in the *big*

Popular with Wide Audience" in *Southern Voice Online* (November 28th, 2003).

⁶ Roberts.

reveal. In the *final scene*, the participant reflects on her transformation in a voice-over as she is shown cavorting in her new wardrobe.

Participants

The majority of the participants on the show are middle-class straight white women. In contrast, most of the participants on *10 Years Younger (10YY)* and *The Swan* are working-class women. A significant minority of participants on *WNTW* are women of color. Participants come from all over the U.S. and Canada. Men rarely appear as participants on the show, making up only about ten percent of participants.⁷ The men featured on the show are a kind of window-dressing; the main business of the show is to make over women and make them “feminine.” The participant is nominated for the show by friends and family, who contend that the participant does not know how to dress and needs to learn to dress well for her own good. In contrast, on *10 Years Younger* and *The Swan* the participants nominate themselves. In exchange for appearing on *WNTW*, participants receive the expertise and advice of two stylists, Stacy London and Clinton Kelly; a free trip to New York City; a paid hotel stay; and five thousand dollars with which to buy a new wardrobe.

Femininity

WNTW opposes traditional definitions of femininity even as it continues to tie women’s identity to their appearance. On *WNTW*, women must fashion themselves

⁷ As men are less invested than women in their appearance in the first place, the transformation in their appearance does not affect them nearly so much. Though they are exposed to the same apparatus of power, they seem to escape unchanged on the inside. I discuss how *Queer Eye* targets men through their performance and not through appearance in my final chapter, “Learning to be a Man.”

through their clothes, hair, and makeup. However, this feminine appearance does not communicate passivity, submission, or dependency, but rather agency, ambition and freedom. Through self-objectification, women reshape themselves and improve their life chances. On *WNTW*, femininity is a means of enterprising the self.

WNTW defines femininity in stark contrast to the definitions of femininity proposed by Susan Brownmiller and Joan Riviere. For Brownmiller, femininity is antithetical to ambition because femininity is fundamentally about being selfless, nurturing, and concerned with men.⁸ Femininity is only competitive in the private sphere, as women use beauty to compete with each other for men. Because a feminine appearance signals submission and acceptance of the feminine role, women can use femininity to disguise their ambition. Similarly, for Riviere, femininity is a mask put on by all women to disguise ambition and intelligence.⁹ Femininity effectively hides ambition because femininity means that one is for others (men) and not for oneself. For both Riviere and Brownmiller, femininity is a bodily performance of submission. Both define femininity in opposition to ambition. To be feminine is to define oneself through men's appreciation of one's appearance.

In contrast, on *WNTW*, femininity is not defined as being a sex object, but as being a competent agent. Laura initially objects to being made-over, arguing that "...don't you think that women are judged, you're either one way or another, you're either pretty or intelligent?"¹⁰ Laura is afraid of being marked as someone who is only a beautiful body, someone only valued for her body. Her concern echoes Sandra Bartky's

⁸ Brownmiller.

⁹ Riviere.

¹⁰ Laura, 2005.

assertion that in identifying with the feminine body, a woman "...may well experience what is in effect a prohibition or a taboo on the development of her other human capacities."¹¹ Yet Stacy rejects this model of femininity, responding "[t]hose aren't the categories that we're actually talking about, pretty or intelligent... We're talking about somebody who is pretty *and* intelligent matching her inside to her outside. And that's what I think most women have a tendency not to do when they're as busy as you are."¹² Here Stacy rejects the mind/body division that casts women as the (pretty) body to the male mind; women can be both beautiful and intelligent. In contrast, *The Swan* explicitly casts women as the body/object to the male mind/subject. Stacy argues that Laura should use her clothes instrumentally to display her intelligence, her "inside." Clinton adds "I think that once you see yourself in clothes that fit you and clothes that give off a different image that you might come around to our side."¹³ Clinton implicitly suggests that Laura's fears are ungrounded, that dressing well will in fact convince other people (and herself) to take her seriously. Clothing is a resource for both working on the self and others; it is a site through which one demonstrates competency. For Stacy and Clinton, dressing well, that is, identifying with normative femininity, will help Laura be and be seen as both "beautiful and intelligent."

WNTW makes use of the self-objectification of femininity as a form of discipline to produce enterprising subjects. Simone de Beauvoir, Sandra Bartky, and John Berger describe the structure of femininity as a doubled subjectivity in which the feminine

¹¹ Bartky, 41-42.

¹² Laura, 2005.

¹³ *ibid.*

person is both watcher and watched, surveyor and surveyed, subject and object.¹⁴ All women must watch themselves and see themselves as objects to be looked at and worked on because they are judged by their appearance. Women adopt this alienating gaze in order to exert control over their appearance and thus, their destiny or everyday experience. Despite their differences, all three theorists assume a normative femininity that functions in the same way for all women, disregarding differences of class, ethnicity, sexuality, and social context. Women objectify themselves because they are dependent on men, represented as objects in discourse, and policed by an institutionally unbound panopticon. *WNTW* generalizes this feminine subjectivity and extends it to female participants under a panoptic public sphere: one must work on one's appearance because one is watched and judged everywhere. However, in *WNTW*, the split subjectivity of femininity is turned into a tool for self improvement and advancement; objectifying oneself becomes a mode of agency.

The show offers three rationales for why the participant must become normatively feminine. First, *self-esteem*; embracing normative femininity will make the participant feel better about herself. Participants draw a new sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and efficacy from successfully fashioning themselves as feminine. Self-esteem serves as a justification for femininity in both *The Swan* and *10YY* as well. Second, *romantic relationships*: the “right” kind of femininity will attract the “right” kind of man. By dressing well, a woman can signal her investment in herself and thereby attract a quality mate. Attracting men is also an explicit theme of *The Swan*, but through sexiness rather than through the work of intelligent investment. Third, *work*; normative femininity will

¹⁴ de Beauvoir; Berger; Bartky.

help the participant to be taken more seriously as a worker and will enable her upward mobility. In dressing well, a woman can appear in control and ambitious at work. This justification is central to *WNTW* and marginal at best for both *IOYY* and *TS*.¹⁵ On *WNTW*, working on one's appearance demonstrates the correct attitude of exploiting all resources in order to succeed in all aspects of one's life.

At the same time, *WNTW* also assumes that all women are innately feminine. The participant is both *transformed* into a “sexy and sophisticated woman,” and simultaneously, something essentially true about her is *revealed*. When she sees herself as a beautiful woman, then she realizes that she was always already feminine. In order to become a “new woman,” the participant must recognize her made-over image in the mirror as her true self. Mirrors are used as a transformative technique within *WNTW* in a series of identifications and disidentifications to form a new feminine subjectivity for the participant, as the outside image paradoxically constitutes and reflects inner subjectivity. All women should become feminine to advance their interests in the public and the private spheres and all women can become feminine because they are innately, deep down, already feminine.

Neoliberalism

Femininity is rearticulated under neoliberalism in *WNTW*.¹⁶ Under neoliberalism, the citizen must do more as the state does less. As a mode of governmentality,

¹⁵ On *The Swan*, work is rarely used as a justification and then only for those professions in which one is worshipped as an object—like a model.

¹⁶ See the Introduction for a full discussion of neoliberalism and governmentality.

neoliberalism “governs at a distance”¹⁷ “...through the regulated choices of individual citizens...”¹⁸ Neoliberalism seeks to “actively create the conditions within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is possible”¹⁹ recasting the citizen as a rational consumer and enterprising agent.²⁰ Consumption is rendered central to personhood and citizenship. The ideal citizen-subject of neoliberalism is the “actively responsible individual”²¹ who seeks self-mastery and self-fulfillment. Like *WNTW*, *Queer Eye (QE)* also makes participants into neoliberal citizens and like *WNTW*, it makes use of the learning self and the panopticon to do so. Both shows teach that one can advance in one’s private and public life through “caring for the self.” However, the two shows define “the care of the self” differently; through appearance in *WNTW* and through “masculine” performance in *QE*. Neoliberal discourse in *WNTW* incites desire and agency on the part of the participant with regard to her appearance. On *WNTW*, the participant must desire to look good, she must imagine she can look good, and she must exercise her agency by fashioning herself. The show’s participants are those who have failed to appropriately perform femininity and those who have failed to care: *WNTW* educates the taste of the former in line with its normative ideals and implants in the latter the capacity to care

¹⁷ Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.

¹⁸ Rose, 41.

¹⁹ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas S. Rose, introduction to *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

²⁰ Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordo, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1991), 44.

²¹ Rose, 57.

about their appearance and derive happiness from it. *WNTW* teaches them how to consume and fashion themselves to advance in their careers and lives. The show expands participants' capacity to appreciate and invest in themselves. Here, appearance and ambition are tied together for both the participant and for those looking at her. In contrast to the discourse of neoliberalism analyzed by Laurie Ouellette on *Judge Judy*, neoliberalism on *WNTW* (and *QE*) works on the desires of both the TV viewer and the participants on the show.²² *WNTW* turns participants into neoliberal citizen-subjects, who enterprise themselves through femininity.

The Set-Up

In the first section of the show, the spectator is presented with the image of the participant as inadequate, incompetent, and in need of help. This part of the show does not affect the participant, but serves to condition the spectator. The participant is shown going about her daily life in “secretly filmed footage,” meaning that the participant did not know that she was being filmed at all or, rarely, did not know that she was being filmed by *WNTW*. Her lack of knowledge guarantees the authenticity of the images; this is how she really dresses. Her failure to dress well constitutes a “crisis” in the narrative of the show. The participant is shown in her “before” stage, a “before” which demands an “after.”

When the “secret footage” first appears, it appears as the effect of an omniscient gaze, which voyeuristically peers into private spaces. The camera appears to have

²² Laurie Ouellette, “‘Take Responsibility for Yourself’: *Judge Judy* and the Neoliberal Citizen” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 232.

unlimited and unmediated access to events, framed by the knowledge and will of the invisible narrator. The second time “secret footage” is shown (after the credits), the spectator is informed that the participant’s friends and family have been secretly filming the participant and the contents of her wardrobe. The immediate access of the opening images is denied the second time they are shown, as the narrator highlights the fact that these images are mediated, filmed by particular people without the knowledge of the person filmed. The gaze behind the camera is no longer the omniscient gaze but an edited series of looks from the perspective of the participant’s family and friends of the participant as well as agents of the show. The spectator is made complicit with the voyeuristic secret filming; the spectator is in on the secret and is knowingly peering into the participant’s private life. This automatically puts the spectator on the side of the camera, allied with the intrusive look of the camera.

In its third appearance, the “secret footage” is implicated in a circuit of looks: the footage is shown being viewed by Stacy and Clinton on a small DVD player. Stacy and Clinton are positioned as demi-gods as they literally look down upon the doings of the participant on the DVD screen. The reception of the images is mediated through their look. They discuss the secret footage, commenting on the participant’s bad taste, her failure to dress for her body type, and point out specific problems with particular pieces of clothing and outfits (too sloppy, too much black, too revealing). As Clinton says regarding Oretha “I have the feeling she’s trying to hide a little bit under her clothes.” Stacy responds that “[s]he’s big on oversize tees” and “[n]ow we’ve got like old woman

in a sack—god fearing, clearly.”²³ Their judgment frames the images of the participant. The camera cuts between images of them watching and talking about the secret footage, the secret footage framed on the screen of Stacy and Clinton’s DVD player, and the secret footage itself. These three levels set up a relay of looks; the spectator watches Stacy and Clinton watching the secret footage; the spectator watches the secret footage “framed” by their look and the literal frame of the DVD player; and the spectator finally sees the images of the secret footage. This relay of looks works as a didactic exercise, as the spectator is trained to see the footage from the perspective of Stacy and Clinton. At the same time, this intervention into the image is highlighted by the cutting between the three levels; while the narrator is invisible and omniscient, Stacy and Clinton exist on screen, as the objects of the spectator’s vision. The naturalism of the first images is broken repeatedly and the images themselves are explicitly embedded within an embodied perspective, in which the look of the spectator is allied with the look of the two hosts. Voyeurism is doubled upon itself, as the spectator watches the hosts watch. This creates a panoptic effect; not only does the spectator view the participant, the spectator is made aware that others are viewing the participant as well.

For Stacy and Clinton, the participant has failed to cultivate a feminine appearance and therefore deserves both their mocking critique and their help. Stacy and Clinton criticize Amanda for dressing like a child in t-shirts and jeans; they critique Gina’s tight, revealing, clothes for being too sexy and therefore not sexy at all; and they critique Laurie for dressing frumpily in tapered acid washed jeans. They rail against the choice of comfort clothing on the part of Raina and Elizabeth, who respectively wear

²³ Oretha, 2003.

oversized t-shirts and sweats and shapeless dresses. The review of the participants is a kind of ritual humiliation, a shaming of the participants because they lack femininity. Stacy and Clinton's critiques fall into three categories: childish, overly sexy, and frumpy. Lurking behind these critiques is the norm that adult women should be "sexy and sophisticated." All of the women who appear on *WNTW* have failed or resisted this version of normative femininity and therefore, must be made over.

Threshold

In this section, the participant is confronted by Stacy and Clinton and agrees to be made over. As she did not volunteer herself and as she cannot simply be ordered to undertake the makeover, the show must work on her desire and persuade her to agree to the makeover.²⁴ Her desire is incited in two ways: first, she is bribed with a \$5,000 shopping spree and second, she begins to think of herself as the object of the gaze. The shopping money becomes more meaningful as her "to-be-looked-at-ness" is invoked;²⁵ consumption and objectification work together. The participant's agreement authorizes the show and frames the makeover as something she is doing for herself.

Stacy and Clinton accost the participant in her home, workplace, or hangout. Friends and family are gathered around for the surprise, including those who nominated the participant to be on the show. Stacy and Clinton rush up to the shocked participant, grab her, and hold her up to the camera as they flank her, one on either side. They

²⁴ According to Clinton only two potential participants turned down the makeover during the ambush—a woman in Chicago and a woman in Atlanta. This shows that the scene of agreement is actually the scene of agreement in reality. "Behind the Seams," 2007.

²⁵ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34-47.

introduce themselves, saying, for instance, “I’m Stacy and this is Clinton and we’re from TLC’s *What Not to Wear*.” The participant sometimes knows who Stacy and Clinton are, but never quite can believe that she’s been nominated to be on the show. Stacy and Clinton tell the participant that they’ve been secretly filming her for two weeks with the help of her husband, siblings, coworkers, or best friends. Stacy or Clinton then pulls out the Visa or Bank of America card (fourth season) and brandishes it, while telling the participant she can have five-thousand dollars to shop in New York City... if “you give yourself over to us, body, mind and wardrobe.”²⁶ Even though the participant is often initially resistant to the project of the show, she always agrees to come to Manhattan for a week to learn to shop under the guidance of Stacy and Clinton.²⁷

When the participant finds out that she has been secretly filmed, she always reacts with shock and surprise. She is confronted with the knowledge that she was being watched all along, objectified without her knowledge or permission. This revelation creates a *retroactive panopticon*: the participant tries to remember what she was wearing when, how she looked when she was watched. When Michelle S. was told of her secret footage, she said “Now I’m reviewing everything I’ve worn in the last two weeks.”²⁸ Despite the fact that she had picked out her outfits knowing that others would see her as she moved about her work, she had not apparently thought of how she would look to them. Even simply hearing about the secret footages cues the participant to monitor herself, gaze at herself, objectify herself. As Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette argue, reality TV promotes a “panoptic vision of society [which offers] protection from both

²⁶ Stacy and Clinton both make the pitch and often use this line, e.g. Celita, 2004.

²⁷ Of course, there would be no show if she did not agree in the first place.

²⁸ Michelle S., 2006.

outer and inner social threats.”²⁹ Here, the threat of the unruly self is contained by surveillance. The panoptic public sphere is invoked in the revelation of the secret footage; the participant learns that others are watching and she should watch herself, because she is judged by her appearance.

As the object of the gaze is revealed to be a subject with thoughts and feelings about being filmed, the spectator is invited to identify with her position. As the spectator imagines what it would be like to be filmed without her knowledge for the last two weeks, the retroactive panopticon is extended to her and the spectator is invited to monitor herself. Simultaneously, the spectator is made complicit in objectifying the (soon-to-be) participant. Although other viewing positions are possible, here the dominant viewing positions are the gaze of “feminine” identification and the active objectifying “male” gaze.³⁰ Subject and object are doubled for both the participant and the spectator as the voyeuristic gaze of the camera is confronted, extended, and internalized in this revelation.

The five-thousand dollar precredited-card is a bribe for submitting to the authority of Stacy and Clinton, the experts. The show only has power over those who could not

²⁹ Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, introduction to *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 6.

³⁰ Laura Mulvey suggests that this doubled gaze of objectification and identification alternates and serves as the feminine spectator’s look. See Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1999), 122-130. For Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, television spectatorship is automatically more fluid. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television” in *Channels of Discourse*, ed. Robert Allen (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 203-246. See the Introduction for a discussion of spectatorship. I argue that the gaze is strongly directed into both identification and objectification on *WNTW*.

themselves afford to spend five-thousand dollars on a new wardrobe. That is to say, the show speaks to the aspirations and fantasies of the middle-, lower-middle, and occasionally working-class individuals. For them, the card is an incredible gift, difficult to turn down. Even if the participant is resistant to the enthralling religion of consumerism, the gift of the card is a powerful bribe in a society where money and image are so important. For the wealthy, the card would not have the same kind of power over their desires and imaginations. The gift of the card also works on the fantasies of the ideal spectator, who is invited to wonder what she would do with five-thousand dollars for a whole new wardrobe. This invitation sets-up an identification with the participant, as the middle-class spectator imagines herself in the position of the participant. The power of the card is its promise of luxury spending for those who would not otherwise spend so much on clothing at one time.

The exchange of the card frames the relationship between the hosts and the participant; in taking the card, the participant agrees to follow Stacy and Clinton's rules and to give herself over to them "body, mind, and wardrobe." This deal frames the relationship as an exchange to which both parties agree: a contractual relationship. In order to change the participant, the show must first get her to agree to participate. In other words, the condition of submission is the exercise of agency. The logic of neoliberalism requires the participant's agency to authorize her subjectification; she must be made to want to change.

Objectification

The process of feminization begins with leading the participant to adapt the split subjectivity of femininity. When the participant actually watches her secret footage with Stacy and Clinton, she is made to literally view herself from outside of herself. The participant watches herself as seen from the eye of the camera, from another. The participant is made simultaneously both subject (watcher) and object (watched), literalized in the visual doubling of the participant as both recorded and “live” or present with Stacy and Clinton. The doubling of the participant is accomplished through the camera’s ability to take an outside perspective and preserve it, enabling retroactive access to oneself as an object. By literalizing the split consciousness of femininity in this way, the show encourages the participant to adopt this split perspective and literally watch herself.³¹ Rather than the subject-object dichotomy generated by the male gaze, here the look is turned around such that the participant’s look at herself is what is at stake.

The participant is made to see herself through the concrete perspective of Stacy and Clinton, even as she is made to see that other people are watching her. Watching the secret footage creates a panoptic effect: if the participant might be filmed or watched at any moment, then she should watch herself. Yet at this point the participant does not yet know how to evaluate her image. Gareth Palmer argues with regard to the British *WNTW* that the secret footage enables the participant “to share the look of the other, to objectify yourself from a vantage point in which this look is inscribed within the seemingly

³¹ Gareth Palmer notes that self-surveillance is a key technology in the British version of *WNTW*. Gareth Palmer, “‘The New You’: Class and Transformation in Lifestyle Television” in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2004), 173-90.

‘objective’ gaze of surveillance footage.”³² However, while this may be true with regard to the British *WNTW*, with regard to the American version, the footage is *not* framed as objective, but from the perspective of Stacy and Clinton, two upper-middle class stylists. Watching the footage with Stacy and Clinton is an exercise in training the gaze: the clothed body is constituted as an object of analysis through their discussion of the footage. Stacy and Clinton verbally break the clothed body of the participant into pieces to be analyzed and discussed terms of fit, color, print, and style. For instance, when Misti covers her eyes as the “secret footage” shows her from behind in a pair of tight Capri pants and asks “do we have to look at that?”³³ Stacy insists on it and tells her it looks like she has a “wide load” because she is wearing tight capris. As Stacy and Clinton discuss her sartorial shortcomings with her, asking her to explain outfits or particular choices, the participant is led to see herself from their specific perspective, forced to reflect on her appearance through the mediation of the hosts. The criticism of the participant’s appearance is tempered with the promise that if the participant learns to dress well, she too can become normatively feminine and beautiful. The secret footage serves the dual purpose of warning and instruction: because others watch and judge you, you should survey yourself first. This scene also serves to train the spectator to monitor herself through the trained gaze of Stacy and Clinton. Under the panoptic mode of objectification, the participant must learn how to see herself as the middle-class experts see her.

Breakdown

³² Palmer, 183.

³³ Misti 2003.

In this section, the participant's self-image is broken down and remade through the use of mirrors, the disposal of her clothing, and teaching her how she should dress. While mirrors are banned on *The Swan*, rendering the participant incapable of governing her image, on *WNTW* mirrors serve to educate the gaze of the participant. The clothed body is constituted and analyzed again, this time through the 360 degree mirror. The 360 degree mirror is used to destroy the participant's view of her clothed body and to teach her how clothes shape the image of her body. The link between the participant's identity and her appearance is broken only to be remade: first the participant's identity is symbolically destroyed through fragmenting her mirror image and throwing out her clothes, but is remade through providing her three clothed mannequins on which to model her appearance/identity. The participant is taught how to see her body and how to dress herself to construct a feminine appearance.

The participant is always shown three times in the 360 degree mirror, shown three mannequins dressed as she should dress, and is shown in three wardrobe scenes.³⁴ The use of the 360 mirror is ritualized, a central and unvarying part of each episode; it signals the beginning of the transformation with a direct assault on the participant's immediate self-image. The omniscient narrator often introduces the 360 degree mirror as "infamous," marking it as something terrible, extraordinary, and dramatic. The participant enters the 360 degree mirror three times, each time wearing a "normal" or favorite outfit. She reflects on her outfit as she examines her fragmented image. Whether

³⁴The order of these scenes varies by season. In Season Two the sequence is 360 degree mirror, wardrobe repeated three times followed by three mannequins dressed as she should dress. In Seasons Three and Four, the sequence of scenes is mirror, mannequin, and wardrobe repeated three times. Other variations surface within seasons; for instance, confession may be interjected into the sequence as with Tish, 2004.

she likes or dislikes the image—most participants defend their choices uneasily as they glance over the mirrors—she will soon be overruled by Stacy and Clinton who enter into the enclosed mirrored space in order to critique the participant. When Stacy and Clinton enter the 360 degree mirror, they point out the flaws that the participant may have missed as the camera pans up and down the body and zooms in for various close-ups on body parts, fragmenting the body of the participant for the spectator, as though in compensation for the failure of the camera to show the full range of the participant's fragmentation in the mirror.

When the participant enters the 360 degree mirror, she is completely surrounded by mirrors, her body literally fragmented and put into pieces, a scene evocative of Lacan's description the pre-mirror stage body.³⁵ Simply encountering the image in bits and pieces cannot reduce the participant to pre-mirror stage fragmentation, which, according to Jane Gallop, is only the retroactively imagining of the anxious ego,³⁶ but it may activate that anxiety. That is, for Gallop, the subject was never in bits and pieces, but only, once it becomes a "whole" ego, imagines that it *used* to be in bits and pieces. In other words, the subject fears the loss of subjectivity through fragmentation. When the participant's image is shattered in the 360 degree mirror, she can no longer identify with her mirror image. Forced to confront her image in bits and pieces, the participant is denied the orthopedic armor of her ego-ideal, her mirror image. Fragmenting the body threatens the ego by denying it the illusion of self-mastery in the wholeness of the mirror

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 1-7.

³⁶ Jane Gallop, "Where to Begin?" in *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 74-92.

image. The threat of ego-annihilation is used to pressure the participant to be pliable, to relinquish her illusion of self-mastery, to render her open to Stacy and Clinton's advice on how to dress. Although the ego cannot be destroyed by being fragmented, the fragmentation in the mirror effects a kind of symbolic death, a destruction of one's prior image.³⁷ For instance, Carey comments that "[t]he 360 mirror was gut wrenching. I really don't like being in... looking at myself in mirrors, especially that many of them."³⁸ Tish comments that "[t]his is a room if you wake up in the middle of the night screaming, it's cause you're in this room."³⁹ Activating ontological anxiety—and symbolically killing the participant— encourages the participant to desire to regain wholeness in the mirror, rendering her eager to accept the next whole mirror image she views of herself as the new imago, the new identification for the self despite her protests.

In addition to threatening the participant's ego, the 360 degree mirror works to destabilize the participant's body image and reshape her map of how she looks and moves. According to Elizabeth Grosz, as "[a]nything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image—clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects."⁴⁰ Clothing is not simply an addition to a stable, natural, fixed body image; rather clothing changes the way the body is both

³⁷ Angela McRobbie argues that the British version of *WNTW* uses symbolic violence to denigrate participants. For her, this violence is motivated by class. Symbolic violence is evident in this scene (and in the wardrobe scene, below); however, in the American version of *WNTW*, this violence is not directed primarily at working-class women but inadequately feminine middle-class women. Angela McRobbie, "Notes on *What Not to Wear* and Post-Feminist Symbolic Violence," *Sociological Review*. 52:2 (2004): 99-104.

³⁸ Carey M. 2006.

³⁹ Tish. 2004.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 80.

perceived and lived by the participant. Further, for Grosz, body image may lag behind reality. Many participants have a distorted sense of their own body: they think they are taller, shorter, skinnier, fatter, or more or less curvaceous than they are. Some participants have disidentified with their current bodies because they are holding on to an old (skinnier) body image; some just have no idea of what their bodies actually look like, because wearing ill-fitting clothing has so shaped their perceptions of their bodies. Marie, a lawyer, was very invested in appearing serious and professional and so wore a uniform of large, boxy dark suits everywhere-- to work, grocery shopping, and to her daughter's wedding. The large black suit shaped her image of herself so that she saw herself as a large woman without curves. When Stacy and Clinton entered the 360 degree mirror with Marie, Stacy literally pinched the suit at Marie's waist and pointed out how small she was, while Clinton pointed out how her clothes gave no hint of the shape of her body. The hosts used the mirror to break up Marie's image of herself in order to make her see her actual slim and shapely body. The participant is forced to confront her actual body in the 360 degree mirror and the actual fit of her clothes through the intervention of Stacy and Clinton; she is forced to see her clothed body from all sides, from the outside, and from the educated perspective of Stacy and Clinton. The hosts always point out how the participant could look more normatively feminine if she were to dress differently; this is both a matter of neoliberal self-fashioning ("dress yourself to look good") and innate femininity (your body is more feminine than it looks.) The fragmented reflections break down the participant's self-image and teach her to see her body differently.

The second ritual event in this section is the critique and disposal of the participant's wardrobe. Even after seeing the secret footage and her image in the 360

degree mirror, the participant often fiercely defends her wardrobe. While Katie M confessed that her secret footage "...was horrible. That was hard.... I don't think much about my clothes, that's the problem,"⁴¹ she still tried to hold onto her ponchos. Stacy and Clinton threw out all of the ponchos. They then threw out all of her polyester patterned shirts. Katie found one cotton shirt and attempted to hold onto it, claiming that it was cotton and not poly, but while Clinton was amenable to letting her keep the one item in return for throwing out everything else, Stacy snatched the shirt away and tossed it too. In this segment, Stacy and Clinton have all the authority and they often end up throwing everything or almost everything out. They justify this disposal of the participant's wardrobe by saying that it will offer a clean slate or a new start. Clothing communicates identity and in throwing out the participant's clothing, Stacy and Clinton are symbolically killing her old identity in order to create a new one. The participant is forced to agree with the disposal of her clothing in this section of the program; there is no space for resistance.

Individualized rules for dressing are modeled by three clothed mannequins for each participant. Each mannequin displays a different kind of outfit: work wear, casual wear, and date or evening wear, exemplifying the contexts in which the "sexy and sophisticated" woman will be found. Stacy and Clinton use the models to teach the participants what would look good on them. For instance, Stacy and Clinton directed Tish, a blue-eyed blonde who wore only black, to instead wear blue-toned reds, blues and greens, to bring out, as Stacy says, her "beautiful blue eyes."⁴² As in the

⁴¹ Katie M., 2006.

⁴² Tish, 2004.

example above, while Stacy and Clinton describe the clothes they also talk about the positive physical characteristics of the participant; a tiny waist will be complemented as a wrap dress is recommended. Stacy and Clinton want the participant to feel attractive, to internalize their gaze and judge herself favorably. They always ask the participant how she feels about the outfit and they engage with her response. For instance, when Gina objected to the length of the pencil skirt, Stacy explained that it would make her look longer and leaner and advised her to try it on and decide for herself. If the participant refuses to accept the outfit as a potential model of dressing and claims not to like it, Stacy tells the participant that they've seen her taste and it is ugly. Outright resistance is met with dismissal; agency within the range of the norm is solicited. The participant learns how to dress through discussing the example of the mannequin, as she is seduced into seeing herself through the feminine ideal.

The ideal of beauty on *WNTW* is defined by a particular version of normative femininity, as noted earlier, where women should be sexy, sophisticated, and adult. This ideal is not a physical ideal that everyone must fit into such as "blonde and busty," as it is on *The Swan*, but a set of individual "rules" for each participant that will help her maximize her good aspects and hide the bad ones (as defined by the show) while creating visual interest through sophisticated use of layering, color palettes, and accessories. Clothing is used to "balance" the body and make it appear to be an hourglass. Lean participants are dressed in clothes which emphasize curves; curvy participants are dressed to appear long and lean. The ideal of "sexy and sophisticated" is not a matter of having the perfect body, but of dressing for one's body, one's age, and the occasion, within a

narrow range defined by upper-middle-class taste.⁴³ Fabric choice is imbued with class implications: manmade materials like polyester are forbidden and branded as lower-class on the show, while natural fibers like cotton are promoted. Clothing, hair, and makeup should not overshadow the participant, but rather should make her visible in a new way: she shouldn't hide behind frumpy long dresses, t-shirts and jeans, or overly sexy clothes and loud makeup. Paradoxically, the participant must see herself as someone to be looked at—she must embrace her status as object in order to dress well and be seen as herself. The ideal of beauty is both normalizing and individualizing as everyone is assigned a particular set of rules in order to look “their best.” In the logic of the show, any body can be beautiful if it is dressed well, and every body must look beautiful.

In order to become a feminine subject, one must see oneself within the norm of femininity. Stacy and Clinton try to get the participant to care about the way she looks, to want to look good, and to believe that she can look good, so that she will *want* to dress well. Before her makeover, Camilla, a twenty-two year old Human Resources manager, wore too-tight pants held together with safety pins and old button down shirts missing buttons. When Clinton confronts Camilla in the 360 degree mirror, he tells her “[y]ou’re telling the entire world that you’ve gained weight and that your buttons popped off. Rather than dressing your body as it is now, which is what we always recommend.”⁴⁴

Clinton asks if she’s not buying clothes because she wants to lose weight and she agrees that this is case. Clinton then tells her that she should “buy new clothes because you’re

⁴³ Roberts argues that the class bias of the show is disguised by the focus on the body in the British version of *WNTW*. However, in the American version, I argue that class is visible on the surface: anything too tight, too revealing, or made of polyester is branded as lower class. Roberts 2007.

⁴⁴ Camilla, 2006.

beautiful and you have a great body.”⁴⁵ Rather than holding Camilla to a particular body ideal—such as the extremely thin ideal she carries with her—Clinton tries to convince her that she is beautiful and deserves to look beautiful. In the logic of the show, she must see herself within the feminine ideal so that she will work on her appearance; if she feels excluded from the norm and disidentifies from it, she will not “take care of herself.” Clinton suggests that dressing well will change how Camilla feels about herself; if she dresses correctly for her body, she will find herself within the feminine norm. Further, adopting a new perspective on herself and dressing to enable and express that new perspective will change how others see her; in order to be perceived as a professional, Camilla must look like she cares about her appearance. Camilla must learn to see herself as normatively feminine in order to invest in her image, manage her “self” and manage the impressions which she gives off. In this scene, Clinton tries to engage Camilla’s desire to be beautiful, so that she will (want to) dress well.

Interstitial Confession

A confession, either in the studio or in the hotel room usually follows this segment, creating an interstitial space within the transformation. When the participant confesses in the hotel room, she films herself, using a video camera on loan from *WNTW*. In addition to the specific “confession camera” footage, the participant also confesses in cabs, at the studio, and at home, when she gets ready; these confessions are modeled on the ideal type of the private confession. For Foucault, modern subjects are compelled to

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

confess because we *feel* liberated in confessing.⁴⁶ As discussed in the Introduction, the confession does not reveal but rather produces the truth of the self. In *WNTW*, confession is built into the structure of the show and compelled either by questions that are edited out or by giving the participant a camera and asking her to film herself. Confession is constructed as liberating on the show because it is an opportunity for the participant to tell the camera and the watching world how she really feels about the process and herself. In the first confession, most subjects confess their resistance. Laura Miranda confessed that “I really don’t care about how people think I dress. Having them throw away my whole wardrobe it’s like they were killing me slowly little by little.”⁴⁷ Laura Miranda refuses to accept their point of view as her own and defends herself, while noting that she invests her identity in her clothes. For Alana, “fancy clothes are for other people” and not for herself; she cannot yet see herself through Stacy and Clinton’s ideal.⁴⁸ Here the confessions are defiant: the participant does not accept the show’s point of view and holds to the “truth” of herself, even though she has been shown how badly she appears. In subsequent confessions, the participant narrates changing truths of her self as she becomes a feminine subject. Rather than serving as a primary mechanism of transformation as it does in *10 Years Younger* and *The Swan*, the confessions demonstrate how the participant changes on the inside over the course of the show; it is about access to the participant as she changes. Here, the confession *validates* the transformation as a true “inner” transformation.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

⁴⁷ Laura Miranda, 2004.

⁴⁸ Alana, 2005.

This confessional mode is very different from the secret footage, the studio footage and the shopping footage; it stands out as a different kind of image. This is the image of unmediated subjectivity, a direct connection between the spectator and the participant as the participant faces the camera and speaks directly to it/to us. While the hosts often speak to the camera, they speak as the hosts of the show, groomed, polished, and catty; they are performing for television. The confession is a different kind of performance; it appears to be intimate and immediate. This image is presented as unmediated and authentic, as guaranteed by the low quality of the grainy picture and lack of camera movement. Because there is no one filming the participant and because the participant speaks directly to the camera about her feelings about the process, the image refutes the subject-object dichotomy, where the person being filmed is the object to the subject's gaze. Rather the participant directly gazes at the imagined spectator and speaks to her as a subject. Breaking the fourth wall is a technique used in narrative television and occasionally film, but this kind of breakage is specific to the reality television genre, in which real people share apparently unscripted personal thoughts and feelings. Given the exposure of the camera in mediating relations of looking in *WNTW*, the confessional mode appears as punctuation, as an intervention into the image, a moment of access to the real.

Exercise: Shopping Day One

In this segment, agency, recognition and desire are central. Neoliberalism comes to the fore as agency is articulated through consumption and disciplined by the panopticon. The participant continues to learn from Stacy and Clinton and puts her

education into practice as she shops. In trying on clothes in front of the mirror, the participant experiences the pleasure of seeing herself as a feminine object. She also discovers a new sense of agency in shopping. Over the course of two days, the participant spends five-thousand dollars on a new wardrobe and obtains a new image of herself.

This segment always begins with the narrator's review of the rules for that particular participant over shots of the three mannequins and the participant walking or taking a taxi to her first shop of the day. The gaze of the spectator is educated by this review and brought into alignment with Stacy and Clinton's gaze. The repetition of the rules does not benefit the participant, who does not hear the review of the rules, but works rather to impress the knowledge upon the spectator. The spectator is trained into a particular ideal and taught to see the participant (and herself) through that ideal.

The participant is knowingly filmed while shopping and she talks back to the camera, speaking directly to the imagined spectator and to Stacy and Clinton. The participant knows that someone is watching through the camera, but does not necessarily know whether or not Stacy and Clinton are watching at that moment. This uncertainty replicates the setup of the panopticon. Yet in this case, the panopticon does not always have the effect of forming docile bodies. While some participants imagine themselves watched and try (with varying degrees of success) to follow the rules, some participants act as though the hosts are watching, but defiantly refuse to follow the rules. Aysha, a young woman who immigrated from Pakistan, initially resisted the rules, saying "All the jeans here, Stacy and Clinton told me not to wear and they're selling here in the popular store. So I think Stacy and Clinton it is this, this is in fashion. I think Stacy, she's not

going to like this. She'll hate it. But I'm going to try it on. Don't kill me Stacy."⁴⁹ Aysha defends her old jeans through the presence of the new jeans in the store; their presence validates her former choice of jeans. Like other participants at this point, Aysha chooses to follow the logic of fashion, which presumes that trends should be followed by everyone, rather than the individualized rules of style provided by Stacy and Clinton. Aysha has not yet begun to view herself through Stacy and Clinton's lens. However, she sees the *jeans* through their point of view and rejects their assessment; before she would never have been aware that those jeans did not fit the ideal proposed by *WNTW*. In her statement Aysha both speaks about and to Stacy and Clinton, speaking to both an imagined spectator and to Stacy and Clinton. Aysha knows that she may be watched by them and that there may be consequences for her choices.

Yet while Aysha tries the jeans on, she does not buy them; instead she chooses to buy two skirts which follow the rules. Perhaps the teaching techniques and the panopticon were effective in changing the way she saw herself. Most participants find shopping by themselves difficult; they are caught between their old view of themselves and their taste and the new view articulated by Stacy and Clinton. The frustration this transitional state creates makes the participant want Stacy and Clinton's help and advice; they no longer know what to buy. When shopping, all participants talk back or about Stacy and Clinton and their rules; whether initially defiant or docile the panopticon works as a kind of training in imagining oneself watched through the gazes of Stacy and Clinton and in adopting their lens.

⁴⁹ Aysha, 2004.

While the participant performs for the camera, Stacy and Clinton watch her and comment, breaking up her narrative with their interpretation. Like the secret footage, the shopping text is used as a pedagogic opportunity, a chance to teach the watching spectator and to discipline her look. When the participant imagines that Stacy and Clinton may be watching and speak to them or about them, her imagination is substantiated by the fact that Stacy and Clinton are watching at least some of the time. The camera is again used to collapse time and space and allow for the apparent real-time monitoring of the participant, creating a panoptic regime for the spectator as well as the participant. The spectator learns to objectify the participant through the lens provided by Stacy and Clinton. This panoptic regime works to train the desire of the spectator in accordance with the judgment of the authorities.

While shopping, the participant experiences the pleasure of seeing herself through the lens of normative femininity. Laura, an accountant and mother, was initially resistant to “growing up” and wearing adult clothes, which she associated with being boring. She literally laughs at the “casual” outfit that Stacy and Clinton showed her on the mannequin as they described the rules for dressing, unable to believe that she should wear a sweater, fitted jacket and skirt to go grocery shopping when she could just wear her pajamas. At the first store where she shops, she rejects everything she tries on—directly to the camera and without the intervention of a mirror. But at the second store, Laura finds a black and white patterned tweed trench coat with a black satin bow to tie it together. She tries on the coat in the dressing room and walked out to look at herself in the mirror. The camera cuts between her and her mirror image as she literally jumps up and down and says “I love the coat! I love the coat! I love the coat! I’m so getting the coat.” She stares at

herself in the mirror and then says “I just feel wonderful. I’m so happy we came here. I’m so happy with what I picked out. I can’t even.. it’s undescrivable. [sic].”⁵⁰ This is a moment of identification in the mirror: Laura feels jubilant in the image of her sophisticated self. As Clinton predicted, Laura finds the experience of being well-dressed transformative. Laura stares at her mirror image with her newly-trained gaze; she looks at her image as from the outside and finds it satisfying. She has learned to survey herself and has learned the pleasure of seeing herself within the feminine norm. In her speech, Laura takes responsibility for her choice, marking her agency; she picked out the coat that makes her so happy. Though she is the author of her actions, her actions were shaped by the show’s authorities, Stacy and Clinton. As Nikolas Rose writes:

The regulation of conduct becomes a matter of each individual’s desire to govern their own conduct freely in the service of the maximization of a version of their happiness and fulfillment that they take to be their own, but such lifestyle maximization entails a relation to authority in the very moment as it pronounces itself the outcome of free choice.⁵¹

In a neoliberal moment, even as Laura feels free, beautiful, and happy, she has learned from Stacy and Clinton how to shape herself and invest in her image.

Shopping is the privileged site of self-production, as it is in buying clothes that the participant shapes herself as a neoliberal feminine subject. Given five-thousand dollars, a new perspective, and a list of stores, the participant is endowed with new capacities to shape herself. For instance, Katie M., a legal assistant, absorbed the rules and correctly avoided “flying squirrel sleeves” and polyester, but initially resisted spending a great deal of money on her clothes. After some reflection, she ended up

⁵⁰ Laura, 2005.

⁵¹ Rose, 58-59

buying four expensive items. This action was out of step with her previous frugal image of herself and her world and required recalibrating both. Katie commented that

[i]t just doesn't feel real. I'm walking around NYC on blocks I walk on often. But completely as if I'm in a different town because I feel like a different person. I would never have walked in Precision. But it's a store that I've stared inside millions of times, saw one price tag in the window and kept on walking. And today I bought a \$450 jacket so... I'm pretty excited.⁵²

Learning how to dress changed her knowledge of her self and her place in the city; doors literally open for her. She attains a kind of consumer citizenship previously denied. Of course, this transformation is only possible because she had the money to spend as well as the knowledge of how to spend it; her movement into previously barred territory demands upper middle-class resources, middle-class taste, and consumer desire. Later in the episode, Stacy comments that Katie looks like a lawyer and not an assistant; her clothes affirm her new taste and class status. Middle-class resources enable Katie to attain a upwardly mobile femininity previously denied to her by her lack of knowledge and money.

Shopping Day Two

The panoptic regime is continued at first on the second day of shopping. Stacy and Clinton sneak up and ambush the participant on the second day of shopping after watching the first day's work. The camera splits its look between the unknowing participant, who speaks to the camera about the clothes, and Stacy and Clinton, until the two images merge into one as they surprise the participant. This relation of knowing and not-knowing puts the participant in the field of being unwittingly observed even as she

⁵² Katie M., 2006

performs for the camera, while the spectator is allowed omniscient access to all actors. This suggests to the participant and the viewer: even if you know you are being watched, you may not know you are being watched; you should always watch yourself. Stacy and Clinton lecture the participant about her shopping the day before and the participant sometimes expresses shock that they were watching; now she knows she is always under surveillance. Stacy and Clinton then take charge of the shopping and their commentary become a part of the action that we see, rather than being framed as commentary on action taking place somewhere and some-when else. Their look becomes a part of the action, rather than framing it; the participant must engage with them directly. Surveillance becomes interaction.

In this segment, Stacy and Clinton lecture and guide the participant, teaching her how to shop. Moving around the store, they teach the participant about specific items of clothing like jeans or skirts, discussing fabric, cut and sizing. Stacy and Clinton explain that cut matters and teach the participant to dress for her body. For instance, for someone who carries weight in the lower-half, a straight-leg pant is better than a boot-cut pant, because the narrowing at the knee creates the look of a wider hip. The participant is taught how to shop to render her body feminine. The store becomes a site of learning for the participant and for the vicarious spectator. Agency is trained within the limits of normative femininity, as Stacy and Clinton shape the participant into an appropriate consumer-citizen.

On the second shopping day, Stacy and Clinton work to make Shireen see herself through the lens of middle-class femininity. Shireen, a Latina single mother, was nominated by her friends and family for the title of worst-dressed bachelorette for her

tight, skin-baring outfits. In the course of the show, Clinton tells Shireen that she is not attracting the kind of man that she wants to be with, implicitly suggesting that Shireen was attracting lower-class men rather than middle-class men with her display of sexuality. On the second shopping day, Stacy and Clinton convince Shireen to try on a different kind of a dress than she is used to wearing, a beautiful brown v-neck wrap dress that falls to mid-calf. Looking at herself in the mirror, Shireen says “I feel that it should be... I’m used to my clothes so tight I’m feeling like I want a smaller size and then I’d love it.”⁵³ Shireen looks in the mirror as she pulls the dress higher and tighter. Stacy explains that “...there’s no room for you to go any smaller.” Here, there is a clash of aesthetics: Shireen wants a dress that fits into her working-class feminine aesthetic, while Stacy argues for a dress that fits into a middle-class feminine aesthetic. In the working-class aesthetic, the body is exposed and made explicitly sexual. Stacy and Clinton change how Shireen sees herself in this scene; with their encouragement, Shireen looks again in the mirror and says “I love it, I do.”⁵⁴ Later, Shireen tries on casual yet sexy jeans with a fitted jacket. Clinton asks if she would go on a date in this outfit and Shireen says yes. Stacy tells her: “if you could go out in this, than I guarantee you the caliber of man you’re dating is going to go through the roof.”⁵⁵ The direct implication is that Shireen will look middle-class and attract a middle-class man, but the indirect implication is that Shireen herself will have more self-esteem and will choose a better man. Again, the mirror is used to educate the participant and to reconstitute her image of her body through analyzing her mirror image. Buying into the middle-class aesthetic, Shireen buys the

⁵³ Shireen, 2006.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

brown dress in the “middle-class” size. Middle-class taste is sold as the route to upward mobility through both enabling self-confidence and attracting the “right”—i.e. middle-class—man.

Clinton’s gay male gaze is an important dynamic in this section. His gaze is sexualizing but not dangerous. Clinton flirts with the female participants, touching them and admiring them. For instance, he tells Jenny that her trousers look great on her tush and he tells Aysha that she has a great shape.⁵⁶ Stacy also compliments the participant and remarks on the fit of the clothes, but the effect is different: her gaze is not sexual, but rather entirely analytic. Clinton takes up the place of the straight man by using the “male gaze,” but he never totally objectifies or sexualizes the woman. There’s always an ironic distance between his performance and Clinton himself. In playing with the male gaze, Clinton enables them to play at being the sexual object without being reduced to being an object: he makes them feel special.

Interstitial Confession

In this segment, the participant confesses that she has changed. Her confession produces the truth of transformation. Shireen confesses in her hotel room “I’m starting to realize now that I did dress really bad. I’m so grateful that I actually had the chance to come to New York and to get all new clothes and to get a new look. It’s really going to be changing a lot of things for me.”⁵⁷ This confession signals that Shireen is becoming a middle-class feminine consumer citizen. Her view of herself has changed; previously defensive, she now accepts Stacy and Clinton’s point of view and authorizes it as her

⁵⁶ Aysha, 2004 and Jenny C., 2006.

⁵⁷ Shireen, 2006.

own. She also buys into the idea that changing the way she dresses will change her experience in the world for the better. Similarly, resistant Aysha confesses that “[m]y thoughts about clothes have been changed a lot... now I realize I didn’t know anything about clothes. I think I had no idea... Stacey and Clinton they showed me a whole new world... I mean I think I have more confidence. When I tried on clothes I was feeling like I was mature, I had that feeling, I’m mature and my attitude changed— that’s how I felt... I felt really good.”⁵⁸ Dressing well makes the participant feel competent and in control. The participant adopts the gaze of the show as her own; she learns to look at themselves and identify with her middle-class, feminine image in the mirror. This confession produces a new truth of herself, undercutting her past understanding of herself. The claim that the makeover changes one on the inside as well as the outside is substantiated through these confessions.

Resistance on *WNTW* is very nearly futile. Nearly every participant resists during the episode and nearly every participant is gratefully transformed by the end of the show. Alana, a thrift-store shopper and a funky dresser, initially tries to resist the show’s version of normative femininity. She even makes a list of her own rules of what she would wear-- 80s style clothes, bright colors, and sparkly things--- and reads it to Stacy and Clinton. Unimpressed by Alana’s display of resistance, Stacy and Clinton tell Alana to sit down and shut up. Nonetheless, in designing outfits for Alana, Stacy and Clinton reflect her “funky” side in a metallic animal print, a purple sequin shrug, and fun, visually interesting high heels. When shopping, Alana selects expensive funky hats (spending \$500 for two hats) and expensive funky glasses; though she initially felt that “fancy

⁵⁸ Aysha, 2004.

clothes are for other people” and explained that she didn’t like to pay full price, she learns to enjoy buying funky, expensive accessories.⁵⁹ Alana buys into her transformation at the hands of Stacy and Clinton; after shopping with them, she confesses “I can’t imagine going back because this looks more like me.”⁶⁰ Despite her initial resistance and awareness of the makeover as form of normalization, her image of herself and her desires shift over the course of the episode. Despite resisting consumption and middle-class style, Alana transforms into a feminine subject whose funky style is reflected in her hats and glasses. As the example of Alana demonstrates, the show practices a kind of appropriation of counter-cultures, as participants who are too “funky” are allowed to maintain their “funky” style through accessories like shoes, purses, jewelry, and hats. Normative femininity is stretchy; it can include personally expressive or even subversive elements even as it brings the participant’s desires in line with its ideals. Though the participant may try to resist, the show works on her desire and self-image, leading her to turn herself into a middle-class feminine subject.

Stylization: Hair and Makeup

Identity is invested in hair and the made-up (or unmade-up) face. In *WNTW*, the participant is transformed by the ministrations of Nick Arrojo and Carmindy, the hair stylist and makeup artist, respectively. The hair-cut is a negotiation that almost always results in submission to Nick’s ideal. The participant is turned away from the mirror while Nick cuts her hair—she is prevented from seeing or shaping her hair style. Nick cuts and styles the participant’s hair in terms of a flexible feminine ideal. He changes her

⁵⁹ Alana, 2005.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

and she sees herself anew, literally, a new image of herself. In the make-up session, Carmindy is the unquestioned expert and she applies the face she wants to see. Carmindy often begins by “erasing” the participant’s face by washing off her makeup, leaving the face “blank” and ready to be reconstituted through make-up. Whether the participant likes make-up or not, whether or not she likes her own made-up image of herself, she is made-up by Carmindy under the normative feminine ideal. When Nick and Carmindy are successful—and they usually are—the participant accepts the feminine image in the mirror as her own. But unlike the femininity which is “fixed” through the body of the participant on *10 Years Younger* and *The Swan*, on *WNTW*, hair and makeup styles are changeable. Rather than “fixing” the participant, Nick and Carmindy teach the participant how to style her hair and makeup. While Nick and Carmindy determine the look for the participant, it is up to the participant to decide to keep it or change it. The success of the new look, then, depends on how seductive it is; it must speak to the participant’s desire.

For Laurie, giving up her mullet of twelve years was a difficult decision because she was attached to it and she had had it for so long: it was part of her image of herself. In the morning before she goes to get her hair cut she confesses “I’m going to miss it.”⁶¹ After he cuts and styles her hair she stares at her image in the mirror. Laurie says to Nick “I love it, I feel fabulous!” and Nick replies “Enjoy looking at the new you.”⁶² Laurie gets up to get closer to the mirror to stare at the new her: she has been made into a “new woman.” Despite her desire to hold onto her hair and fear of losing “her” hair style, she does not grieve its absence. Her identification with the mullet is replaced with an

⁶¹ Laurie, 2005.

⁶² *ibid.*

identification of her new image in the mirror. She is seduced by the new feminine self and it gives her pleasure to see herself looking beautiful. But the image is not yet whole, first, because the small mirror reflects only the face, and second, because the participant's look is not yet completed by clothing and makeup.

Makeup is more transient than a haircut, but no less important. In the logic of the show, makeup is necessary to complete the new femininity of the participant. When participants argue that they only have five minutes to put on makeup in the morning, Carmindy creates short routines for them. When participants argue that they never wear makeup, Carmindy makes them up anyway. Often participants already wear makeup, but wear it incorrectly; Carmindy always explains to the participant what she is doing, how, and why. After telling Karen, a redhead that “you have beautiful skin, beautiful eyes, everything about you is delicious,”⁶³ Carmindy instructs Karen to wear warm tones and gold to make her modern and beautiful. Carmindy always finds something beautiful about her participants, promising that she can see the beauty in them, and she always offers means to enhance their beauty. Like Nick, and Stacy and Clinton, Carmindy seduces the participant into femininity with the promise that she can see the beauty in them and bring it out so the participant can see it too. In the logic of the show, to be complete as a woman, one needs makeup.

The mirror serves as the ground for a series of evaluative looks and partial identification, providing baby steps for identification. The participant is invited to see her as Carmindy has seen and made her; the participant is given a beautiful image of herself as she could be if she practiced femininity. The participant often marvels at her new

⁶³ Karen, 2005.

image in the mirror. As Staci said after her makeup and haircut, “I don’t feel like the same me. [laughs] I look at myself in the mirror and I go who’s that? Wow that person looks really good. I wonder who they are? It’s a strange feeling.”⁶⁴ Even without the new clothes, the experience of looking in the mirror is unsettling and transformative; in this case, the image does not match the participant’s image of herself yet, but it offers a seductive image of herself. The mirror offers the opportunity to identify with the feminine norm inscribed on the participant’s body. However, the transformation is not yet complete; the participant must style herself and view her whole look in the mirror.

The First Reveal

In the first reveal, the participant puts her made-over look together for Stacy and Clinton’s approval. As with the ritual of the 360 degree mirror, the participant picks out three outfits and tries them on in front of a mirror. In putting together her three outfits for Stacy and Clinton to critique, the participant shows that she has learned to dress according to the standards of middle-class femininity. While the 360 degree mirror fragmented the participant, she finds wholeness in this mirror. This scene plays out Lacan’s mirror stage most closely, as the polished mirror image becomes the source of the participant’s new ego ideal. Simultaneously, the participant is both the objectified image and the active agent fashioning herself: she puts together the look which reflects and constitutes herself.

The participant finds wholeness and approval in the mirror, literally and figuratively held up by Stacy and Clinton, who stand behind and flanking the participant.

⁶⁴ Staci, 2006.

Their gaze legitimates the participant's gaze and warrants her transformation. They exclaim over colors, shoes, the fit of the clothing; everything that was wrong is now right.⁶⁵ When Raina, an Asian American woman who dressed in enormous sweats, walks into the studio in her first outfit, Clinton exclaims "From cute to sexy, you look fantastic... adorable."⁶⁶ Stacy says "We discovered this neckline is divine on you. And also this length is really terrific because we're getting a nice shape on your torso without sacrificing too much of your leg." As all three admire Raina in the mirror, Raina takes in her new image: "I'm feeling amazing. I'm nervous... It's crazy to see it all together, the hair the makeup, the new clothes..." "But you love it don't you?" Clinton asks. Raina responds nodding her head and smiling at her reflection, "I love it." To see it all together is to see herself together and whole, a new ideal reflected and embraced. The moment of recognition in the mirror is a jubilant one for the participant and the new hosts, as all three exclaim in pleasure—you look adorable, I love it, as the jubilation of the hosts sustains and enables the participant to embrace her feminine image.

Seeing herself as normatively feminine also makes the participant feel powerful. When Elizabeth sees herself made-over in the mirror with Stacy and Clinton, she says "I have to say guys you really knew what you were talking about. I can't believe how empowered I feel."⁶⁷ Elizabeth has learned to internalize the show's lens and to judge herself by her appearance: her look now makes her feel a sense of agency and power.

Alana initially resisted the transformation and tried to hold onto her "unprofessional"

⁶⁵ Season Four makes this even more obvious as Stacy and Clinton watch the old secret footage of the participant (again) on a big screen TV and then show the participant her old image before allowing her to see her new image in the mirror.

⁶⁶ Raina, 2005.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth, 2003.

look. However, as Alana looks at herself in the mirror with Stacy and Clinton, she says “I feel like it makes me feel more assertive, like I can go in there and say, ‘give me the job’.”⁶⁸ Stacy responds “now you look the part.”⁶⁹ Alana is transformed by her new appearance: now that Alana is normatively feminine, she feels powerful, assertive and in control of her future. Alana learns to value her appearance as a site of agency and identity. In addition, the show teaches that looking the part is necessary to getting the part: Alana will become a professional through learning to dress like one. In being transformed, Alana becomes a neoliberal feminine subject, pretty, consuming, normatively feminine, and prepared to get the job. The transformation is not merely outward but also inward: looking feminine makes the participant feel self-confident, assertive, and empowered.

The mirror scene is also the stage where the participant separates from Stacy and Clinton, sometimes tearfully, often with hugs; it marks the end of her dependence on them, the arrival of a new maturity foretold in the image itself. As Stacy says to Raina after she’s tried on her last outfit for them “Do you feel like you can go back to LA and do this yourself because you know what we don’t have time to come visit you every week.”⁷⁰ Raina demurs asking if they’ll come visit her if she says no and Stacy responds “No we want you to say you know what you’re doing now.”⁷¹ The image in the mirror represents a promise of self-mastery. As Raina agrees that she can fashion herself by herself, she identifies with the image of feminine self-mastery in the mirror: the

⁶⁸ Alana, 2005.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Raina, 2005.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

appearance of self-mastery enables her to claim a new competence. Seeing herself as whole in the mirror, she learns she can govern herself. The identification with her new image enables her to grow up.

As the participant walks away after showing off each outfit, music plays and the participant is shown in slow motion strutting toward the camera or posing in her outfits; she is dressed up in the televisual/filmic grammar of glamour, the reward for becoming an object worthy of being looked at. After highlighting the relations of seeing through the camera and playing with conventional subject-object distinctions, one of the most “rewarding” moments, in narrative and filmic terms, is the moment that most closely approximates the fetishized woman in classical narrative cinema.⁷² The participant is glamorized in her new look, accorded the status of spectacular object. Now that she is a normatively feminine woman, she can be objectified; now that she has learned how to use femininity, she can be glamorized.

The Big Reveal

In the Big Reveal, the participant fashions herself for a reunion with her friends and family. Drawing on what Nick and Carmindy taught her, the participant styles her hair and applies her makeup. Looking into the mirror, she recreates the image of femininity for herself: she has learned to objectify herself as they objectified her. The truth of the transformation is made clear as the participant fashions herself as normatively middle-class and feminine. The participant has learned to see herself through the lens of middle-class femininity and to invest her identity in her appearance. The show has

⁷² Mulvey 2000.

successfully made the participant over into a self-governing feminine subject: now she will continually fashion herself according to the standards of middle-class femininity.

The success of her transformation is signaled by the camera work and by the reaction of her friends and family. The camera cuts between the nervous participant and the crowd of friends of family awaiting her triumphant return, until the two images merge into one and the participant reenters her society, transformed. Cutting between the two scenes creates suspense, for while the spectator has omniscient access to both the participant and the audience, she must wait for the participant to arrive in order to see the dramatic reaction of the crowd. Her friends and family cheer for the participant, as though for a celebrity. The entrance itself is cloaked in glamour. For instance, Sohni is shot descending a staircase as everyone looks up at her, a classic image of glamour and objectification. Now that the participant has fashioned herself as normatively feminine, she is rewarded by being fragmented and objectified by the camera. Her status as object to be looked at is made an explicit part of the narrative: her friends and family are there to look at and admire her and she is there to be admired. Her new beauty renders her spectacular.

However, the participant's friends and family discuss not only the participant's appearance, but also her subjectivity: she seems like a new person. Elizabeth's friend comments that "You can tell there's a change on the inside—she feels so much better about herself."⁷³ In other words, Elizabeth's makeover has *changed* Elizabeth on the inside. Jeanie's friend comments that "[h]er attitude is so much different [sic]. She's

⁷³ Elizabeth, 2003.

alive, she is just vibrant.”⁷⁴ The second comment suggests that the participant is now more truly herself; something hidden has been *revealed*. Contradictorily, appearance both shapes and reflects one’s inner self. However, both these comments uphold the tight link between identity and appearance: the participant is transformed by the makeover on the *inside*. In this scene, femininity appears to be a *visible* cure for unhappiness, lack of self-confidence and poor self-esteem. Not only can one work on and transform oneself through femininity, but this change will be immediately visible: one’s femininity will lead others to see one as happy and confident. The implication here is that women should govern themselves through investing in and working on their appearance. In this scene, the participant is lauded for her successful transformation, inside and out: her new-found femininity makes her a better, happier person.

Final Scene

In the final scene of *WNTW*, the participant shows off her new wardrobe as she narrates the effect of the makeover in a voice-over. The participant is rendered both subject and object in the final scene: she is the omniscient narrator and the object on screen. As she discusses how the makeover makes her feel confident, powerful, and optimistic, she is shown performing for the camera in her new wardrobe, demonstrating her enjoyment of both her new look and being-looked-at by the camera. This ending appears to place the participant in the feminine position of objectification and pleasure in her objectification, but her voice-over contradicts her status as object: now she feels

⁷⁴ Jeannie, 2006

confident, efficacious, and ambitious. In this scene, femininity appears to *empower* women even as it turns them into objects-to-be-looked-at.

In becoming normatively feminine, the participant becomes a better neoliberal consumer-citizen. After her make-over, Misti says:

I can't believe how much this appearance has changed me. I'm totally motivated to go home and go to school or get two jobs so I can shop and shop. It's totally changed my outlook, my perspective on myself and the way I want to be, the things I want to do with my life.⁷⁵

Being made-over changes how Misti feels about herself and her capacities for the better.

She wants to shop and work so she can shop; her ambition is triggered by her new appearance. For Aysha, a young woman from Pakistan, the makeover leads her to embrace American individualism:

All my life I've been doing stuff for my family, or my sister, or my brother I'm too involved in family.... This is the first opportunity that I got that's all about me. This whole week made me realize what life's all about it's not only job and home and there are a lot of things to do and I can move on with life. So I'm glad that I'm here.⁷⁶

Aysha learns to value self-fulfillment through the makeover. Becoming feminine “empowers” the participants to be ambitious, that is, to desire and act *for themselves*.

Many participants have resisted normative femininity by not investing themselves in their appearance; in order to “empower” them through femininity, the show must first get them to care about how they look. As Clinton says to Katie after she's been transformed, “And now that you know you can look this great, you can pay more attention.”⁷⁷ In other words, in learning to care about how she looks, Katie can now take

⁷⁵ Misti, 2003.

⁷⁶ Aysha, 2004.

⁷⁷ Katie M., 2006.

responsibility for her appearance. In her final voice-over, Katie concurs with this assessment, saying “[f]or me this show should be called ‘How to Care’ because I just didn’t care before. It feels crazy to say it but I feel pretty today and I don’t truly believe it’s only exterior.”⁷⁸ Katie has learned to invest in her appearance and derive pleasure from it. Investing in her appearance makes her feel better about herself—pretty on the inside. The show has expanded her capacity to appreciate and invest in herself. Taking responsibility for her appearance renders her appearance a site through which she can exercise agency, make choices, and work on herself. She becomes the “actively responsible” neoliberal subject through investing herself in her appearance.

Transformation in *WNTW* is not easy: even though the participant always loves her final image and embraces a new ideal, she often resists throughout the show. Why are the participants so tied to their mirror image even when they acknowledge their style does not look good? Misti defended her monstrous shoes and sloppy shirts even though she later admitted that she looked mean; Alana defended her bright colors and thrift-store clothes and later admitted that she hadn’t been looking at herself and that she loves her new look which she describes as awesome, pretty, and powerful; Jeannie defended her sparkly bright clothes but later said that the makeover helped her come out of a dark time into color. For all of these participants, their initial look, no matter how bad it seemed to others, including Stacy and Clinton, represented them; they were tied to the armor of their mirror image, as Lacan writes. Their egos were vested in their image; in their hair, makeup and clothes. Even when they could see that that style did not make them look good, as Jeannie admitted in an earlier confession, they found it difficult to let go because

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

that style defined them. In order to let go, they had to be broken out of their investment in their image through the use of the distancing camera, the disciplining panopticon, and the fragmenting mirror. Drawing on Gallop's writing on Lacan, I argue that the participant can become a "new person" only by fictionalizing her prior mirror image.⁷⁹ That is to say, through iterations of confession, the participant moves from claiming her "before" self as "true" to constructing her "before" self as a fiction. After the makeover, the participant constructs her old image as the product of depression or having lost her way or trying too hard or not trying at all and therefore failing to represent her. Whatever the specific construction, the participant claims her new image as her "true" self through disavowing her old image as a fiction. A significant change in appearance demands a new identification and thus, a fictionalization of the old image and self represented by that appearance. Transformation is not easy precisely because women are invested in their image, whether or not it looks "good." Only through disavowing the old image can participants stay "true" to themselves and identify with the new feminine image in the mirror.

Conclusion

As Laurie Ouellette writes, "[r]eality programming is one site where neoliberal approaches to citizenship have in fact materialized on television."⁸⁰ In *WNTW*'s discourse of neoliberalism, femininity is articulated as a mode of self-cultivation that will ensure domestic, economic, and personal security. Participants are taught to see their style, their clothes, and themselves as an investment. As Nikolas Rose writes regarding the logic of

⁷⁹ Gallop, 90.

⁸⁰ Ouellette, 232.

“advanced liberalism,” participants are taught to “‘enterprise themselves’ to maximize their quality of life through acts of choice.”⁸¹ In other words, as Stacy says, “[i]ntelligent people use their style well.”⁸² As discussed above, one should “use style” to enhance one’s efficacy and self-esteem.⁸³ As Stacy and Clinton suggest to Shireen, she could “use style” by dressing “well” in order to attract the right kind of man. As they suggest to Alana, she should “use style” to get a job by “dressing the part,” that is to say, dressing professionally to be seen as a professional. Concern with appearance does not signify a lack of ambition but rather the opposite: the person who really cares about doing well will do everything, including dressing well, to ensure her success. As Rose argues, neoliberalism enables “govern[ing] at a distance” by producing the consumer-citizen as the “actively responsible individual.”⁸⁴ In *WNTW*, the participant takes on the task of disciplining herself and becomes a better neoliberal citizen by learning to monitor herself through the split-subjectivity and the appearance ideal of normative femininity. In the end, *WNTW* offers a fantasy in which upward-mobility is guaranteed through femininity; if only everyone would “take responsibility for themselves” through the tools of normative femininity, they would be successful.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Rose, 57.

⁸² Laura, 2005.

⁸³ In contrast, Roberts argues that the British *WNTW* empowers women through making them sexier, echoing Berger and Bartky. This may be true of the British show, but does not describe the U.S. version.

⁸⁴ Rose, 43; Rose, 57.

⁸⁵ With regard to the British *WNTW*, Angela McRobbie argues that participants could not move up in class to the level of the show’s hosts. McRobbie, 99-104. Perhaps one of the key differences between the British and U.S. versions of the show is that such upward mobility is imaginable in the U.S. In the U.S. mythos, everyone can remake themselves and anyone can make it.

Normative femininity is redefined through its articulation with neoliberalism. As discussed above, Riviere and Brownmiller define femininity in opposition to ambition, while Bartky and Berger define femininity through dependency. For them, to be feminine is to shape one's appearance to please the gaze of powerful others. In *WNTW*, the self-objectifying structure of femininity is reshaped as a self-discipline that ensures success in both the public and the private sphere. To look good advances one's chances of getting a job, getting a raise, or getting a good mate, because looking good means that one cares and wants to do well. On *WNTW*, as appearance is defined as another field of action, judgment, and competition, the objectification at the heart of femininity is figured as a mode of agency. The participant must become feminine both because she is innately feminine already and because becoming feminine will empower her. The show transforms the participant into a middle-class feminine subject through shaping her agency and desire.⁸⁶ In making femininity inevitable and irresistible, the show incites the spectator's desire to become feminine. On *WNTW*, femininity is a tool for the self under a neoliberal regime where every subject must make use of every possible advantage. This model of femininity is not a reaction to dependency, but rather a reaction to persistent anxiety in an uncertain world. In *WNTW*, to be normatively feminine is to be *for oneself*, ambitious and upwardly mobile; normative femininity demonstrates that one is a competent, "actively responsible" agent. *WNTW* tightens the link between women's identity and their appearance, even as the show redefines femininity through "active responsibility," aspiration, and ambition.

⁸⁶ In contrast, Martin Roberts argues that the British version of *WNTW* operates like a "cop show" in which participants are transformed through "coaxing and coercion." His account of the show ignores the work of power on desire. Roberts 247 and 234.

Chapter Two: Caring for the Self in *10 Years Younger*

“The biggest lesson I learned from this is that I really deserve to look my best, to feel my best. And I don’t think I felt like that before I went through all this.”¹

The mission of *10 Years Younger* (10YY) is not merely to make the participant look younger, but to rehabilitate her as a neoliberal feminine citizen-subject through an authoritarian intervention. As appearance is defined as the measure of women’s self, the “care of the self”² is defined for female participants as care for one’s appearance. One enacts femininity through caring for the self; femininity signifies self-respect and respectability. In the show, visible age renders the participant unfeminine and serves as evidence of the failure to “care for the self.” The participant is shamed for her old and unfeminine appearance through spectacle and objectification. By failing to “care for herself,” the participant has failed to carry out the duties of the neoliberal citizen. Through confession, the show locates the failure to “correctly” care for the self in individual flaws, such as a low-self-esteem, thereby erasing the social context of class and gender in the lives of the mostly working-class female participants. Following neoliberal logic, the participant’s “failure” to care for herself justifies the show’s authoritarian intervention into their lives. Despite the neoliberal language of choice, agency, and empowerment, the participant has no choice but to obey and submit to the makeover. Under an authoritarian mode of governance, the show sends the participants to a series of experts who normalize, “improve,” and “fix” the participant, making her look younger and more feminine. The success of the “fix” is upheld through the reveal and the

¹ Cindy, *Head of the Class*, 2005.

² The “care of the self” is Michel Foucault’s phrase; he used it to describe the practice of self-government of the elite Ancient Romans. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

spectacle; the participant now identifies with her feminine image. Having been “cared for” and rendered feminine inside and out, the participant is “empowered” to care for herself again; now that her image is rejuvenated, she can become a “self-responsible” neoliberal citizen.

The Show

10 Years Younger distinguishes itself from other makeover shows through the device of attempting to shave ten years off each participant’s perceived age through an extensive makeover. *IOYY* is hosted by Josh Green in half the episodes and Mark Montano in the other half.³ *IOYY* is set in and around Los Angeles in various locations including the studio, the street, and doctors’ and dentists’ offices. Like *What Not To Wear* (*WNTW*), *IOYY* airs on The Learning Channel (TLC). Both shows are didactic, teaching the middle-class female spectator how to care for herself through caring for her appearance (as defined by each show.) Both shows are generally aimed at the same viewer, given their placement on cable television and use of the makeover, a narrative traditionally associated with women.⁴ Like *WNTW*, *IOYY* is an American version of a British show. *IOYY* took off in Britain, but was cancelled after two years in the U.S. However, while new episodes of the American show were only made between 2004 and 2005, two episodes of *IOYY* were aired daily, Monday through Friday from 2005 to 2007.

³ Other casting changes follow the change in hosts; in the episodes hosted by Josh Green, Jaime Austin serves as the clothing expert, while Mark Montano takes over that role in the episodes which he hosts.

⁴ However, as a daytime television program, *IOYY* may be aimed at home-makers (distracted viewers) or unemployed women.

In Spring, 2008, *IOYY* was resuscitated; new episodes are now being aired.⁵ Despite the fact that it was cancelled after two years, the show has had a significant presence on daytime television for the last four years.

The show follows a simple half-hour formula, which is repeated in each episode. First, in the segment I call *spectacle as punishment*, an average perceived age is obtained for the participant through enclosing her in a sound-proof glass box and surveying one-hundred people. Second, in *the confession*, the host shares the results of the survey, including selected comments, with the participant. The participant confesses the story of how she came to look so old and why she wants to look young again. Third, in *the treatments* section, the participant is subjected to a series of cosmetic-medical treatments, such as cosmetic (and not so cosmetic) dentistry, LASIK surgery, various dermatological procedures, and others. Fourth, the participant returns to the set of *IOYY* for *a day of glam*, in which she is made over by the glam squad—Mark or Jaime, Jenn, and Damone. Fifth, the participant's transformation is revealed to herself and to the spectators in *the reveal*. Sixth, in the segment I call *spectacle as reward*, the participant returns to the glass box, and another one-hundred people are surveyed to obtain a new average apparent age for the participant. Finally, the participant steps out of the box and is rewarded with her new age.

The Participants

The majority of participants on *IOYY* are working class women. Eighty-six percent of the participants of the show are female, and about eighty percent are white.

⁵ These episodes are beyond the scope of my analysis.

10YY, like *WNTW*, primarily makes over and *transforms* women; both shows are really about femininity.⁶ However, unlike *WNTW*, the vast majority of participants on *10YY* are poor or working-class.⁷ Details about the participants' lives are not always given in each episode and class must be deduced through various clues. More than a quarter of female participants are single mothers, some of whom dropped out of high school or never went to college. Many participants have lacked access to health care, particularly dental care, while other participants have been incapacitated by illness. In terms of work, participants hold jobs such as teacher, nurse, guidance counselor, occupational therapist, factory worker, and assistant manager at a restaurant to name a few. None of these jobs are both highly paid and highly respected; many of them are within traditionally female-dominated (and badly paid fields). A few participants are full-time housewives and a very small percentage are unemployed and looking for work. In terms of consumption, all of the participants have failed to present themselves well through consuming correctly.

What links the participants together is the sense of stress, struggle, and limited

⁶ The techniques of transformation are more effective with women because they rely on women's identification with their appearance as their self. The male subjects undergo the same mechanisms of transformation described here, but are rarely as emotionally affected.

⁷ Class is difficult to determine with accuracy in the post-industrial U.S. The traditional measures of class in terms of either relation to production (Marx) or consumption (status according to Weber) fail to match up or adequately describe the existing configuration. Further, for Marx, class consciousness must be achieved a condition clearly not met in the U.S. As Abramowitz argues, the middle-class increasingly resembles the working-class in their lack of autonomy (what Iris Marion Young would call powerlessness) and extended hours at work. Despite this immiseration, what might broadly distinguish middle-class from working-class are the kinds of opportunities open and how easy or difficult it is to pursue those opportunities. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Signet Classics, 1998); Max Weber, "Class and Status" in *Sociological Theory*, ed. Lewis Coser and Bernard Rosenberg (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc, 1982), 301-307; Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

opportunities that characterizes nearly all of their confessions. Though none of them espouse a working-class consciousness or speak about working-class culture, they all speak about the gender- and class-related problems in their lives—problems which, as I discuss below, are revealed only to be covered by an individualizing rhetoric.

Aware that their appearance has suffered, the participants nominate themselves to be made over, like the participants of *The Swan* and unlike the participants of *WNTW*. In exchange for humiliation on cable television, participants receive new hair and makeup styles and one new outfit. They also receive dental care, dermatological care, and possibly other forms of medical treatment, such as LASIK. Under the guise of the makeover, participants receive health care. Unlike *The Swan*, participants' features and bodies are not *reshaped* through cosmetic surgery. The focus is on normalizing the body through erasing the marks of age and class, rather than making the physical body more feminine in its proportions. On *10YY*, the participant trades her privacy for medical treatments and the makeover.

The Care of the Self

It is imperative for neoliberal citizens to care for themselves. As Colin Gordon argues,

The idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is a sense in which one remains always continually employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that it is part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital. This is the 'care of the self' which government commends as the corrective to collective greed.⁸

⁸ Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction" in *The Foucault Effect*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44.

Under neoliberal thought, to “care for the self” means to be responsible for oneself; it is the work everyone must do to sustain and maintain themselves. Self-esteem is reflected and maintained through self-care. In neoliberal thought, high self-esteem enables the neoliberal citizen to be self-fulfilling and self-enterprising.⁹ Caring for the self is the essential task of the neoliberal citizen-subject. To fail to care for the self is to fail to exercise the duties and freedoms of neoliberal citizenship.

On *IOYY*, “the care of the self” is defined through femininity. As a woman’s self is defined through her appearance, woman’s “care of the self” is enacted and measured through her appearance.¹⁰ Femininity signifies that one properly cares for oneself. In the discourse of *IOYY*, women should care for themselves by producing and maintaining a youthful, middle-class, feminine appearance. Femininity is tied to the appearance of youth, as age tends to make men and women resemble each other, depolarizing gender.¹¹ In order to look both feminine and young, one must not only care for one’s skin, eyes, and teeth, but

⁹ Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 37-64.

¹⁰ For example, Joan Brumberg chronicles a shift in the work of self-improvement from character in the nineteenth century to body in the twentieth in her analysis of girls’ diaries. Joan Brumberg, *The Body Project* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

¹¹ Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr, *Face Value; The Politics of Beauty* (Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 171. I disagree with their assignment of meanings like “unknowing” and “innocent” to the unmarked face and more generally, with their argument that feminine beauty always simply connotes passivity, immobility and uselessness.

also must follow fashion and continue to update one's clothes, makeup, and hair. One must also make time for sleep and exercise and find ways to manage stress. The failure to "care for the self" results in the appearance of age and the failure to look feminine. In the show, to fail to care for the self is to fail as both a neoliberal citizen and a woman.

Governmentality: Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism

10YY relies on a neoliberal frame, but makes use of a authoritarian form of governmentality to transform the participants.¹² While neoliberalism governs through freedom, authoritarianism governs through obedience. Neoliberalism seeks to "actively create the conditions within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is possible,"¹³ recasting the citizen as a rational consumer and enterprising agent.¹⁴ Authoritarian governmentality is defined by the rejection of "limited government characterized by the rule of law that would secure the rights of individual citizens."¹⁵ In other words, nothing prevents the sovereign from "interven[ing] in the intimate lives" of his subjects.¹⁶ However, neo/liberal rule can contain authoritarian forms of government.¹⁷

Under liberalism and neoliberalism, those deemed incapable of governing themselves are subject to authoritarian rule.¹⁸ As Mitchell Dean argues,

¹² See the Introduction for an extensive discussion of neoliberal and authoritarian rule.

¹³ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, Nikolas Rose, introduction to *Foucault and Political Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

¹⁴ Gordon 1991, 44.

¹⁵ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 147.

¹⁶ Dean, 145.

¹⁷ Dean, 145-147.

¹⁸ Dean, 134.

Within liberal forms of government... there is a long history of people who, for one reason or another, are deemed not to possess or to display the attributes (e.g. autonomy, responsibility) required of the juridical and political subject of rights and who are therefore subjected to all sorts of disciplinary, bio-political and even sovereign interventions.¹⁹

Neo/liberal regimes may turn to "...sovereign interventions to confine, to contain, to coerce and to eliminate... those deemed without value."²⁰ For those deemed improvable, authoritarian intervention will attempt to "foster... capacities of responsibility and self-governance," that is, to turn "deficient" individuals into disciplined neo/liberal citizens.²¹ In *10YY*, the failure of the participants to adequately care for themselves renders them failed neoliberal citizens, justifying the use of authoritarian intervention. Because the participants have failed to care for themselves, the show "takes care" of them in an attempt to "improve" them.

Following neoliberalism, *10YY* individualizes social inequality; the problem lies not in the social world, but in the individual herself.²² Under neoliberal welfare policies, those in need of help

...are to be assisted not through the ministrations of solicitous experts proffering support and benefit cheques, but through their engagement in a whole array of programmes for their ethical reconstruction as active citizens—training 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 of an 'advanced' liberal democracy.²³

¹⁹ Dean, 134.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Dean, 146.

²² Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

²³ Rose, 59-60.

In other words, the problem is not poverty, but poor self-esteem, which leads to a failure to “self-actualize.” Following this approach, *IOYY* turns the problems caused by social inequality—particularly gender and class—into problems caused by the participant’s low-self-esteem and failure to care for herself. Under neoliberalism, the failed (but improvable) citizen is transformed through “technologies of citizenship” which seek to “empower” the individual.²⁴ *IOYY* attempts to right the participant’s life through raising her self-esteem (by improving her appearance), thereby “empowering” her. *IOYY* disciplines, cares for, and “empowers” the participant so that she will take care of herself.

Spectacle as Punishment

IOYY begins with a spectacular scene: the participant is exhibited in a soundproof glass box in a pedestrian-intensive site in Los Angeles.²⁵ The participant is exhibited as she normally looks: wearing little or no makeup, frumpy, badly-fitting clothes, unstylish hair, and unfeminine shoes. The host of the show, Josh Green or Mark Montano, polls pedestrians, asking them what they think the participant’s age is and why. Silenced and made deaf in the soundproof glass box, the participant is made into a object of others’ gaze. This exhibition is meant to shame the participant, but it is justified on the show as a scientific way to ascertain the participant’s apparent age. Unlike other forms of shaming on reality television however, this form of shaming is not based on surveillance, but on spectacle.²⁶

²⁴ Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Sites include the Long Beach Aquarium, the airport, and an outdoor pedestrian mall.

²⁶ As I discuss in the next section, surveillance, or rather, the recorded scene of the spectacle, plays an important role in shaming; however, the doubling of the spectacle

This set-up turns the participant into a spectacle to be looked at for both the people on the streets of L.A. and the television spectator. The glass box separates and elevates the participant, just like a stage. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues with regard to those displayed in the freak show and the beauty contest, participants in the show “occupy a viewing platform which literalizes their decontextualization, fashions their display, and enforces the objectifying distance essential to the spectacle’s cultural work.”²⁷ That is to say, by being placed in the glass box on the busy street, the participant is plucked out of her daily life, set apart and at a distance from the spectator, and made into an object to be looked at. The host directs the spectacle and mediates its meaning for the viewers. Only the host can speak; the participant as the “viewed object” of spectacle is silenced in the box.²⁸ While the street often functions as a site of personal display and evaluation of the self and others, the participant, enclosed in a glass box, is frozen in the position of being looked at, as the host directs the looks of the pedestrian spectators.

As the host and the viewers discuss the flaws of the participant, the spectacle takes on the aspect of a freak show. The host asks the pedestrian spectator “how old do you think she [the participant] is” and often follows up by asking “what makes her look so old?” The host frames the question negatively and thus provokes negative evaluations: she looks old because she has bags under her eyes, crow’s feet, forehead wrinkles, lines around the mouth, bad teeth, yellow teeth, veiny hands, a wrinkled neck, frumpy

through playing the recording for the participant works rather differently since the participant knew that she was being watched in the first place.

²⁷ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Beauty and the Freak” in *Points of Contact: Disability, Art, and Culture*, ed. Susan Crutchfield and Marcy Joy Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 189.

²⁸ Garland-Thomson, 185.

clothing, and/or gray hair.²⁹ As the pedestrian spectators name the signs of age on the participant, the camera zooms in on the participant, giving extreme close-ups of the features under discussion. At times, three insets on screen show the participant from various angles and distances, as though she were some strange creature under scientific consideration. The camera work here disrupts the unity of the participant's image for the television spectator by fragmenting her image and through extreme-close-ups which render the body part unconnected to the person. This fragmentation resembles that of the 360 degree mirror in *WNTW* and the use of the grid in *The Swan*. While the body is constituted and analyzed in relation to age in *IOYY*, it is constituted and analyzed as the clothed body in *WNTW* and the physical female body in *The Swan*. However, in this scene in *IOYY*, the fragmentation of the participant's body is for the eyes of the television spectator *not* the participant, like *The Swan* and unlike *WNTW*. This fragmentation resembles the fragmentation of women in narrative cinema described by Laura Mulvey.³⁰ Yet while Mulvey argues that women are turned into a fetishized, pleasurable, spectacle for men, in *IOYY*, the woman in the glass box fascinates, not because she is sexy, but because she is horrifying. Where the former type of objectification cloaks the participant in glamour, this kind of objectification turns her into freak. Having allowed herself to visibly age, the participant is rendered aged and grotesque to the spectator.

In this scene, spectacle functions as punishment for the participant. As Shawna

²⁹ While the official discourse of age covers up femininity in this scene, the lacy slip of femininity shows through. As I discuss below, this is partly due to the fact that (at least on this show) age and femininity are opposed. Additionally, many of the critiques revolve specifically around feminine self-presentation, such as the failure to wear make-up or fashionable, fitted clothing.

³⁰ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34-47.

says later about her experience in the box, “It was horrible. It was absolutely horrible.... I felt completely exposed.”³¹ Other participants complain of people coming right up to the box to look at them, invading their personal space. While they are in the box, participants witness (but do not hear) the spectators gesturing to particular marked areas of the body, such as the area around the eyes. To be on display is a particularly painful experience for someone who wants a makeover because she is unhappy with her appearance. The spectacle converts her unhappiness with her appearance into shame through exposure to the judging public eye.

This scene of spectacular shame—which is replayed multiple times through the episode—serves a didactic role for the television spectator. In the first lesson, the spectator is taught that to enter the public space of the street is to be seen and judged according to a middle-class standard of femininity. While experts, family and friends on *WNTW* judge the participant, on *IOYY* the public judges. Appearance is rendered the site of truth, as the age the show values is not the participant’s real age, but the one produced through the evaluative gaze of the public. An implicit public consensus about how people *should* look is manufactured in this scene, as individuals across gender, race, and class offer similar critiques of the participant’s appearance. As Gareth Palmer argues, shaming on Lifestyle Television relies on a creation of a community standard;³² on *IOYY*, the agreement between members of the public creates a community standard that women should be young, feminine, middle-class, and well-dressed. The spectacle of the participant in the box not only shames the participant, but verifies the existence of such a

³¹ Shawna, “Beauty’s Only Skin Deep,” 2005.

³² Gareth Palmer, “Video Vigilantes and the work of shame,” *Jump Cut* 48 (Winter, 2006).

standard and dramatizes the costs of failing to meet it. While participants are shamed in part because they do not look middle-class, the question of money or resources is not raised in the program.³³ Instead, the participants' lack of femininity renders them disrespectable. The show makes such judgment in the public sphere appear to be natural, universal, and true, teaching the television spectator that everyone judges each other on the street according to the same middle-class standard.

The second lesson the show teaches the television spectator in this scene is how to read and (assuming the viewer possesses the resources to do so) manage age. The television spectator hears the critique and sees the marks of age and stress enunciated on the body of the spectator through didactic close ups. Age is revealed through the yellowing of teeth and gray hair; through sun-damaged skin and wrinkles; through frumpy clothes and ill-kempt hair. These marks are a mix of somatic signs and self-presentation; as the pedestrian spectators suggest, gray hair can be colored, wrinkles can be injected with botox, teeth can be bleached, and new clothes can be purchased. These signs are also signs of class-based resources: do you have the money, leisure and knowledge to pursue "self-care?" The many suggestions made by the spectators about what can be done to help the participant disguise her age imply that the public is knowledgeable about how to look younger and imply a shared middle-class approach to the body and the self. This scene teaches the spectator how to read the signs of age. It also teaches that that any sign of age is likely to be read at the higher end of the spectrum, because any "normal," that is, middle-class, person would possess the knowledge, desire

³³ Similarly, Gareth Palmer notes that working-class individuals are frequently shamed on British Lifestyle Television. *ibid.*

and capability to fight or disguise the signs. The television spectator learns that age can be read on the body and can—must!— be fought, lest others judge you as much older than you actually are.

The Confession

After having been shamed and objectified, the participant then joins the host in *10YY*'s studio to discuss her life and how she came to arrive on the show. While her subjectivity was erased through objectification in the previous scene, here the focus is on her thoughts, feelings and experiences. The confession individualizes the participant and makes her problems the result of a flawed or inadequate self, obscuring social inequality. The confession produces the participant as a bad citizen-subject and at the same time is said to operate as a therapeutic intervention. Using the language of contract, Josh Green promises to make the participant a neoliberal self-responsible citizen; using the language of esteem, Mark Montano promises empowerment through a therapeutic intervention. However, as I discuss below, these discourses are deceptive, as the confession is used to justify the participant's subjection to authoritarian rule.

In contrast to the mobile relations of confessor/confessing agent on talk shows,³⁴ the fixed relations of confessor/confessing agent on *10 Years Younger* closely resembles the power relation which Michel Foucault describes:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor, but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and

³⁴ Jane Shattuc, *The Talking Cure: TV Talk Shows and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 136.

intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated.³⁵

The participant must be examined thoroughly and known by the host (and by extension, the television spectators) as part of her treatment (her transformation, her makeover) and in order to prescribe her treatment. The host, either Josh Green or Mark Montano, is always the concerned authority, the male, middle-class expert, while the participant is always the confessing agent. The host ferrets out the “truth” of the participant through asking a series of (often painful) questions: what was your experience in the box like?; what brings you here?; how do you feel about the way you look?; what’s the difference between you and this picture of you (a picture of the participant taken five to twenty years ago)?; what happened or why are you where you are today?; how did the people’s comments about you make you feel?; do you think they’re right?; and always, how old are you? As Mimi White argues, despite the fact that individuals on television “speak in their own voices...narrative context is provided, and regulated, by an authority who positions the confessional subject, orientating what the subject will say and how the subject will speak in advance.”³⁶ While White’s observations hold true for *10YY*, they do not apply to *WNTW*, and only somewhat apply on *The Swan*. On *10YY*, the host’s questions elicit the “truth” that the participant has failed to care for herself and has suffered inside and out as a result.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 61.

³⁶ Mimi White, *Teleadvising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 178.

The failure to properly care for the self is grounded in encumbrance and the corresponding failure to be wholly autonomous.³⁷ The female participants have failed to “properly” care for themselves because they are mothers, have struggled with illness, or have wrestled with trauma. Sixty-four percent of the female participants on the show are mothers; thirty-eight percent of female participants are married mothers and the twenty-six percent of female participants are single mothers. Mothers are encumbered with dependents by definition, as care for a child or children requires that they devote significant time and attention to another person.³⁸ As Mylene, an African American woman, tells Mark, “I believe I need a change. I’ve been putting everyone [else] first and it’s time to put myself first. I want to start dressing up. I want to start putting makeup on.”³⁹ Mylene works full-time and is the primary care-giver for her family; her husband has been deployed to Iraq. The conflict between the feminine ideal of self-sacrificing motherhood and that of the neoliberal feminine subject is evident in her words. Unlike upper-class women, Mylene cannot buy her way out of this dilemma with a full-time nanny. Overturning the liberal assignment of women to the home, dependency, and encumbrance,⁴⁰ *10YY* hails working-class mothers as potentially autonomous neoliberal citizens. While Jane Shattuc argues, with respect to talk shows, that being affirmed as an individual is good for women who are subsumed in family, this example shows that

³⁷ As Mimi McGee points out, the “care of the self” was premised on the “autonomy” of the Ancient Romans and Greeks. That is, the labor of women and slaves gave them the leisure to pursue self-mastery. *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

³⁸ Wendy Brown argues that liberalism implicitly defines autonomy in opposition to the encumbrance of mothers in the family. “Liberalism’s Family Values” in *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

³⁹ Mylene, *A Very Tall Order*, 2005.

⁴⁰ Brown.

discursive freedom from family is not freedom from the discipline of femininity.⁴¹

Indeed, the denial of the importance of family heightens the burden on women to “care for” themselves.

Illness and trauma also encumber participants. With regard to illness, the “imperfect” body demands care and prevents the individual from acting freely. For instance, Sara had diabetes and fibromyalgia and could not get out of bed for a period of time.⁴² About twenty percent of female participants on the show have suffered from serious illness including a car accident, cancer, diabetes, and depression. Similarly, unresolved trauma is portrayed as rendering the participant incapable of acting freely. About twenty-four percent of participants have suffered some kind physical or psychological trauma. While trauma and illness both demand a great deal of self-care and care from others, *10YY* does not acknowledge these forms of care. Encumbered by children, illness or trauma, these participants lack the autonomy to “correctly” care for themselves.

10YY defines working-class women’s misery in relation to their appearance and lack of self-care, erasing their social context and the constraints of class and gender.⁴³ When Joslyn talks to Mark Montano, she explains that she looks old because she has stopped “taking care” of herself in order to care for her two children, one of whom has special needs. The makeover has nothing to do with her struggle to care for her child, but

⁴¹ Shattuc, 121.

⁴² Sarah, *Getting Dolled Up*, 2005.

⁴³ As Marsha Cassidy argues with regard to *Glamour Girl*, a 1950s “misery” television show, *10YY* exposes the misery of working-class women even as it covers it up and offers solutions to those problems through consumption. “The Cinderella Makeover: *Glamour Girl*, Television Misery Shows and 1950s Femininity” in *The Great American Makeover*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 125-140.

it is presented as a solution to the “real” problem, which is the fact that Joslyn now looks five years older than she really is. On *IOYY*, appearance itself is constructed as the real problem, despite the confession of the participant’s misery. In the narrative of *IOYY*, the problem is not that these women lack money, security, or time; the problem is that they have allowed themselves to look old by failing to “take care of themselves,” that is, failing to protect the body, manage risk, correctly consume products, and spend time on oneself. *IOYY* ignores social issues like the lack of adequate health insurance (class) and public day care (motherhood). Instead, the show blames the individual for her low self-esteem and her corresponding failure to care for herself. As Sadie Wearing argues, “aging is imagined... as a moral failure” in (the British version of) *IOYY*.⁴⁴ Obscuring class and gender inequalities, *IOYY* locates the root of the problem as a flaw within the participant’s self.

Within this segment, three techniques are used to produce the “truth” that the participant has failed to care for herself, that she is flawed, and that she needs help. First, the host plays the comments of the spectators who evaluated the participant’s age for the participant on a small DVD player. The participant now sees and hears the public’s analysis of her appearance. As in the first scene, the participant is fragmented visually and verbally, but this time she views and hears her fragmentation. Replaying the spectacle for the participant has the same effect that the 360 degree mirror does in *WNTW*: it breaks apart and reconstitutes her body image. She is made to see her body as aged and grotesque. The cruelest evaluations and the highest age evaluations are played

⁴⁴ Sadie Wearing, “Subjects of Rejuvenation: Aging in Postfeminist Culture” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 277-310.

for the participant, but this selection is taken to be exemplary of the objective public's judgment. For instance, in the selection played for Leda, the spectators comment that "she looks rundown," "she has bags under her eyes" "she has a lot of wrinkles" "she looks like she's done a lot of living already," and "she could stand to lose a few pounds."⁴⁵ The participant becomes a spectator to her own spectacle. While *WNTW* replays the secret footage for the participant to teach her that she is under surveillance and should watch herself, in *IOYY*, the participant knew she was on display in the first place. Replaying the spectacle for the participant functions to shame her and to teach her to see herself as an object through the lens of age and middle-class femininity.

After the participant views this footage, the host asks how it made her feel, using the language of therapy to provoke a confession. Leda replies: "I can't believe it. I cannot believe it. I'm in total shock. I didn't think I looked that bad. I mean I know I looked bad, I didn't think I looked **that** bad. 50s? oh my god. I don't even know what to say. I'm devastated."⁴⁶ Leda confesses her shame, anger, hurt and shock as she confronts the gap between how she sees herself and how the public sees her. This scene is explicitly about shaming the participant by making her see herself as having failed to meet community standards of appearance. In a way, this shaming operates as a kind of consciousness raising, as the participant learns about how she "really" looks. The public's critique of the participant exposes her failure to judge and manage her appearance. Even when the participant agrees with the public's critique, her failure to put her judgment into action reveals her to be incompetent—in the show, barriers such as the lack of resources are

⁴⁵ Leda, *Guilty of Needing a Makeover*, 2005.

⁴⁶ Leda, *Guilty of Needing a Makeover*, 2005.

ignored. Even though the participant desires a makeover—she has nominated herself for the show after all—she is deemed incapable of knowing how much she needs the makeover or how to makeover (and care for) herself.

Second, in another move to educate, shame, and work on the participant, the host sometimes shows the participant two photos of herself: a real “before” photo of how she looks now and an imaginary (fabricated) “after” photo of how she might look in ten years if she does not change her “lifestyle” now. Both hosts use the language of lifestyle, a modern equivalent to the care of the self. The first photo is so unflattering that even looking at the first picture is painful for the participant. In the second photo, created through “scientific age progression,” the participant sees her own face made old and haggard in a fabricated photo. Diane reacts with horror to the scientifically aged photo, commenting “Ohmygod that’s scary. I look really old. That’s horrible.”⁴⁷ The photo is a shock tactic and an effective one. The image dramatizes the cost of the participant’s lifestyle on her looks and purports to reveal what the participant will really look like in ten years. In using the word “science” the show pretends that the fabricated photo is legitimate and authoritative. After showing her the doctored photo, Josh Green asks Diane, “Do you think this is where you could be in ten years?”⁴⁸ In asking if the photo is a possibility, the host both threatens the participant with a terrible fate if she does not submit to the makeover and offers hope that she could look otherwise. The photo makes the care of the self visible, providing evidence of the link between lifestyle and

⁴⁷ Diane, *Raring to Risk*, 2005.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

appearance. The fabricated photo is used to pressure the participant to change herself and to submit to the makeover to avoid the fate of looking old.

Third, the participant is informed of the “average age” obtained for her through polling one-hundred people. This age is obtained through a “democratic” and objective scientific measure; the show can now say with authority how old the participant really looks. In neoliberal discourse, quantifying things provides a way to measure and control them.⁴⁹ To put something into numbers is to establish an “objective truth.” For instance, Mark informs Cat that the average age guessed for her was thirty-two years old. She responds “That’s a real bummer.”⁵⁰ Mark asks “Cat, how old are you?” “I’m only twenty-five” she says.⁵¹ Mark replies, “Cat, people think you’re seven years older than you actually are.”⁵² Mark quantifies the difference between her real age and her apparent age, as the host does in nearly every episode, in order to make Cat see how she has failed herself. The difference between the participant’s real age and her apparent age is the measure of her failure to take care of herself. Cat responds “Yeah that’s kind of disturbing. I mean it makes me feel bad but I think this will be good because it will motivate me to take care of myself.”⁵³ Cat’s response to finding out the difference between her real age and her assumed age is to say that the difference is her own fault and that the new information makes her want to take responsibility for herself and “take care of herself.” By putting into numbers the costs of her failure to “take care of herself,”

⁴⁹ Dean; Rose.

⁵⁰ Cat, *Bringing out the Spunk*, 2005.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

the show has made her efforts quantifiable and knowable. It also demonstrates how badly she has taken care of herself.

While both hosts use the same techniques to produce the confession, they use different strategies to “enable” the participant to “take action” by beginning the makeover. Josh Green offers the participant a deal (do something to get the makeover), while Mark Montano asks the participant if she is ready to begin her makeover. On the level of the diegesis, with regard to the deal, the participant appears to act as a contractual neoliberal citizen, while with regard to the question of readiness, the participant appears to have been transformed by the confession and empowered to make a choice and exercise her freedom. Though different, both strategies of action mimic neoliberal strategies of empowerment, by getting the participant to act, to choose, to contract and thus to behave as a neoliberal citizen. However, both strategies cover up the non-diegetic contract, the contract that allows the participant to be on the show in the first place. After all, the participant wanted the makeover to begin with; she had to nominate herself for the show and presumably, sign a contract to appear on the show. In contrast, the participant on *WNTW* is nominated by her friends and family and must be persuaded to agree to the makeover. While the deal or the participant’s assertion of readiness appears to construct her as an agent who chooses to be made-over, her decision was already made.

Josh Green closes the confessional segment through “enabling” the participant to act by making “a deal” with him in order to get the makeover. After listing the elements of the makeover for the participant, Josh makes an implicit or explicit deal with the participant. For instance, he tells Summer: “Here’s the deal. We do all that for you. I

want you to do something for you.”⁵⁴ Doing something for herself teaches the participant to “make herself a priority,” to take care of herself. Sometimes he proposes an activity for the participant, like a cooking workshop, that will help the participant make a “lifestyle change.” As the expert, Josh directs the participant to take care of herself through a specific activity. As the participant has proven herself incapable of caring for herself, making a deal is the first step in acting as someone who looks out for her own interests. The deal is framed as a therapeutic intervention that enables the participant to choose and act. However, this deal is not negotiated; the participant has no way to set the terms of the deal but can only agree to the deal or refuse it. The fact that the participant cannot afford the treatments on her own and can (most likely) only get them through the show creates a unequal power relationship between the host and the participant. While the neoliberal citizen is the contractual citizen, this is not an instance of contract, but rather of consent.⁵⁵ Agreeing to the deal appears to be an exercise of contractual agency, but it is really a submission to the “expert” guidance of the show.

Mark Montano *never* uses “the deal,” to close the confessional. Instead, he almost always ends the confessional segment with the question “are you ready?” By framing the participant’s consent as a matter of readiness, the show constructs the confession as already effectively changing the participant. The participant has become conscious of and knowledgeable about her flaws; now she is ready to act. In framing the obstacle to self-care as a problem of desire, Mark Montano covers up the fact that the participant

⁵⁴ Summer, *A Face for Radio*, 2005.

⁵⁵ Carole Pateman defines contract as a free agreement between equals and consent as the agreement of a socially subordinate individual. *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

materially could not accomplish the makeover herself. In the shows with Mark Montano, the confessional itself is constructed as sufficient to change the participant on the inside, taking the place of the therapeutic treatment ordered by Josh Green. The moment of being ready and “choosing” the makeover, like the moment of consenting to the deal, highlights the participant’s agency while obscuring her submission to their plan and her prior agreement to participate on the show. As with the deal, the participant only consents to what the show determines is necessary and does not get to negotiate the makeover; indeed, it might be said that what the participant is ready for is, in fact, submission.

While the confession appears to “empower” the participant, it actually produces her as a deviant citizen-subject in need of rehabilitation. The confession appears to change the participant, to “raise her consciousness,” teach her the importance of self-care and appearance, and enable her to be responsible for herself and chose the makeover. However, it really leads her to see herself as responsible for her appearance, flawed, and in need of guidance. The confession promises salvation to the participant by securing her obedience. The social context of class and gender is obscured by the individualizing discourse of the “care of the self.”⁵⁶ In order to fix the participant, the show sets up pre-determined plans of actions to which she may consent. In becoming ready or making the deal, the participant seems to be a subject who looks after her best interests, a free and self-responsible agent, yet her consent is really a form of obedience to the plan laid out for her.

The Treatments

⁵⁶ Wearing makes a similar point (but only with regard to class) with regard to the British *10YY*. Wearing, 295.

Unlike makeover shows like *WNTW* or *Queer Eye*, the makeover of *10 Years Younger* does not simply involve new clothes and hair, but also includes a series of cosmetic-medical treatments. The participant is sent to the dermatologist, the dentist, and/or the ophthalmologist; most see two or three specialists.⁵⁷ Having been produced as an failed neoliberal citizen-subject, the participant must be “improved” so that she can become a good neoliberal citizen and take responsibility for herself. The authoritarian governmentality at work in this segment of the show creates a very limited field in which the participant can exercise agency. The participant submits to the treatment outlined by the expert in order to be “fixed” and normalized. These treatments “fix” the participant by making her look both younger and more feminine; as I discuss below, the two are intertwined.⁵⁸ The treatments themselves work on the surface of the participant’s body, but are intended to also affect her soul by raising her esteem. The workings of class and its effects on appearance and perceived life chances are submerged in the individualizing discourse of self esteem. As June Deery argues with regard to makeover shows in general, these scenes unfold like infomercials.⁵⁹ The participant’s visit demonstrates the power of the expert to transform the body. Rather than teaching the participant to “take care of herself,” the show “takes care” of her by changing her body and normalizing her.

⁵⁷ Rarely, the participant is prescribed another kind of cosmetic-medical treatment. On the shows hosted by Josh Green, the participant may also receive a treatment for the soul. I discuss those treatments below.

⁵⁸ Wearing argues that the makeover in the British *10YY* is about gender and *not* age; I argue with regard to the American version that the two are articulated together. Wearing, 297.

⁵⁹ June Deery, “Trading Faces: The makeover show as prime-time ‘infomercial,’” *Feminist Media Studies*. 4.2 (2004): 211-214. Indeed, infomercials could be seen as an early form of reality television.

Deery argues that all makeover shows are like infomercials, in that they “employ the classic personal testimony technique to demonstrate the conventional narrative of problem identified (someone is unattractive), solution offered (e.g. surgery), and then empirical proof of the desired transformation”⁶⁰ to sell the products or treatments featured on the show. While this characterization fails to fully describe makeover shows, it does describe the scenes of cosmetic-medical treatment in *IOYY*. In these scenes, the doctor asks what the participant dislikes about herself and the participant confesses her flaws. The expert validates these flaws and may add to them, expertly identifying problems. The treatment then is shown in an edited montage. After the treatment, the participant then sees her new teeth or burnished skin and reacts with joy. She gives her personal testimony as to the efficacy and (most of the time) the ease of the treatment. In addition to the narrative structure, the treatment scenes are also formally similar to infomercials. Both the participant and the expert speak directly to the camera about their experience. The expert, labeled on screen with his/her name and specialty, explains how the procedure will work directly to the camera, out of the sight and sound of the participant. The length of the treatment is minimized through cutting. These scenes teach the spectator that normalization and feminization through expert treatment is easy and effective. However, these scenes also do other kinds of work within *IOYY*.

Although most treatments are apparently easy and painless, some scenes violate the infomercial structure by showing and dwelling on the participant’s pain. These scenes tend to emphasize the participant’s culpability, such as the sun-damage that she obtained by sunbathing without sunscreen or the fact that she smokes. Measures—usually painful

⁶⁰ Deery, 213.

peels like the TCA or Jessner's Peel-- must be taken to undo the damage done to the face of the participant and restore her. Extreme close-ups on the pained face of the participant highlight her suffering, while the participant narrates her experience in a voice over. As Joan says "It was like standing on the sun."⁶¹ Her pain testifies to the extremity of the solution and how badly she needs the treatment. As Mimi says "I am so glad I've done this. I think all of the pain I've gone through is definitely worth it."⁶² In other words, a youthful appearance is "worth" suffering for. These scenes of suffering rework the infomercial form while offering the spectacle of pain: the treatments appear as even more powerful because the participant will go through pain in order to get the promised results. Having failed to care for herself, the participant must endure painful treatments at the hands of the experts to regain a feminine and youthful appearance.

In these scenes, the participant exercises her agency only to consent and submit to being normalized by the medical experts. The participant does not get to choose the expert or the specific treatments she will receive. When she visits the expert, the participant may name the things which she would like "fixed," but it is the expert who decides what will be "fixed" and how. The expert acts on the surface of the participant's body, while the participant must stay still and be acted upon, despite her fear or pain. Here, the participant's body—in relation to the marks of age, rather than, as on *The Swan*, the physical shape of the body—is the object of transformation. Rather than teaching the participant how to care for her teeth or giving her contacts, rather than prescribing dermatological products like Retin-a or home-use teeth bleaching-strips, the expert

⁶¹ Joan, *Peeling Back the Years*, 2005.

⁶² Mimi, *From Backstage to Centerstage*, 2005.

changes the participant's body directly and permanently. The difference between the two practices is that the former requires the discipline of habitual use and produces results over time, while the latter requires expert intervention and produces a spectacular instant transformation. While the participant is taught to how to dress in *WNTW*, here the participant is "fixed," more or less permanently, through expert interventions. The LASIK treatment, prescribed for nearly every participant wearing glasses, epitomizes this approach as it is essentially a contact lens carved onto the eye. In these scenes, the participant submits and is passively remade by the expert, who "fixes" her permanently by inscribing youth and femininity onto her body.

In all the shows I viewed, only one participant turned down a procedure. The dermatologist, Dr. David Amron tries to convince Marcy, a former beauty queen, to use Botox and even tells her "I'd love to see you do it."⁶³ Marcy refuses because she worries about the health risks. Dr. Amron tries to convince her that botox is safe and effective, but Marcy refuses to be reassured by the doctor. This moment is shocking because Marcy asserts her own judgment over the expert's and because she puts her health above socially-constructed norms of beauty.⁶⁴ The show attempts to normalize treatments and expert guidance in these scenes, but this extraordinary scene upends the infomercial structure and message. What this scene reveals is that the participants are real people in a constructed situation who do indeed exercise their agency to consent to being "fixed," despite the potential pain or health risks.

⁶³ Marcy, *Pageantry Days Once Again*, 2005.

⁶⁴ However, Marcy, as a former pageant contestant, is an expert in beauty preservation. I thank Dr. Bernstein for this point.

These treatments “fix” the participant by giving her “perfect” skin, teeth or eyesight. A large variety of treatments are used to make the participant’s skin look “perfect.”⁶⁵ These treatments burn and exfoliate the top layer of skin; fill in scars and wrinkles; paralyze muscles; burn veins; treat acne and rosacea; tighten the skin; and eliminate facial hair. Examined together, the goal of these treatments is clear, tight, bright, soft, smooth, hairless skin— “perfect” skin. Perfect skin is both youthful *and* feminine. For instance, while acne is often taken as a sign of youth, dermatological treatments attempt to eliminate acne because it is not beautiful. However, femininity is linked to other signifiers of youth: hairless skin is both feminine and youthful, soft skin is both feminine and youthful, and full lips are both feminine and youthful (lips thin with age). In being treated for the signs of age, the female participants are brought in line with the feminine ideal of perfect skin. In the dermatological visit, imperfect skin is pathologized and perfect skin is normalized. The repetitive visits to the dermatologist, with his or her seemingly endless arsenal of tools, sends the message that everybody can and should have youthful, feminine skin.

Perfect teeth should also be young-looking, beautiful and feminine. On *10 Years Younger*, the most important signifier of age is the color of the teeth, as evidenced by the fact that the most common dental procedure on the show is “zoom whitening,” in which the teeth are bleached white. Age can be erased through erasing the stains on the teeth and making them white again. Age is also signified through chipped teeth. Participants’

⁶⁵ Laser treatments like IPL (Intense Pulsed Light), the Fraxel Laser, the V-Beam Laser (also known as Pulse Dye Laser), and the Galaxy/Aurora Laser; plasma resurfacing; PhotoDynamic Therapy; Thermage; chemical peels like the glycolic acid peel, alpha-beta peel, Jessner’s Peel, and trichloroacetic acid peel (TCA); microdermabrasion; Sclerotherapy; restalyn, and botox.

teeth may be recontoured and the edges straightened. For those with serious problems, teeth may be shaved down and covered with a porcelain veneer. As with the dermatological treatments, other normative ideals are packaged along with the appearance of youthful teeth.⁶⁶ The ideal smile is not only white and chip-free, but also has aligned teeth, something which is not at all tied to youth. The goal of the show is to produce the beautiful smile, not simply the young looking-smile. For women, the beautiful smile is also a feminine smile. As Dr. Bill Dorfman says “[o]ne of the things about women’s teeth is that they look nicer if they’re not too square....So I’m just going to round the edges a little bit here and give you a little bit more feminine look.”⁶⁷ Dr. Dorfman feminizes the participant on the level of her body by rounding the edges of her teeth in the service of creating the “ideal” smile for her. Despite the emphasis on age, it is clear that the show has a specifically feminizing agenda. The show normalizes perfectly white, perfectly even, perfect aligned teeth and pathologizes uneven, chipped, and/or stained teeth. These scenes demonstrate that anyone could have the “perfect” smile though the miracle of cosmetic dentistry.

In the narrative of the show, getting the treatments and looking “better” not only makes the participants look better in their own eyes, but also makes them feel confident, younger, and better about themselves. Rather than treating *self-image* and teaching the participant to evaluate herself through her character, the show teaches that the “correct” way to evaluate oneself is through one’s appearance. In *IOYY*, “fixing” the participant’s

⁶⁶ In addition to the treatments described above, some participants have also had the gap between their two front teeth eliminated. Nearly all of these participants are women of color. This may be a racialized norm of beauty that is inscribed onto women’s bodies.

⁶⁷ Marcy, *Pageantry Days Once Again*, 2005.

appearance is meant to act on the soul of the participant as well as her body, by making her feel better about herself. The fact that participants feel ashamed of their appearance (and are made to feel ashamed by being turned into a spectacle) makes normalization seem like the correct solution. For instance, April, a young white woman, lost several teeth in a horse-riding accident as a teenager. Unable to afford a dentist, April felt so bad about her teeth that she stopped caring for them. After the accident, she stopped smiling because she did not want to show her bad teeth. She stopped singing, because singing meant that she would have to show her teeth. When she visits the dentist on the show, he finds that in addition to missing several teeth, she also has gum disease and three teeth are infected. However, according to the show, the most important reason to fix her smile is to make her feel confident. As Dr. Sands says after he restores her smile, "...she's going to walk around with her head up and feel good about herself for a change."⁶⁸ Once April has good teeth, she can smile and sing freely. Once she has good teeth, she can take care of them and of herself. Restoring her smile is more than fixing her teeth; it is a way to act on her self-image, to change the way she feels about herself and how she acts. After her makeover, April says "Before 'Ten Years Younger' I felt like: Yuck, who's that doggie in the window and now [I feel like:], look out world here I come!" With her new perfect smile, April now has the self-esteem to take on the world, act on her desires, and smile. In the discourse of the show, once the participant is "fixed" and normalized by the experts, she can feel good about herself and therefore, begin to take responsibility for herself and act as a good neoliberal citizen.

⁶⁸ April, *Singing a New Tune*, 2005.

However, the conflation of appearance with self-esteem covers up the issue of class. Though it is clear that April's teeth do affect her self-esteem, the key issue is that she could not afford to see the dentist when she first lost her teeth. "Bad" teeth is often an indicator of poverty. Those with "good" teeth are likely to be middle-class people whose parents could afford a dentist and/or an orthodontist. Those with bad teeth not only may not have been unable to afford a dentist, but may also find that their job and life prospects are limited by their "ugly" smile. Appearance matters, not only because one may feel good or bad about one's appearance, but because first, teeth and skin matter in relation to general health, and second, people judge one another by their appearance. The problem is not simply that people feel bad about their appearance, but that in reality, their fears of being judged by their appearance are correct.⁶⁹ In the show, participants' fears are both substantiated (people do judge you by your appearance) and denied through the language of self-esteem (you limit yourself because you feel bad about your appearance and therefore, yourself). The key issue—that the participants could not afford these treatments on their own and will not be able to afford them after the show—is obscured by the privileged discourse of self-esteem: one feels bad about oneself because of one's appearance and therefore, cannot act. The notion that low self-esteem results in a failure to act echoes neoliberal prescriptions about welfare recipients.⁷⁰ Fixing esteem through fixing appearance is an individualizing (and problematic) prescription that covers over class issues.

⁶⁹ Susan Bordo makes this argument about fatness; that overweight people are correct in their fears of being judged harshly and in terms of their character. *Unbearable Weight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁷⁰ Cruikshank; Rose.

In contrast, a different notion of the self is revealed in the episodes hosted by Josh Green. In these episodes, participant must also undergo a lifestyle treatment. It is not enough to be “fixed” on the outside; these participants must be directly transformed on the inside. The therapeutic activity is suggested or prompted by Josh Green; he is the expert who can see into the participant’s soul and divine what she needs. The activity he prescribes helps the participant confront a fear or a trauma, returns the participant to her younger self, or teaches the participant to be more healthy. Changing her lifestyle, exercising more, or confronting her fears will help the participant look younger through making her feel better about herself and happier. This intervention assumes a flawed self which can be fixed and treated through the right experience. It also assumes that the outside will reflect the inner self, since the endpoint of these treatments is to produce a younger-seeming individual. The lifestyle treatment is intended to produce changes in the body and the self through intervening on the level of the interior self.

However, the lifestyle treatment does not make for good TV. Although these scenes borrow from the infomercial form, they lack the visual punch of the “after” image. Selling a specific procedure or treatment may be easier than selling the idea of cooking for your kids or making time for your husband, because lifestyle changes are not immediately apparent. These scenes can seem awkward and, when the camera moves into the participant’s real life, intrusive. These kinds of treatments were dropped in the show’s second year on air, perhaps because they did not work very well in the narrative of the show or perhaps because they worked against the notion of the self—from the outside-in—developed in the rest of the show.

The Day of Glam

The last part of the makeover itself is the “day of glam” administered by the glam squad. Unlike the medical professionals, who vary from episode to episode, the members of the glam squad are a stable part of the show. The glam squad consists of three people: Jenn MacDonald, a white, female, punky hairstylist; the makeup artist Damone Roberts, a gay man of color; and either Jaime Austin, a white woman, or Mark Montano, a gay man of color, as the clothes stylist.⁷¹ This section of the makeover is the most traditional section, as the participant’s hair, clothes, and makeup are transformed by the requisite expert. The “day of glam” is a reward for going through all of the difficult treatments. It is intended to not only transform the participant, but to “pamper” her, to make her look and feel glamorous and feminine. The discourse of age recedes before the feminizing agenda of the show as the participants are made beautiful and feminine. Like *WNTW*, *10YY* attempts to bring out an assumed latent femininity by showing the participant that she can look different and “better” according to middle-class norms. In *10YY* however, the emphasis is always on updating the participant to make her look (and feel) modern, youthful, and “glam.”

Part of looking old is styling oneself in older modes of glamour, as the notion of what is beautiful changes over time. As Damone tells Luray, people tend to maintain the appearance they had when they looked the best, but that ages them, because styles change and people age: the look that worked for you at seventeen is not the look that works for

⁷¹ In the episodes hosted by Josh Green, Jaime Austin is the clothing expert, while Mark Montano takes on those duties in addition to hosting in his shows.

you at fifty.⁷² His point echoes Anne Hollander's contention that the image of beauty is created through images and becomes the lens through which one sees oneself.⁷³ As Jaime tells the television spectator "...all I had to do is bring her [Cindy's] self-image up to the current and the present image."⁷⁴ Instead of using the '80s as her model, Cindy must be persuaded to see herself through current images of beauty. As the dominant image of beauty changes over time, looking young means dressing, styling your hair, and making-up in the fashion of the current period. In order to look "young," one must be flexible in one's self-view, updating, consuming, and performing within new styles (which of course costs time and money.) The show operates as a incitement to pay attention to fashion, lest one be left behind and marked as old by an older cut or silhouette. Beauty, then, is a time-bound regulative norm that produces the effect of age when not consciously followed.

Clothing, hair, and makeup are updated according to a young, fashionable, middle-class feminine ideal. With regard to clothing, youthful style is defined by fitted, sexy, and hip clothes which create casual, fun, flirty outfits. Unlike *WNTW*, where the participant is shown clothing appropriate for work and play, on *10 Years Younger*, the clothing tends to be suited for more or less glamorous play, rather than work. The participant tries on many outfits under the eyes of the clothing expert to determine what kind of clothes will make her look both young and feminine. As she tries on clothes, the participant begins to see herself in modern, feminine fashion. Femininity is defined by the hourglass silhouette; youth is defined by contemporary fashion, such as low-rise jeans. With regard to hair, Jenn creates a feminine and modern haircut, color and style for

⁷² Luray, *The Competitive Edge*, 2005.

⁷³ Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Avon, 1980).

⁷⁴ Jaime, *Unstick the '80s*, 2005.

the participant. Part of her work is in erasing the physical signs of age, for instance, by coloring grey hair, or minimizing the effect of age, like cutting to disguise thinning hair. The other part of her work lies in changing the participant's dated haircut by cutting the participant's hair to meet current middle-class fashionable norms of style. For instance, teased bangs are replaced by long layers.

Finally, in the make-up segment, Damone creates new looks for the participant, making them look young and feminine through managing facial hair and applying makeup using modern styles and techniques. For instance, Damone often waxes the participant's eyebrows in order to "lift" the eye and make the participant look younger. Unlike *The Swan*, in which beauty norms are raced and Anglo-Saxon features are imposed on the participant, Damone does not impose white beauty norms on participants, but highlights and enhances "ethnic" traits like full lips, sharp cheek-bones, or a large nose.⁷⁵ Makeup is deemed a necessary part of self-presentation as Damone creates five-minute makeup routines for busy women; for him, there is never an excuse not to wear makeup. In all three aspects of the makeover, the experts expunge the participant's outdated beauty practices and remake the participant in youthful, modern, feminine fashions, making her *look* young, feminine, and attuned to fashion.

The purpose of these scenes is not to shape the participant's agency, but to reshape her appearance to meet middle-class norms of femininity. Like the preceding scenes of cosmetic-medical treatment, the expert begins the interaction by asking the participant how she feels about her clothes or how she usually wears makeup, but while

⁷⁵ The issue of raced beauty norms deserves a fuller discussion, but this is outside the scope of this chapter.

the expert engages the participant, s/he determines the “problems” and how to fix them. As in the preceding scenes, the participant consents and submits to the expert, but with the difference that her hair, clothes, and makeup are not “fixed” on her body. With regard to the clothing portion of the makeover, the participant must actively try clothes on and look at herself, but with regard to the hair and makeup segments, the participant is still while the expert works on her appearance. As the expert lectures the television spectator in insets, voice-overs, or direct address, the participant appears to act as the example, a living mannequin to demonstrate the correct way to style oneself for the television spectator. While the experts tell the participant how to dress or apply makeup, the participant is given no chance to put these lessons into action. Unlike *WNTW*, where the participant must learn from the experts to put her own look together at her big reveal, the participant is put together by the glam squad for her big reveal. Rather than learning how to style herself, she is made to see herself (and be seen) as young and beautiful at her reveal.

Often, these makeovers have a therapeutic dimension, in which the participant’s real self is to be restored through the makeover. The participant has failed to “match her inside to her outside” because she is too busy, stuck in a rut, or traumatized. The show assumes that the participant is really feminine and that even if the participant is unaware of her inner femininity, the lack of its expression damages her. As Jenn says, in direct address to the camera, “Summer is really fun, really outgoing and her personality and her outward appearance did not match... Summer’s outward appearance actually affects how

she feels about her self.”⁷⁶ Because Summer did not “take care of herself,” that is, take the time to be feminine, she feels bad about herself. The solution is bring out her femininity by changing the way she looks. As Jaime says to Darcy, “We want to see you in beautiful, feminine, colorful clothes that Darcy probably never allows herself to wear.” Darcy, a single mom and nurse, wore scrubs everyday. Jaime later comments to the camera that “I think there’s a quality about Darcy that’s very feminine,” a quality that Jaime brings out in Darcy through dressing her in skirts and dresses. In these scenes, the expert claims to see into the participant’s soul and bring out what she herself may have forgotten or left behind. By bringing the outside in line with the imagined feminine inside, the expert claims to restore both body and soul.

Class underlies the need for “restoration.” Many participants cannot afford the time or energy to see a professional hair-stylist, buy new clothes, or put on makeup everyday. Jenn comments that Marcy’s hair looks brassy and looks like it’s been colored at home. When Jenn asks Marcy about her color, Marcy confesses that she likes color and that she “can’t afford to go to a high-end salon.”⁷⁷ The problem is not that Marcy does not value herself or has let herself go (as is implied by the show), but that she does not have the money to have her hair professionally dyed every month. Class is rarely so explicitly discussed on the show. Rather the show assumes that if the participants knew they could look good, they would buy new clothes, new makeup, invest in a hairstylist, and style themselves everyday. Whatever they may learn about styling themselves from the show, the participants are only given one outfit; without money to purchase the

⁷⁶ Summer, *A Face for Radio*, 2005.

⁷⁷ Marcy, *Pageantry Days Once Again*, 2005.

makeup and clothes, the “restoration” is only a one day affair. Yet the show assumes that this restoration is effective, that it will indeed transform the participant and make her a self-responsible and self-actualizing subject.

Unlike *WNTW*, where the participant and the spectator see the transformation after each scene, the reveal is withheld from both the participant and the viewer. Only the process of trying on clothes, cutting hair, and applying makeup is shown. These scenes create anticipation for the reveal, for both the participant and the viewer. Emphasizing the expert’s voice in the procedures and silencing the participant’s reactions raises the question of how successful the style makeover has been, whether the expert solutions were effective, and how the participant looks and feels now.

The Reveal

In the revelation of the makeover, the participant is transformed. The participant must confront her old self in the space of the mirror and face her made-over self. In the course of this visually scripted process, the participant is transformed through disidentifying from her old self, her shamed self, and identifying with the image in the mirror, her normalized self. After being taught to see herself as an object-to-be-looked-at and submitting to treatments to normalize her appearance, the participant is ready to invest in her new appearance; she emerges a new and improved person through the mirror, which contradictorily gives her back her self, a new self. On one hand, the mirror operates in Lacanian sense, in that in its reflection the participant becomes a “whole” person, as it does in both *WNTW* and *The Swan*. On the other hand, now that she looks “normal,” that is to say, middle-class, feminine and younger, she can esteem herself and

take care of herself. This transformation is meant to “fix” the participant, to turn her into a neoliberal feminine citizen capable of caring for herself.

After sufficient suspense has been built up by the use of anticipation shots earlier in the show and narrative direct address, the scene of the reveal begins. The participant waits, hidden behind a curtain, while the host, the glam squad and perhaps a friend or a family member await the participant in the studio. Mark or Josh then calls the participant out. When the participant comes out the camera pans up and down her body, revealing all of the changes and sexualizing the participant, drawing on the filmic language of fetishistic fragmentation.⁷⁸ As the participant walks out, the glam squad reacts with squeals of excitement and praise, treating the transformed participant like a celebrity. Their welcome works to further “glamorize” the participant and cues the television spectator to react in the same way. Some of the time the participant’s walk is accompanied by an inset of “the before” as well as “the after” on the screen. The contrast between the “before” and the “after” heightens the impact of the transformation and dramatizes the magnitude of the change for the television spectator as the participant almost always looks strikingly better. As satisfying as the sight of the made-over participant is for the glam squad and for the spectator, the “money shot” of the scene is the moment where the participant sees her new self.⁷⁹

Before the participant can see her new self, she must repudiate her old self. When the participant joins the glam squad, she finds herself greeted by a life-size picture of

⁷⁸ Mulvey 2000.

⁷⁹ Laura Grindstaff uses the term “money shot” to refer to the emotional peak of the talk show. As quoted in Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92.

herself taken “at the beginning of the process” (in the words of the show.) The participant stands directly in front of this image, which provides a reflection of the participant as she used to be. Facing her “reflection” the participant confronts her “old” self, the shamed self. Literally, this image no longer represents her. Taking the position that the public took on her, she demonstrates her acceptance of the community norm by judging and disidentifying from her “old” self. As Allison says upon viewing her “before” picture, “Definitely not good. She can definitely go away.”⁸⁰ Allison judges her old image and calls it the image “she,” not I. In rejecting the her image “before” the makeover, the participant renounces her old self and proclaims her difference from that self.

After the participant denounces her old image, the life-size picture is removed to reveal the participant’s “true” image in the mirror. The old image is destroyed and that self expunged to make way for the new self. Showing the participant her “before” image and then showing her the after heightens the emotional impact of the makeover for her—and for the television spectator.⁸¹ As Suri says, “When I saw myself in the mirror it was great. Especially seeing the before photo, you know it’s really a shocker. You see that and you see yourself in the mirror, it’s great.”⁸² However, upon viewing her “new self,” her mirror image, the participant does not immediately recognize herself. Transformed by others, her image has been withheld from her. As Joslyn says “When I first looked in the mirror I saw a completely different person. I saw a person that didn’t even look like me,

⁸⁰ Allison, *Sizing Down and Looking Up*, 2005.

⁸¹ Where the television spectator is led to objectify the old participant through the spectacle, now she is led to identify with her in the glory of the new image.

⁸² Suri, *Different Strokes*, 2005.

but I mean, better than me. It's a good feeling!"⁸³ The new image is not immediately recognized as the self, but this is less a matter of rejection than of transition. The self is recognized as "better," an improvement that the participant will accept as her self. As the participant identifies with her image, she transforms on the inside. As Janet says, "Look at this. The hair is great. I look wonderful!"⁸⁴ By the end of her Janet's speech, she personifies her mirror image as "I" rather than "that." Lack of recognition becomes identification with the "improved" self in the mirror.

After being shamed and fragmented, the mirror image restores the illusion of wholeness and self-mastery. For Julie,

Before *Ten Years Younger*, I felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb because my hair was bad, my makeup was bad, my clothes were bad. I feel like a new person because I see a new person in the mirror. I don't see that other person that [sic] made me so sad before.⁸⁵

The "other person" here is Julie's old self, the shamed self that made her feel sad and hopeless. Julie is reborn in the mirror; her sad past—a car accident, multiple surgeries, and unemployment—is erased in erasing the marks of stress and age on her face.⁸⁶ Her earlier incompetence in caring for herself is erased in the *image* of self-mastery in the mirror. Her new image enables her to become a "new" person.

Now that she looks young and feminine, the participant can feel good about herself again. As Stacy says "I feel amazing. I love my hair, my smile, my makeup... I

⁸³ Joslyn, *Runway Ready*, 2005.

⁸⁴ Janet, *Kicking Out the Old Look*, 2005.

⁸⁵ Julie, *Hairnet to Hottie*, 2005.

⁸⁶ Cressida Heyes similarly argues, with regard to *Extreme Makeover (EM)*, that the participant's working class status is erased by erasing the marks of class. *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98.

can't believe in ten days that I can look this different and feel this good."⁸⁷ In the discourse of the show, appearance, or the outer self is the means by which women's inner self is measured and esteemed. The transformative power of the makeover is affirmed in this discourse; if esteem rests on appearance the only way to feel better about the self is to "improve" one's appearance. As Maggie argues, "The lesson I learned from coming to the show is that the little things do count, paying attention to your hair your makeup the colors that you wear, it changes everything about you."⁸⁸ Having been transformed into a normatively feminine woman, Maggie feels better about her self; she learns that she should care for herself to feel good about herself. Femininity is not simply a masquerade,⁸⁹ because the practice of femininity shapes the internal self as well as appearance through appearance-based esteem. In becoming feminine and therefore worthy of esteem, the participants are "empowered" to "care for" and prioritize themselves. Having been "cared for" and "improved," the participant can become the self-actualizing subject of neoliberalism. The lesson of the show is that one should "take care of oneself" by tending to one's appearance because it demonstrates and enables self-esteem and thus, self-responsible agency.

The relation between outer self (appearance) and inner self (soul) is not consistent across episodes of *10YY*. On some episodes, the makeover seemingly liberates participants from their old selves and allows them to become a new person. As Jackie

⁸⁷ Stacy, *Picture Perfect*, 2005.

⁸⁸ Maggie, *Saying I Do to a New Look*, 2005.

⁸⁹ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade" in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986).

says, “I feel great. I feel absolutely fabulous, like a whole new person.”⁹⁰ Age, depression and experience are washed away in a liberatory transformation, as the marks of the participant’s former life are erased from her image. In these episodes, the mind and body seem to be connected. In some episodes however, the makeover brings the outside in line with the inside, revealing the “true” inner self. As Jeannie says “I love it, I love it. I I feel.. I feel like I—the person I am on the inside is coming out. I just look at that person in the mirror and I think—let’s go play!”⁹¹ Although the logic at work here relies on mind-body dualism, Jeannie’s comment points to the fact that bringing the outside and the inside in line supports that inner feeling of youth. The rhetoric of matching the inside to the outside authenticates the makeover as exposing the participant’s real self. Each participant legitimates the makeover as creating her new self and transforming her, revealing her real self, or restoring or lost self. These authentication narratives construct different relationships between the mind and the body.

The last interchange of this scene assumes the transformation of the participant and moves her inevitably towards the glass box once again. Mark always asks some variation of “You ready to see what your public and your family have to say?” to which Cat representatively responds “Yeah, I’m totally ready.”⁹² Echoing the language of readiness that he used with regard starting the makeover, Mark uses the language of agency to ask the participant to become a spectacle again. In the strangest formulation, Mark asks “You ready to go out and conquer the world?” Luray responds “oh yeah!”⁹³

⁹⁰ Jackie, *From Jacked Up to Jackie O*, 2005.

⁹¹ Jeannie, *Overworked and Under the Gun*, 2005.

⁹² Cat, *Bringing out the Spunk*, 2005.

⁹³ Luray, *The Competitive Edge*, 2005.

Being ready to display oneself is equated with power; through her self-confidence and beauty Luray can “conquer the world” from the space of spectacle. In their emphatic replies, the participants testify to their new confidence and self-esteem. Having measured and surveyed herself according to the community standards promulgated by the show, she is ready to be surveyed and have her confidence rewarded with a good evaluation in the public eye. Her reply naturalizes the spectacle of feminine display.

Josh Green tends to either ask questions such as “Can you handle the box?” or tell the participant that “You look dynamite, but the truth is in the box.”⁹⁴ The question is a challenge to the participant, rather than an invitation. The only answer the participant can make is to say yes, now she is confident enough to handle the box; now she is ready to be a spectacle. However, when he makes a statement that the participant has to go into the box again, he gives her no space to establish that she has changed; the question of her transformation is left with the public. Here, the fact that the participant has no choice but to go into the box is not concealed. For Josh Green, the box is not a confirmation, but a test.

Spectacle as Reward

The glass box shifts from a site of punishment to a site of reward. In the participant’s second time in the box, she smiles confidently and even poses for the public gaze. This time, the spectacle resembles a beauty show rather than a freak show. The gaze is admiring and the spectators smile at or even applaud the participant. This time, the host asks “what makes her look so good?” or “what do you like about the way she

⁹⁴ Jackie, *From Jacked Up to Jackie O*, 2005.

looks?” The questions are framed positively and provoke positive responses. The spectators reply that they like the participant’s bright smile, her stylish clothes, her beautiful skin, or her great stylish haircut. The participant’s self is evaluated in the same terms as they were the first time, but this time they are evaluated positively; the participant has become a pleasurable spectacle of beauty. The participant has acquired the correct signifiers of femininity through the show’s purchase of consumer products and expert treatment. The positive evaluation is quantified in terms of age, as the members of the public again guess her age. This time, however, the number is low—always younger than the participant’s real age (especially for older participants)—sometimes eight, ten, fourteen or even seventeen years younger than her previous perceived age. The participant is rewarded with compliments and the “truth” of a new young age. She becomes young in their eyes. As the participant is admired by the public, spectacle becomes a reward.

The second spectacle, like the first, is didactic. It too teaches that to enter public space is to be judged and it teaches that the signifiers of age can be altered and read differently. It also teaches that, since women will be judged by their appearance by others, it is better to be judged favorably. It teaches that it is easier to navigate public space if one is already looking at oneself, because one will be-looked-at. The participant’s exhibition in the box as a *reward* naturalizes woman’s position as an object to-be-looked-at.⁹⁵ This spectacle teaches women to secure their sense of self through their relation to their appearance; they should enjoy looking at themselves and being looked at, and they should define themselves as objects of the gaze. Femininity is portrayed as a

⁹⁵ Mulvey 2000.

desirable achievement that leads to public admiration, high self-esteem, and happiness. The participant is freed from the glass box at the end of the spectacle, presented with her new age, and released. Now that she has been “improved,” she is allowed into the public sphere once again. Now that her esteem has been tied to her appearance and her appearance made feminine and youthful, she can be counted on to “care for herself.”

Conclusion

IOYY blames working-class women for their failure to “correctly” care for themselves. The show acknowledges the struggles and stress in their lives only to condemn the participant for struggling, failing to alleviate her stress, and allowing it to show. Through the spectacle and the confession, the participant is led to take up the public’s, that is, the show’s, judgment upon her self: shamed, she is led to see that she has failed to care for her self. Her failure to act as a good neoliberal citizen justifies the show’s authoritarian intervention. Unlike *WNTW* and *QE*, in which the object of the makeover is the reshaping of the participant’s agency, in *IOYY*, the object of the makeover is the transformation of the participant’s body. Experts “fix” the surface of her body through cosmetic/medical interventions according to a middle-class, feminine, youthful ideal. The participant becomes a new feminine self through identifying with her “restored” image. The participant’s reward is to be once again displayed in the glass box and to obtain a new age: proof that the makeover has succeeded in transforming her and making her (look) younger and more feminine. Instead of being shamed, she is praised for her appearance. In the logic of the show, now that she has been “fixed” on the inside and the outside, she is empowered to take up the duties of the self-fulfilling neoliberal

citizen and care for herself. Now that she looks feminine, she can respect herself and be respectable. However, in defining the makeover as fixing a “flaw” in the participant’s self, the show effaces the temporary nature of the fix, that is, her unchanged social context.

Chapter Three: Beautiful Submission: Authoritarian Normalization in *The Swan*

“I feel completely comfortable in my own skin. Before I entered *The Swan* program I could not look in a mirror and tell myself that I was beautiful. I can do that now. I could not wear a bathing suit in public and I’ve done that on national TV.”¹

On *The Swan*, femininity is achieved through submission to “the program.” An inflexible feminine ideal is married to an authoritarian regime; the participants need not learn or master a discipline, but only obey. Through their confessions and unflattering close-ups, participants on the Swan are constructed as “ugly” inside and out, flawed and inadequate. In order for them to lead good, worthwhile, and happy lives, they must “hand...over their lives to a world-class team of experts”² who will “fix” both their insides and their outsides and transform them into “confident beauty queens.”³ Participants are objectified and evaluated by the experts, who create a plan to normalize each and every part of the participant. In surrendering to “the swan program,” the participants are “freed” from governing their selves and their appearance. Surrender, however is active rather than passive; they must work hard (at the gym, in therapy) and endure pain (post-surgery, therapy) under the directives of the experts. Under this authoritarian regime, the participant’s agency has meaning only in terms of obedience or disobedience. The pageant competition works to bring the desire of the participants in line with the feminine ideal of the show, thereby leading her to submit to the guidance of the experts. In the finale, the participants are objectified, measured, and ranked according to how closely they now approximate the inflexible feminine ideal: though transformed, they are still objectified, subject and obedient to the evaluative gaze of the experts. In

¹ Kelly, “The Pageant: Part Two,” Season One, Episode Ten.

² Voice-Over. “The Pageant: Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

³ Amanda, “The Pageant: Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

submitting to the experts, the participant is made “feminine” as both her mutable body and the soul are "beautified" according to a "glamorous," white, and dated ideal.

The Show

While *The Swan* imitates *Extreme Makeover (EM)*, the first cosmetic surgery makeover show in the U.S.,⁴ *The Swan* alters the makeover formula by adding an element of competition. Each one-hour episode follows the transformation of two participants, cutting between their stories. In the first segment of the show, what I call *Confession and Objectification*, each participant is introduced to the viewing audience and a panel of experts through her video-confession. The experts objectify, analyze and diagnose the participant through her video and present a plan to “fix” the participant. In the second segment, *Transformation*, the participant joins *TS* program, moving into a *Swan* apartment in L.A., where she will live for three months. In the third segment, *Surgery*, the participants meet with the plastic surgeon and undergo surgery. In the fourth section, *Resistance and Submission*, the participant struggles with the transformation—dieting, working out, physical healing, and therapy— and is pushed to submit. The participant must suffer and do penance for her failure at femininity in order to become a feminine woman. In the fifth section, *The Reveal*, the two participants finally see their new, glamorized selves for the first time in three months. The experts compare the participants and choose the one who has “transformed the most” to go to the beauty pageant. In the beauty pageant finale, the selected participants compete to “be crowned the Swan.”

⁴ Like *EM*, *The Swan* requires multiple cosmetic surgeries for each participant, oral surgery and cosmetic dentistry, and fitness training. Unlike *EM*, *The Swan* has a therapy component and requires the participant to relocate to L.A. for three months.

Unlike the typical makeover narrative, in which each participant changes from a belittled “before” to a triumphant “after,” *The Swan* chooses one participant as the incarnation of (its version of) the feminine ideal. Rather than highlighting the democratic aspect of the makeover, the show rewards the participant who surrenders the most to the “program” during each season.

In its first season, Summer, 2004, *The Swan* was a surprise hit, garnering over fourteen-million viewers an episode.⁵ The second season aired that Fall and failed to garner the same ratings.⁶ After two seasons, the show was cancelled. Despite its short life, I include *The Swan* as a significant makeover program because of its popularity and media presence, especially in the first season. Unlike other makeover shows examined in this dissertation, *The Swan* was shown on a network television station (Fox), and therefore was broadcast to a larger and potentially more diverse audience. Unlike *10 Years Younger (10YY)* and *What Not to Wear (WNTW)*, *The Swan* received a great deal of media attention, including a cover story in *People*, interviews with participants on *Larry King Live*, and a great deal of censorious print coverage. In comparison, *WNTW* and *Queer Eye (QE)* both are/were quite long-lived: *WNTW* is still going strong in its fifth year, while *QE* had four years, airing its final episodes in Fall of 2007. While *10YY* had a comparatively short first-run over two years (though over a hundred episodes were aired), it continues to air in reruns on TLC daytime three years after being cancelled.⁷ In contrast, *The Swan* aired only twenty-one episodes and did not have the same post-

⁵ Rick Kissel, “‘Swan’ On The Nose,” *Daily Variety* (April 12, 2004), 6.

⁶ Because the first season was so popular and the second season unpopular, I focus my analysis on the first season of the show.

⁷ After a three year hiatus, *10YY* has been renewed and new episodes are now showing on TLC. March, 2008.

cancellation broadcast presence, though it has been released to DVD. I speculate that *The Swan* was a hit in the summer of 2004 because it was shocking and different, but that it failed commercially (by the rating standards of network television) because both the regime of governmentality and the feminine ideal of the show were out of touch with the national imaginary.

The Participants

Unlike *IOYY* and *WNTW*, the participants of *The Swan* are *all* women. Like *IOYY*, the participants are working-class or lower-middle-class; they suffer from the same dental and health problems. However, compared to *IOYY*, a greater percentage of participants on *The Swan* are married mothers (a few single women and a few single mothers are also featured as participants.) Many participants are full-time mothers. Others work in stereotypical fields for women, such as nursing. A few participants are unemployed or underemployed. The age span of the participants ranges from the early twenties to forty years old, with most participants in their late twenties and early thirties. Like *QE*, *WNTW* and *IOYY*, the vast majority of *The Swan*'s participants are white. In addition to their similarities across race and class, the participants are all uniformly (and deeply) unhappy about their appearance and therefore, themselves.

In their unhappiness, the participants apply to be on a makeover show that offers a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to change their lives. For women who feel miserable, undervalued, and stuck in their lives, the show offers the illusion that they will be valued, cared for, and transformed. Like *IOYY*, the show ignores the social context of class and gender in promising the participants that they will lead wonderful lives if they become

feminine. In return for going on the show and giving up control over her life and her image, the participant is given three months of housing in L.A., three months of food, expert services, free plastic surgery, therapy, dental care and oral surgery. Childcare, however, is not provided or subsidized by the show. Isolated from her family, the participant is freed from the constraints of her ordinary life to work on herself. *The Swan* promises that with its help, the participant can change herself inside and out, becoming self-confident, prettier, and happier. She is also given the opportunity to compete for the “chance to be crowned The Swan,” and win cash and prizes.

Authoritarian Governmentality

The Swan relies on an authoritarian mode of governmentality and is the purest example of that type among all the makeover shows analyzed in this dissertation. Under authoritarian rule, nothing prevents the sovereign from “interven[ing] in the intimate lives”⁸ of his subjects. While liberal forms of rule govern through the freedom of their citizens, authoritarian rule governs through obedience and attempts to neutralize opposition to authority. Authoritarianism makes use of “disciplinary, bio-political and even sovereign interventions”⁹ such as “decree, interdiction, punishment and reward” to rule.¹⁰ Even under this coercive mode of governmentality, agency is still plays a part. Disobedience may be followed by punishment or torture, but the individual has the agency to obey or disobey. Under authoritarian governmentality, one’s possible actions are constrained by the threat of intervention and the promise of punishment or reward.

⁸ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 145.

⁹ Dean, 134.

¹⁰ Dean, 145.

The Swan defines the feminine ideal and imposes it on the minds and bodies of the participants through a process of normalization under an authoritarian regime. While both *WNTW* and *IOYY* aim to produce neoliberal subjects (through different means),¹¹ *The Swan* aims to produce authoritarian subjects. While in *IOYY*, a neoliberal frame justifies an authoritarian intervention, *The Swan* begins and ends with authoritarian rule. Within the show, the experts have the power to normalize the participant according to particular feminine ideal through ordering the participant's life at every level—what she is to eat, how she is to work-out, what surgical procedures she will get, and how she will recover.¹² For three months, the participant lives under the surveillance of the show, in a life constructed by the show. The participant's agency is limited to obedience or disobedience: obedience is rewarded with the opportunity to participate the pageant. The ultimate reward for obedience and feminine transformation is to win the pageant and be crowned *The Swan*. Ideal femininity is linked to active surrender to authoritarian rule. The “best” woman, then, is the one who is the most obedient and submissive, sacrificing her comfort and vision to be objectified, transformed and saved by the show's authorities.

Confession and Objectification

In the first section of the show, participants confess to their faults, are objectified, diagnosed, and provided with a “plan” that will render them “feminine” and “beautiful.” The scene opens with host Amanda Byram welcoming the panel of experts to the show. Amanda introduces the participant to the expert and the viewing audience through

¹¹ Please see Chapters One and Two.

¹² Of course, the diegetic intervention is grounded in the participant's extra-diegetic agreement; she must sign a contract in the first place.

playing her confessional video. After viewing the first video, the experts discuss the participant, diagnose her problems and outline solutions. After their input, Amanda presents the “plan” for the participant, which includes all of the experts’ recommendations and more. The plan objectifies the participants, fragments their bodies, and outlines the course of normalization. This process—confessional video, expert discussion, and presentation of the plan—is then repeated for the second participant. At no point does the participant interact with the experts; her words and image are prerecorded and provide the text for the experts’ critical eyes. In this section, the participant is constructed as flawed inside and out and in need of expert care and direction. In their authority, the experts provide the solutions for all her problems, promising a miraculous transformation if only she obeys their directives.

In her confessional video, the participant, seemingly unprompted, confesses her failings inside and out. The participant explains her present self through her autobiography.¹³ Unlike *IOYY*, in which the host prompts the participant to blame herself for her (poor) appearance and sadness, in *The Swan*, the participant seemingly diagnoses and blames herself without prompting; she already knows what is wrong with her and it makes her loathe herself. Yet this is the truth that must be spoken; the confession seemingly bursts out of her, often with tears. The camera works primarily in close-ups, as though we were getting closer to her, closer to the truth of the participant. Her appearance is immediately visible and flawed; her inner problems manifest through her tears. She is objectified and turned into a spectacle by the camera and the gaze of the watching experts

¹³ For a discussion of how confession relies on psychological techniques to construct a narrative of selfhood, see: Nikolas Rose, “Assembling the Modern Self” in *Rewriting the Self*, ed. Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1997), 224-248.

(whose reactions are highlighted in cuts away from the confession video.) The confession concludes with the participant's explanation for why the makeover would help her and solve all of her problems.¹⁴ The confession establishes the participant's culpability and abjectness, producing the truth of herself as deeply flawed and incapable of helping herself.¹⁵

Every video confession includes a moment where the participant faces her self in the mirror with disgust. The mirror scene reveals the participant's awareness of her "flawed body" and her sadness in her appearance. The mirror is a site of fascinated torture for the woman in the confession. As Gina says, "I'm not embarrassed [because] of my disability [Gina is mostly Deaf]. But when I look in mirror, I feel handicapped because I don't feel confident with [sic] myself. I can't stand my nose. I have no chin."¹⁶ Rather than finding wholeness in the mirror, the participant sees herself in pieces. The participant faces her reflection only to list what is wrong with herself, pointing out each and every one of her flaws. The camera corroborates her analysis of her body through close-ups of her abject flesh. The confession demonstrates the participant's ability to apply cultural criteria to her body and situates her as both culturally competent (knowing) and deficient (failing to embody femininity or be feminine.) The participant's pain stems from her dual position as both the critiquing subject, the surveyor, and the

¹⁴ As Mimi White argues, confession is tied to consumption on television. Here, the participant's confession enables the makeover and therefore, consumption. Mimi White, *Teledvising* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹⁵ As noted in the introduction and Chapter One, as Michel Foucault argues, the confession produces the truth of the inner self. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹⁶ "Gina and Lorrie" Season Two, Episode Three.

object-in-the-mirror, the surveyed.¹⁷ The participant's body is constituted and analyzed as physically flawed through her analysis of her mirror image and close-ups of her body.

In these accounts, the women express great pain in their failure to be feminine. Two participants feel great shame over their facial hair and the fact that they must shave daily. Some participants blame their post-birth smaller breasts, large noses, or overweight bodies for their failure to correctly embody femininity.¹⁸ These women feel like failures as women and long to be beautiful so that they can feel like women. In other words, as Rhoda, one of Wendy Chapkiss's interview subjects says, "[a]s long as beauty remains such an important aspect of womanhood, some women will just fail to be women."¹⁹ As opposed to Kathy Davis's account of gender normalization through female consumers of plastic surgery or Cressida Heyes's account of gender normalization in *EM*,²⁰ the participants of *The Swan* do not long to be ordinary, to blend in or be invisible. Rather, they all speak of the desire to be beautiful, to be feminine, to be able to walk into a room

¹⁷ Feminine subjectivity is defined by both Sandra Bartky and John Berger as being both the "surveyor and surveyed." Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38-41; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 40.

¹⁸ As Elizabeth Gailey argues, the postpartum body—deflated breasts and sagging stomachs—is pathologized in cosmetic surgery shows. Elizabeth Gailey, "Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology" in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007), 107-118.

¹⁹ Wendy Chapkiss, *Beauty Secrets* (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 67.

²⁰ Kathy Davis, *Reshaping The Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (Routledge, New York, 1995); Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Against Heyes, Emily Boyd argues that beauty is tied to femininity and womanhood in *Extreme Makeover*. Emily Boyd, "Altering Bodies, Transforming Selves: Emotion and Gender on *Extreme Makeover*" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2007).

and become the object of the fascinated gaze. For the participants, womanhood is defined through being a beautiful object.

Against Cressida Heyes's claim that cosmetic surgery makeover shows construct a perfect inside which must be expressed by a perfect outside, on *The Swan*, both the inside and the outside are flawed and the two are often linked together.²¹ For instance, when Jennifer was left alone in her house by her mother as a child, the house burned down, leaving Jennifer badly burned and scarred. Jennifer's inner self is not perfect: she is deeply emotionally scarred by both her mother's abandonment and being teased as a child. Jennifer's physical scars invoke her emotional pain; her history—abandoned, burned, teased—is written on her skin. Mind and body, inside and outside are in a metonymic relation, where one invokes the other. As Virginia Blum argues, in a plastic-surgery society, “identity happens on the surface” of the body.²² In *The Swan*, the participants' damaged self-worth is projected onto the flawed body. Emotional weight is given to physical appearance and emotional problems manifest as physical failings; both mind and body are imperfect.

After viewing the participant's confession, the experts diagnose the participant and prescribe solutions to “fix” her inside and out. Amanda prompts the discussion, asking in one instance, “Tanya wants to be invisible; what can we do to make her want to be visible again?”²³ The experts are labeled with their name and specialty as they speak, enhancing their authority. Each expert—two plastic surgeons, a therapist, a fitness coach,

²¹ Heyes, 2007. Emily Boyd offers an opposing analysis of *EM*, arguing that the transformations are a matter of both body and self.

²² Virginia Blum, *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 165.

²³ “Tanya and Merline” Season One, Episode Eight.

a dentist and a life coach—speaks to his or her domain, drawing on his or her expert knowledge to objectively solve the problems of the participant. The spread of experts speaks to a particular way of understanding the problems of the participant. The plastic surgeons promise to “fix” the face and body to make them meet the inflexible feminine ideal; the therapist offers to heal the psyche; the dentist promises to fix the teeth to create the Hollywood smile; the fitness coach will make the participants to lose weight and perfect the body; and the life coach will push the participant to actively surrender. In this division of problems, it is clear that solving problems only on the surface of the body (through surgery, working out and dentistry) would be insufficient while solving problems in the psyche (therapy, life coaching) would also be insufficient. To have a “deformed” body would lead inevitably to a deformed mind in the logic of the show; to have a troubled mind would trouble the surface of beauty. To truly make her beautiful, the experts must transform and “fix” both the inside and the outside of the participant.

The plastic surgeons speak of “feminizing” the face of the participant through changing facial and bodily features. Femininity is spoken of as something inherent in (or missing from) each body part, rather than a mode of self-presentation or a way-of-being in the world. As Dr. Dubrow says of Kristy: “She needs to be feminized. Open up her eyes, take the fat out of her cheeks and her chin. Get rid of that bump on her nose. Breast augmentation, liposuction. Really help to bring out her feminine side and make her feel sexy.”²⁴ As the plastic surgeons speak about what they “need” to do to the participant, the camera cuts to an image of the body part under discussion against a blue grid. The camera shows the audience what the expert sees, isolating the feature and highlighting the

²⁴ Dr. Terry Dubrow. “Kristy and Christina,” Season One, Episode Two.

“problem;” the participant is fragmented and turned into an object lesson for the viewer. To become feminine, the body and face of the participant must be reshaped to essentially mimic Barbie: white, large eyed, small-nosed, exaggerated breasts and a slender waist and hips.²⁵ According to the plastic surgeons, the newly feminized body will magically transform the participant’s inner self as well, making her (feel) sexy and feminine.

In addition to the surgeons, the therapist, Dr. Ianni, gives her evaluation of the participant’s mental health. For instance, like many participants, Marnie is depressed and stuck in her life. Dr. Ianni explains that Marnie needs to grieve her losses and move through her depression. Later, Amanda explains that Marnie’s depression may delay her recovery. Dr. Ianni’s diagnosis becomes the defining narrative, repeated ad nauseum, for each participant. The psychic state of the participant is important in two ways. First, each participant’s particular problems imperil her submission and transformation. Second, the program aims to make the participant “beautiful” on the inside by making her self-confident and happy. Dr. Ianni’s diagnosis defines the participant’s inner struggle.

After a short discussion around the table, the experts’ “plan” for the participant is presented.²⁶ The “plan” is highly formulaic and proceeds according to the following categories: “Face,” “Body,” “Dentist,” “Fitness,” and the unlabeled category which includes therapy and life coaching. For each category, the matching image of the participant is placed on a blue grid with concentric circles and a cross targeting a

²⁵ As June Deery argues, the feminine ideal of *The Swan* is Barbie. “Interior Design: Commodifying Self and Place in Extreme Makeover, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, and The Swan” in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2006), 171.

²⁶ Clearly the plan is developed in advance of the meeting as it is far more detailed than the experts’ discussion. The plan is for the benefit of the viewer.

particular body part (repeating and extending the earlier image of the participant against the grid). As Virginia Blum points out, in the late nineteenth century, plastic surgery used grids over photography to establish facial measurements in relation to the objective ideal.²⁷ Here, the use of the grid evokes the promise of perfection through a measurable ideal. Every body part is measured with regard to the feminine norm, such that the exact deviation from the norm can be produced and “remedied.” This method of measuring femininity mimics Alphonse Bertillon’s fragmentation of the “criminal” body into inherently “criminal” parts.²⁸ The participant’s body is implicitly compared to the faceless, gridded, image of the feminine ideal which rotates in the bottom left corner of the screen. The plan promises to turn the participant into the feminine ideal.

The face and the body of the participant are similarly objectified and analyzed in the plan. First, the participant’s unmade-up, unhappy face appears in a frozen close-up, against the blue grid. As Amanda reads the surgical procedures out, they are didactically listed on the screen, while the body part is highlighted. The procedures are nearly always the same.²⁹ Race is unspoken, but the feminine ideal is clearly the dominant, white, beauty norm: small nose, high cheekbones, big eyes, and full lips. Second, the participant is revealed in ugly grey underwear and an unflattering sports bra for the “body” portion of the plan. The participant does not react to the humiliation of being shown in nearly naked on national television: she is totally objectified. Like the surgical procedures for

²⁷ Blum, 199.

²⁸ For a discussion of Bertillon, see: Allan Sekula, “The Body in the Archive,” *October*. Vol. 39. (Winter, 1986): 3-64.

²⁹ The procedures follow some version of this list: Endobrow lift; Upper Lid Lift; Mid-Face Lift; Nose job; FATMA; Lip enhancement; Liposuction on Chin and/or Under Eyes; Fat transfer to cheeks; and LASIK.

the face, those for the body are formulaic. Nearly every participant undergoes these surgeries: Tummy tuck, extensive Liposuction, and Breast augmentation. The body is carefully divided up; one participant, Belinda, is prescribed extensive liposuction in the inner thighs, outer thighs, abdomen, knees, flanks, and hips. Very rarely a participant may get a breast reduction and a few get a breast lift without getting breast augmentation. The ideal is defined by large breasts, small hips, high buttocks, thin waist and extremities. The list of procedures and the highlight literally break the face and the body into parts to be improved; each part can be measured against the standard of perfection and brought into alignment with the feminine ideal. The formulaic nature of the surgical fixes for both face and body is the result of a fixed feminine ideal.

The fragmentation of the self into parts continues with the next category, dental. Again the face is shown in close-up, but this time the highlight box targets the closed mouth, belaboring the obvious and maintaining the focus on the body in terms of parts. Here the demands of beauty intermingle with the requirements of health. Participants routinely get deep cleaning and root canals, as well as zoom bleaching and DaVinci Veneers. The perfect gridded, white, aligned smile is a beauty requirement that requires and moves beyond healthy teeth. As in *IOYY*, the working class or lower-middle-class origins of the participants are evident in the often poor health of their teeth and the lack of braces. Some participants, like Merline, feel shame over their imperfect smiles, because they could not afford the braces to “fix” them. The pain and shame are to be wiped away with a brand-new smile, as the markings of class are “upgraded.”

In the “Fitness” category, the issue is not what is to be done to the participants (what they must suffer and recover from), but what they must do. Every participant is

ordered to do two hours of training at the gym everyday; every participant but one is put on a reduced calorie diet, usually 1200 calories. The single too-thin participant is marked as exceptional; she is “the only Swan to need to gain weight.”³⁰ Even this “Swan,” Kelly, must work out to build muscle and approach the ideal from the other side. For every other participant, losing weight through diet and exercise is key. All of the participants must work out in order to approach the feminine ideal: tight, toned, muscular and slender. The narrow ideal does not allow for bodily variation, as the perfect rotating figure on the side of the TV screen reminds the audience. The participant’s whole body is targeted by fitness. The participant is constituted and analyzed as “objectively” “un-fit,” gross and inadequate (with the exception of Kelly, who is produced as “too thin”.)

The last category is untitled and includes therapy (an hour a week) and life coaching (as necessary.) In the first couple of episodes, therapy and life-coaching are included in the fitness category; later they are separated out. The inner self is represented by a close-up of the face and the head, the location of the psyche. Even here, the participant appears on the blue grid, targeted by the cross and circles behind her; there is a norm towards which she must be brought. Therapy and coaching will enable her to become beautiful “on the inside.”

The requirements for submission and obedience are built into the fixed feminine ideal of the show. While on *IOYY*, the expert and the participant together discuss what the participant does not like about herself and would like to get “fixed,” on *The Swan*, the experts diagnose the participant and propose solutions as a group, without the participant. The participant is the passive object of the experts’ gaze; they diagnose her to bring her

³⁰ Amanda, “Kelly and Rachel.” Episode One, Season One.

into the norm and render her beautiful. What is desirable is not what is unique to the participant; rather she must be brought into the static ideal. Despite the mass of details and the precision of the plan, the individualized programs add up to the same regimen: severe surgery on the face and body, a low-calorie diet, working out at the gym, the dentist, therapy and life coaching. The plan reflects the “objective” feminine ideal and how it can best be grafted/implanted/sutured to the participant.³¹ In this authoritarian regime, the experts intervene in the participant’s intimate life in order to feminize her according to a fixed ideal.

The objectification of the participant is not an exercise aimed at the participant, who has already confessed to all of her faults, who is already cognizant of her failings and of the need to “transform” inside and out. Rather, this is an exercise aimed at the spectator, designed to both show the power of the experts to see and fix inner and outer problems of the self and to teach the spectator to evaluate herself according to the same gaze. The processes of normalization are different for the participant and the viewer; the participant is transformed under an authoritarian regime, while the spectator watches her transformation and learns how to objectify herself, what services to consume to remedy the problem, and what actions she should take towards her own self. Where the participant submits, the spectator learns. Unlike shows like *WNTW* where the process of normalization is the same for participant and spectator and where the participant serves as a point of identification for the spectator, here the participant serves as an object lesson.

³¹ As Brenda Weber argues with regard to *Extreme Makeover*, the “personalized” transformation is just a repetition of more of the same. Brenda Weber, “Beauty, Desire, and Anxiety: The Economy of Sameness in ABC’s *Extreme Makeover*,” *Genders* 41 (2005): 1-53.

Objectified on the blue grid, presented as a collection of problems, there is no identification possible with the stripped, flat image of the participant. Rather than invoking identification, which Kathryn Fraser argues is the core of every makeover,³² this presentation of the participant invokes the objectifying gaze. Looking at the voiceless, static, exposed image of the participant, the spectator is rendered complicit in the participant's objectification. The spectator is trained to see the participant (and herself) through the fragmenting lens of the camera. The participant is reduced to the status of a scientific specimen as the spectator is taught to take up the clinical gaze and apply it to others and herself.

Transformation

In order to be transformed, the participants must leave their friends and family and move to Los Angeles for three months. There, they will be isolated and treated in the cloistered world of *The Swan*. This is a kind of monastic retreat, where the participants leave behind the cares of their world in order to “work on themselves” and achieve salvation, that is, become beautiful. For three months, their entire lives are dedicated to the project of transforming themselves. They need not worry about their work, their families, or anything but the project of self-transformation. Like novices, they are dedicated to a higher task; here not serving god, but transforming themselves. Like novices, the participants must obey their superiors, those in touch with the divine ideal, the experts. *The Swan* demands surrender, but this is no passive swoon, no limp

³² Kathryn Fraser, “‘Now I am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies...’ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*” in *Remodeling Reality*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 184.

submission; rather, participants must actively suffer and work hard as they submit to the edicts of the experts in service of the project of transformation.

Toby Miller argues, with regard to *Queer Eye*, that part of the ideology of U.S. consumer capitalism is “*secular* transcendence, the sense that one can become something or someone other than the hand dealt by the bonds of birth” through consumption.³³ *The Swan* does not promote transcendence so much as it promotes salvation through penance. According to Foucault, “Penance is the affect of change, of rupture with self, past and world.”³⁴ As a penitent, the sinner proves his suffering, makes his shame visible, and discloses himself to the public. According to Foucault, there is a shift in penitence from performance to verbal confession, in which the penitent continually verbalizes and analyzes his thoughts in complete submission to another’s will. In disclosing the self in this way, the penitent renounces herself and achieves salvation. *The Swan* engages with both of these forms of penitence: performance and suffering on the one hand and continual disclosure and analysis of one’s thoughts in submission to another’s will (through therapy and “coaching”) on the other. Through these techniques, the shameful self is both revealed and renounced, enabling a “new” self to be constituted.

For the participant, the world of *The Swan* operates as a “total institution,” in Erving Goffman’s terms.³⁵ The participant’s entire environment is a part of the show, from the apartment owned and regulated by the program, to the mandatory two-hour

³³ Toby Miller, “Metrosexuality: See the Bright Light of Commodification Shine! Watch Yanqui Masculinity Made Over!” in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2006), 106.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the self” in *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 43.

³⁵ Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961).

session at the gym, the mandatory weekly therapy, and the doctors' and dentist's offices. Furthermore, the show controls who enters the environment. Contact with the family is limited to videotapes and taped phone conversations. The participant does not even control her own apartment, as the "life coach" (and creator) of the program, Nely Galan, can invade the space of the apartment to confront and bully the participant at any time. The participant is also under constant surveillance and anything she says or does can be replayed. For three months, the participant only comes in contact with those participating in the show. The authorities in the show have the power to reinterpret all words and actions according to their agenda. The participant is stripped of her dignity and personhood, defined as imperfect and inadequate. The project of self-transformation is all-consuming and supported by the structure of the institution. The "total institution" is a pure space of authoritarian rule.

The fact that the participant must leave her family for three months is perversely justified in terms of the importance of family. This retreat is necessary because it will enable the participant to become self-confident and beautiful and thereby become a better wife and mother. She leaves behind her family in order to return to them an improved version of herself. If she is not already a wife or mother, gaining self-confidence and achieving beauty inside and out will enable her to find a man and eventually, become a wife and mother. Once perfected, she can fulfill her feminine destiny. By putting herself "first" (and submitting to the plan), she can better fulfill her feminine familial roles. Here, traditional feminine roles are married to the feminist language of empowerment.

As Amanda explains, “no mirrors” is the number one rule in *The Swan*’s program.³⁶ When the participant first moves into her new apartment, Amanda announces (to the viewer) that there are no mirrors. Ritualistically, the participants are shown exclaiming over the lack of mirrors. In the finale, Amanda explains that not only are all mirrors covered up—as we see in the episodes themselves—but also all reflective surfaces with which the participant might come into contact—in her apartment, the gym or the doctor’s office—are treated to be non-reflective. In the second season, “Swan Security” are formulaically shown searching participants’ luggage and confiscating items like sunglasses, compacts, and CDs. In every episode, the lack of mirrors and the fact that the participant does not see herself for three months is repeated throughout the episode.

The elimination of mirrors and reflective surfaces is a technique used to produce a different kind of docile body. Rather than the self-monitoring (and self-mastering) neoliberal subject promoted by *WNTW*, here the lack of mirrors is intended to sever the participant from her image and to prevent her from evaluating, measuring, or working on her appearance. As Anne Hollander argues, “[t]he mirror is the personal link between the human subject and its representation.”³⁷ Without a mirror, the participant is denied her image; she cannot define herself through her appearance. Indeed, Amanda claims that the lack of mirrors is intended to help the participant focus on her inner transformation.³⁸ However, the lack of mirrors also prevents the participant from *governing* her image. As Hollander points out, “[s]elf image-making is the acknowledged activity of us all and we

³⁶ “The Pageant, Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

³⁷ Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Avon, 1980), 391.

³⁸ Amanda, “The Pageant, Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

know we need our private camera and screen for our personal productions.”³⁹ The mirror serves as camera and screen through which one governs one’s appearance. Without a mirror, one cannot “produce” oneself according to the image in one’s mind’s eye. In being “freed” from governing her appearance, the participant surrenders control over her appearance to the experts. Giving up this kind of control over appearance is also, given the links between appearance and self, to give up a form of self-knowledge and self-mastery. The lack of mirrors leads to submission under an authoritarian regime.

The importance of the mirror is evident in Tanya’s story.⁴⁰ Tanya is having a hard time in the “program” and wants to quit. In the last month of the program, “*Swan security*” invades Tanya’s apartment, searches her belongings and discovers an illegal mirror. When Nely confronts Tanya, Nely explains that having a mirror breaks the rules and is cheating. Tanya explains that she knew she wasn’t going to make it weeks ago, intimating that getting the mirror was a manifestation of quitting. Having the mirror is proof of a failure to submit and to surrender herself; she disobeys the rules and the injunction to submit. Tanya is expelled from the program for breaking the rules and getting a mirror. Under an authoritarian regime, her resistance can only be punished. Tanya’s narrative of transformation ends in failure; she held onto her image.

Surgery

The plastic surgeon, either Dr. Dubrow or Dr. Haworth, dictates the surgical plan to the participant when she meets with him before surgery. While *10YY* presents a scene in which the agency of the participant seems to guide the expert intervention, here the

³⁹ Hollander, 414-415.

⁴⁰ “Tanya and Merline,” Season One, Episode Eight.

interaction is weighted on the side of the expert. The doctor tells the patient what he will do for her. Nearly all of the participants go along with the surgical plan. However, it is possible to resist. When Tawnya turns down a face lift and a nose job (she wanted to hold onto the bump that both her daughters had as well), Dr. Dubrow tries to pressure her to “agree” to “take out” the bump, telling her that “they agreed” and she would look better without it.⁴¹ Tawnya refuses and not incidentally, does not make it to the pageant. While the patient may say no to a procedure, such behavior invites coercive bullying (the attempt to neutralize resistance) and is punished through non-selection for the pageant. The show makes it far easier to say yes and go along with the experts’ plans.⁴²

During surgery, the participant is dehumanized. She is turned into a slab of meat, an object to be improved. The doctors smugly discuss their work to the camera, commenting on the difficulty, the time involved, and their satisfaction in the outcome. The surgery itself is spectacle, complete with dehumanizing close-ups and zoom-outs to display the quiescent body under construction; the camera work is frantic. The surgeries are invasive, dangerous, and multiple. Surgery is presented as an event, an ordeal, requiring the heroics of talented doctors on the bodies of failed subjects with “bad genetics” and bad habits. Only the male surgeons can redeem the faces and bodies of the inadequately feminine participants. The participant’s deficient body is fully disclosed to the surgeons and partially disclosed to the viewers (exposed primary sex characteristics are blurred out in the shots of the participant’s body). The participant is made into beautiful object by the surgeons.

⁴¹ “Cindy and Tawnya,” Season One, Episode Three.

⁴² The interaction with the dentist follows the same model. Everyone eventually gives into the dentist, even those who are initially resistant.

While the two plastic surgeons are male, the dentist, Dr. Sherri Worth, is female. For the most part, all their interactions with the patient are the same. The experts are evaluative and professional. Much as the surgeons express dismay over the patient's fat and eating habits, Dr. Worth expresses dismay over the state of their teeth and gums and their failure to take care of their teeth. All of them evaluate the patient and express disgust at her degree of divergence from the norm. Much like the surgeons, Dr. Worth expresses pride in her own work. However, there is an element of sexualization in the gaze that the surgeons, particularly Dr. Dubrow, directs to the patient post-surgery. The plastic surgeons' remarks that the job is beautiful, the patient is beautiful, that she'll look great, take on an edge of sexualization lacking in the dental interactions. As others have noted, this pride in their creation and (vaguely performed) desire for it resembles that of Pygmalion.⁴³ While the male and female doctors professionally evaluate the participant before intervening, for the male plastic surgeons, the patient becomes worthy of an evaluative and somewhat sexualized gaze after she is operated upon.

While Deery and Heyes argue that cosmetic surgery on makeover shows operates as a kind of magical transformation,⁴⁴ I argue that what is significant about the portrayal of cosmetic surgery on *The Swan* is the work involved for the participant. Deery argues that participants on *The Swan* "go into the deep sleep of a surgical operation, and then are resurrected anew."⁴⁵ Similarly, Heyes draws on the mythos of the fairy-tale to argue that the patient goes to sleep (under general anesthesia), is magically transformed by the surgeon, and awakens remade, like Sleeping Beauty being woken with the prince's kiss.

⁴³ Fraser, Deery, Blum, 92-94 (with regard to actual plastic surgeons and patients.)

⁴⁴ Heyes, 103-105; Deery, 169.

⁴⁵ Deery, 169.

In the fairy-tale narrative, the ugly outside is brought into harmony with perfect and good inside. While Heyes acknowledges *EM* complicates the fairy-tale narrative by showing the suffering of the patient through shots of the traumatized post-surgical body and the recovery, she maintains that the essential story of both *EM* and *The Swan* is that of the fairy-tale. Whether or not this adequately describes *EM*, it fails to describe *The Swan*. The focus on *The Swan* is on not on magical transformation that reveals the perfect inner self, but on the work the patient must do to transform inside and outside.

On *The Swan*, surgery is not a magical transformation given by the doctor, but an opportunity which the participant must take to be transformed. The focus is on the length and difficulty of the surgery, the suffering the patient must endure, and her attitude towards suffering. The camera lingers on the swollen, bruised faces of the participants after surgery. Rather than waking up transformed, they wake up deformed, broken, and bandaged. All are shown convalescing. The participant is not passively transformed by surgery; rather she must work hard at healing through curtailing her movements and wearing uncomfortable girdles, chin straps and other forms of bandages as directed. For instance, Nely chides Marnie for her refusal to wear the appropriate garments and bullies her into wearing them. If the participant does not obey the doctor's orders, she may develop complications or heal badly. Though the surgery is done to the participant, her transformation depends on her post-surgical behavior, including whether or not she obeys the doctor's orders, diets correctly, and/or works out hard enough in the gym. Surgery on this show does not look easy, magical or desirable. In fact, the participants become almost heroic by enduring and surviving the many intrusive operations and the discomfort of healing.

Surgery is a mode of penance. First, the failed and sinful body is revealed to the doctor and to the world before the participant is transformed. The caps are pulled off the decaying teeth and the plastic surgeon lifts the gown to examine and expose the soft stomach. Second, the surgeon or dentist intervenes, cutting into the abject body or pulling teeth, while the participant submits to their treatment.⁴⁶ Third, the patient suffers the pain of her transformation. After the operation, the new body is hidden by swelling and bruises, the signs of suffering. The participant's desire for her new body is made evident in her willingness to suffer and in the revelation of the marks of her suffering. Penance works differently than Deery's Christian metaphor of death-and-resurrection. Penance requires not just the sacrifice of leaving home and family, but exposure, physical suffering, endurance, and most importantly, active, continual engagement in the project of obedience to the experts. Through exposure and suffering the participant releases the sin of her failed femininity and attains a new state of being.

Resistance and Submission

Unlike *WNTW* or *QE*, in which the participant must learn new skills, on *The Swan* the participant is transformed through submission to the program. Once surgery is over, the participant must follow directions and endure the pain of dieting, working out, and healing. She need not learn how to shop for herself; she is not shown trying on clothes or being made-up. Rather, the participant must obey the rules that structure her transformation and live under the dictates of the program. After the drama of surgery, the

⁴⁶ Deborah Caslav Covino argues that the pre-surgical body is rendered abject, while plastic surgery attempts to "amend" the abject body through cutting off the offending flesh. Here, the treatment of the out-of-control body constructs it as abject. *Amending the Abject Body* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004).

episode unfolds in terms of submission or resistance to the program's dictates. In the realms of fitness, diet and therapy, the participant either obeys or presents an obstacle to her own transformation (in the rhetoric of the show) by disobeying.

With regard to fitness, the participant must surrender to the plan developed by the personal trainer, which requires that she work very hard. Every single contestant must work out for two hours in the gym. Sometimes the participant is resistant to such hard work. For instance, Kim is shown slacking off and complaining about the work-outs. By failing to work out the way the trainer wants her to work out, Kim has resisted the program, holding onto her own feelings of working hard enough, rather than submitting to the trainer's ideal. Nely confronts Kim about her "bad attitude" at the gym and attempts to bully Kim into agreeing with her. Kim is frustrated to be perceived in this way and disagrees with Nely's assessment. In refusing to change her story, Kim performs her failure to surrender to the program. As an authoritarian regime, the show attempts to repress and neutralize Kim's resistance.

With regard to diet, every participant but Kelly must lose a serious amount of weight. The eating habits of the participants are tracked through both their weekly weigh-ins and recording their grocery orders. The participant is measured against the plan in terms of both weight loss and diet. For instance, Christina "cheats" on her diet by ordering and eating full-fat yogurt. Nely invades the space of her apartment and confronts her, pointing to both her weight gain and the record of her grocery orders. Unlike *WNTW*, in which the hosts intervene to teach the participant, this interaction is a form of obedience training. In addition, the interaction itself is punitive: Nely yells at Christine and berates her. Nely shames Christina into throwing away her sinful full-fat yogurt.

After she is confronted and bullied, Christina “recommits” herself to the program and to following the diet. Here, Christina’s disobedience is turned to obedience.

Even in the emotional narrative, the program has a clear point of view about what the participant should do and become. In therapy and through confrontations with the show’s resident bully, the life-coach Nely, the participant is steered through her transformation. For instance, Dr. Ianni diagnoses Sarina (a white woman) with an inability to make a decision whether to be in a relationship or not with her cheating ex-husband Lucky (a black man). In the voice-over, the show amends this diagnosis to “Sarina’s transformation will suffer if she doesn’t stop focusing on Lucky and start focusing on herself.”⁴⁷ Nely shows up at Sarina’s apartment to confront her about her “problem,” now redefined as her inability to let go of Lucky. Nely pressures Sarina to focus on herself and presents Lucky as the obstacle to Sarina’s internal transformation. Nely tells her: “I want you focused on you...How badly does someone have to hurt you before you put yourself first? No more Lucky. Bye, bye Lucky.”⁴⁸ According to Nely, Sarina must drop Lucky because he is bad for her and detracts from her focus on “herself.” Holding onto something outside the program prevents Sarina from “surrendering” to the program and putting all her energy into transformation. At the end of her interaction with Nely, Sarina is convinced, commenting that “I want to make it to the pageant so I need to focus on my transformation.”⁴⁹

In these scenes, the participant is labeled defiant or resistant: in the logic of the show, the problem is her failure to fully obey. In all of these interactions, no negotiation

⁴⁷ Amanda, “Sarina and Kelly,” Season One, Episode Six.

⁴⁸ Nely, “Sarina and Kelly,” Season One, Episode Six.

⁴⁹ Sarina, “Sarina and Kelly,” Season One, Episode Six.

is possible. The show takes the position, through Nely, of knowing what is best for the participant and what she must do. The participant's own feelings and desires are discounted by the show. Nely, the inventor of the show and the "life coach," is also the show's enforcer; she is the one who confronts the participant about their failure to work hard in therapy or the gym or their failure to follow the diet or transform internally. Nely's "life coaching" is always in terms of the show and its agenda, as she pressures the participant to submit to the program. As Nely confronts the participant, clips of the participant's defiance and resistance are replayed; Nely is given the epistemological upper hand with regard to the viewer. To neutralize their disobedience and lead the participants submit to the plan, Nely relies on both the stick (vehemence, shaming and bullying, the threat of dismissal) and the carrot: the lure of performing in and possibly winning the pageant.

In the cases above, Nely threatens the participants with the possibility that they will not make it to the pageant unless they change their behavior to follow the program. The pageant and the competition to get into the pageant are used to bring the participant's desire into the "correct" alignment. If the participant were simply to improve herself to her own standards, she would want to be in control of her diet, fitness regimen, plastic surgery, makeup and so on. She would have the right to contradict the experts as the expert on herself and her desires. However, this possibility is explicitly disallowed by the pageant. With the competition of the pageant, the goal of the transformation is to become "pageant-ready." The ideal is defined by the criteria of the pageant. Threatened with losing the competition and inadequacy with regard to an outside norm, the participant realigns her desires around the given ideal. She shapes her body and self in submission to

the pageant's ideal. Because the program is developed to get her "pageant ready," in order to be transformed into the ideal, she must "surrender" to the program.

The Reveal

Amanda explains that it has been one month since "we've [the viewers] seen the contestants and three months since they've seen themselves." The experts discuss one participant—her flaws, struggles to transform and progress—giving the viewer the insight of their collective experience. Amanda then plays an even-more edited version of the confession tape, showing the participant is shown at her lowest and most pathetic, in order to heighten the contrast with the "after." After recapping the show with regards to the first participant, Amanda announces the "new" participant, calling her out by name. As the music swells, the double doors of the mansion are opened to reveal the participant standing in the dark. The participant then walks into the lit mansion. The experts cheer and clap as the participant smiles, poses and slowly turns around, the better to show off her brand new look.

The ideal feminine look, as embodied by the participants, is hyperfeminine and uniformly excessive. Make-up is excessive and unflattering, including for instance, pink lipstick for nearly every participant. Skin is spray-tanned golden. Hair is tremendously long, obviously lengthened with extensions. Most white contestants are bleached blonde; the biracial Asian-Caucasian contestant is bleached blonde and even one of the Latina contestants is given golden highlights in her black hair. Participants are dressed for as though for a formal event: dresses are long, clingy, and often low-cut. The dresses exaggerate the new bodily contours of the participant: enormous breasts, a tiny waist,

slimmed hips and thighs. Accessories are similarly excessive and formal: many participants wear gloves and all are draped in jewelry. The plastic features of the participant are eerily similar and uniformly “feminized”: eyes pulled open and lips puffy. Styled to the height of femininity, all of the signifiers of femininity are exaggerated to the point that one reviewer aptly compared the participants to drag queens.⁵⁰

The new look is an imitation of glamour. The participants are dressed as celebrities, not in the sense that their look mirrors current celebrity styles, which it does not, but in the sense of being dressed to be seen. The look is spectacular, that is, it makes a spectacle out of the participant. The presentation of the participant is intended to make her look special and give her the aura of celebrity. In fact, Amanda and Nely frequently compare the participants to movie stars. As Nely says “[w]hen I saw Cindy, I thought wow who is that movie star?”⁵¹ Through these comparisons and the emotional reactions of the experts and the participants themselves, the show packages the participants as paragons of femininity, to be envied and imitated.

However, as a persuasive text, *The Swan* failed to persuade this viewer. While I find shows like *WNTW* persuasive in that they offer an “after” which accords with my desires and feminine middle-class taste, I find the after of the *The Swan* at best, tacky and at worst, grotesque. Cute Kelly is transformed into a plastic Barbie; Merline looks strange with enormous cheeks and pink lips; Gina emerges with monstrous uneven cheek implants, the contours of her face visibly asymmetrical. The participants inspire horror and pity, rather than envy or identification. It is not feminist resistance that makes me

⁵⁰ Brian Lowry, “The Swan,” *Daily Variety* (April 12, 2004): 9.

⁵¹ “Cindy and Tawnya” Season One, Episode Three.

decry these images and refuse them; it is my feminine middle-class disposition.⁵²

Perhaps, as a middle-class viewer, I am not the target of this program. I speculate that this image of ideal femininity may be attempting to speak to the desires of working-class women to be seen as glamorous, sexy, and special. Working class women have often been accused of being excessively feminine by middle-class women and working class women have often constructed identity through spectacular femininity.⁵³ Given that the show died in its second season, it is likely that this feminine ideal failed to speak to women's (working class or not) desires.

Before and after images are used twice to heighten the effect of the transformation. As each participant enters the mansion, she is flanked by “before” and “after” images of herself in her underwear. The before image shows her without makeup, hair pulled back and unsmiling, and clad in grey underwear and a grey sports-bra—the same image used in the objectification sequence. The “after” image shows the participant smiling, made-up, styled and clad in a matching colorful, sexy bra and underwear set. The construction of the triptych encourages the spectator to compare the three images. Time and space are undone as three images of the participant appear on screen: the participant is tripled, all there at once. The participant is rendered a spectacle in these images, as the narrative stops and the camera lingers.⁵⁴ The gaze invoked is both clinical and sexual, as the lacy lingerie of the “after” image invites the spectator to lasciviously

⁵² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵³ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34-47.

view her body. As Weber notes of *EM*, even after the participant is transformed, she cannot really leave behind her “before” self because it is attached to her through the workings of the show.⁵⁵ The contrast between “before” and “after” demonstrates the magnitude of change and advertises the effectiveness of the show.⁵⁶

Before she has the chance to see herself in the mirror, each participant announces that she has changed on the inside. As Cindy says “Despite not having seen myself I feel great, I feel beautiful.”⁵⁷ Belinda announces that she has learned that “beauty comes from the inside.”⁵⁸ No longer must the participant find her self worth in the mirror; now she feels good about herself. The program has succeeded in changing how she feels about herself before she even looks at herself. This mandatory speech justifies the transformation as an authentic inner transformation. One could dismiss this mandatory speech as a cover-up for the obsession with appearance. But this speech also points to the boot-camp aspect of the program: the women develop confidence in themselves through the discipline of the program. In giving up autonomy to be re-birthed by the program, they discover a sense of self-worth. Damaged femininity is repaired through authoritarian submission; they become better women, “self-confident beauty queens,” precisely through obeying the experts’ directives and working hard.

Once the participant has declared her inner transformation, she is allowed to finally—after three months without a reflective surface—see herself. The participant is

⁵⁵ Weber, 2005.

⁵⁶ As Gareth Palmer argues, lifestyle television is invested in proving that it “works.” Gareth Palmer, “‘The New You’: Class and Transformation in Lifestyle Television” in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2004), 187. Italics his.

⁵⁷ “Cindy and Tawnya,” Season One, Episode Three.

⁵⁸ “Andrea and Belinda” Season One, Episode Five.

sent to stand in front a curtain-covered mirror. Camera work—close-ups of nervous hands and long arcs over the back of the participant and from the side—and music amp up the suspense. Amanda asks the participant if she is ready and when she says yes, the curtains are pulled apart to reveal the participant’s mirror image. The music swells and breaks as the participant sees herself for the first time. She routinely gasps, covers her mouth with her hands, and cries out. As Merline says “I am as hot as I feel! ... I love me.” This is the revelation towards which the show has been driving: all at once, reunited with her image, the participant achieves salvation, the transformation from a state of misery into blessed state of beauty and self-love.

When the participant meets her severed image in the mirror, she meets the image crafted for her by the show. Having been severed from and denied government of her image, she encounters her image as a stranger, a new self.⁵⁹ Her mirror image is the “ideal” image, whole and perfect, at once the ideal incarnate of femininity (according to the show) and, as in *WNTW* and *10YY*, the Lacanian mirror-ideal, which stands in for and constructs the participant’s self.⁶⁰ The participant’s perfected state is revealed to her. All of her hard work is rewarded as she sees her new self in the mirror. The marks of her “ordinariness,” misery, motherhood, and working-class background—scars, lines, sagging stomach—are erased; now she is special and beautiful.⁶¹ The participant ogles

⁵⁹ As June Deery notes, the participant often touches herself, as though to reassure herself that the image in the mirror really is her. Deery, 170.

⁶⁰ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 1-7.

⁶¹ Heyes also notes that the marks of class are erased in cosmetic surgery shows. However, she argues that this erases class; I argue that working class status of the participant’s is reproduced in the ideal itself. Heyes, 98

herself, taking narcissistic pleasure in being beautiful to and for herself.⁶² As Virginia Blum argues with regard to women who get cosmetic surgery, their pleasure comes not from being admired by a man, but from achieving beauty.⁶³ The participant is rewarded for her penance and hard work with a beautiful appearance, an image that now mirrors, supports, and enables her “radiant” inner self to shine through. Meeting her image in the mirror confirms and completes the transformation: now that she sees how beautiful she is, she can truly be transformed on the inside and outside.

The revelation in the mirror is the “money shot” of the show, the emotional explosion, the “dramatic climax” at the center of the show’s constructed narrative.⁶⁴ What will the participant think? Will it all be worth it? The mandatory speech about change on the inside functions as a prelude to the emotionally charged moment in the mirror. As the participant looks and cries out, the narrative stops. The camera lingers on spectacle of the participant looking at herself. Amanda often asks the participant to continue looking at herself and asks her what she likes most about her transformation, further extending the moment and capitalizing on the participant’s reaction. Close-ups emphasize the participant’s emotional reaction and enable identification with the participant’s joy. As Amanda says, “When their moment [in front of the mirror] came, we all went along for the ride.”⁶⁵ In a strange moment of identification, the viewer is situated on the other side of the mirror, looking back through the camera as the participant looks in the mirror. The

⁶² Hilary Radner argues that the pleasure of the feminine culture is this narcissistic gaze. *Shopping Around : Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁶³ Blum, 17.

⁶⁴ Laura Grindstaff as quoted by Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92.

⁶⁵ “The Pageant, Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

confrontation between the inner self and new, visible, and spectacular outer self yields the “money shot.”

After the participant examines herself in the mirror, Amanda reminds the participant that she has to thank the experts.⁶⁶ This line is so scripted that Amanda repeats that line even when the participant has already thanked her transformers. Gratitude is built into the script. This language is important because it points to the relationship between the participant and the experts. The experts give and the participant takes; they have the power to bestow the gift upon her. They are responsible for her new image. The participant is the beneficiary, the recipient of their “gift.” Her subordinate status is revealed in this language. Her own work is overlooked in this construction or folded into their gift; after all, she worked hard under their direction. She is directed to be grateful, to accept her new image and their “gift,” thereby acknowledging their power over her.

After each participant has had her reveal, the two participants are given a second before and after comparison to demonstrate their transformations. The participant is shown in fragments, the better to examine and compare each body part. The “after” image then fills the screen, wiping away and replacing the “before” image. The domination of the “after” image restores progressive movement of the makeover narrative. Only after the participant sees herself in the mirror can she leave her “before” image behind.⁶⁷ This process is repeated for the second participant. Both participants have achieved the “after” of the makeover; they have been transformed. Now they can be compared to each other.

⁶⁶ Only in the first season; in the second season, she invites the experts to applaud the participant’s transformation.

⁶⁷ Though the before image is invoked again for the episode’s winner in the finale.

Despite the fact that both participants have worked hard and transformed, despite being styled as paragons of femininity, despite the cheers from the judges, at the end of the show, a winner and a loser must be chosen. The two participants are judged according to “beauty, poise, and overall transformation.” The two participants are measured against each other and against the ideal. The ideal is not merely “beauty,” but “overall transformation.” What this means is that the participant who submits the most to the experts is rewarded with being named the winner, while the participant who resisted or held onto her own values is named the loser. As Nely says, “Rachel wins because she surrendered to transformation in the most incredible way.”⁶⁸ Rachel followed the program to the letter and worked hard under the guidance of the experts. Those who win are distinguished, not necessarily by their beauty or poise, but by how much and how well they obeyed. Surrender is rewarded with the chance to continue to obey and compete.

In contrast, resistance spells a failure to truly transform. For instance, in the final reveal, Kathy “turned down” the “traditional gown” to wear a funky outfit with a black motorcycle jacket. She had her own image of what she wanted to look like and clearly went against the recommendation made by the program. Unsurprisingly, she was not chosen for the pageant. Tawnya declined the nose job and face lift and similarly lost the contest to go to the pageant. Their transformations were deemed insufficient, because they did not submit to the dictates of the expert and the ideals of the show. As Nely says, “I’m really sad Christina didn’t make it to the pageant, but the truth is she didn’t

⁶⁸ “Kelly and Rachel,” Season One, Episode One.

surrender to her internal transformation.”⁶⁹ The failure to submit and obey results in their expulsion from the show, a punishment in the show’s terms.

The Pageant

As Amanda asks in the Season One finale, “[w]hy end a makeover series with a pageant?” and answers herself “we wanted to give the women in the swan pageant the ultimate motivation.”⁷⁰ That is, if the makeover is ultimately about looking better, then a competition over who looks best is the ultimate motivator. The pageant serves to mobilize the desire of the contestants, to make them desire the ideal and work harder for it. The pageant demonstrates how much they’ve changed: from “insecure ordinary women” to “confident beauty queens.”⁷¹ Now that the participants enjoy being looked-at, the pageant turns them into objects-to-be-looked-at par excellence. The pageant mobilizes the ranking and evaluating gaze at work through the show in the form of a “final exam.” Participants are measured against each other and in relation to the feminine ideal; the winner demonstrates the feminine ideal. The pageant is a spectacle, a celebration of the participants’ transformation inside and out (and the show’s power to change them),⁷² and a competition over who most can best demonstrate the feminine ideal inside and out.

The pageant functions as a spectacle of femininity. When all nine participants first take the stage in their evening gowns, they are overwhelming in their likeness, the

⁶⁹ “Christina and Erica,” Season Two, Episode Four.

⁷⁰ “The Pageant Part Two” Season One, Episode Ten.

⁷¹ Amanda, “The Pageant Part One,” Season One, Episode Nine.

⁷² Again, as Palmer argues, lifestyle television is invested in proving its efficacy. Palmer, 187.

polished high gloss of their look. The beauty pageant marks the contestant as extraordinary and particular, even as her individuality is submerged in her attempt to embody the ideal.⁷³ The participants are called “beauty queens,” marking them as paragons of femininity, special and better than the viewing audience. They are separated and (literally) elevated, made beauties through their display. They are turned into extraordinary objects-to-be-looked at. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, “[T]he relation between the judge and beauty institutionalizes the cultural right of all men to evaluate the bodies of all women and recapitulates the competition among women for male favor that unequal power begets.”⁷⁴ The pageant affirms and celebrates women’s status as objects, valued for their appearance. Objectified and de-individuated, the contestants are marked as “celebrities” through their spectacular display in the pageant.

As we are reminded by the show, the participants are extraordinary not because of the gifts of nature, but because of their obedience and hard work. Videos of the participants working out and preparing for the pageant are shown. Beauty is constructed as an achievement. The announcer reminds the viewer that the participants have collectively lost more than 200 pounds. Their transformation to beauty queens does not come naturally, but is obtained through obedience to expert directives. If these awkward, self-conscious, “ugly ducklings” could become “beauty queens,” than couldn’t anyone? Beauty is rendered democratic and competitive. The program implicitly promises that anyone could become a “beauty queen” with the right instruction, dedication, and hard

⁷³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Beauty and the Freak” in *Points of Contact: Disability, Art, and Culture*, ed. Susan Crutchfield and Marcy Joy Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 181-96.

⁷⁴ Garland-Thomson, 191.

work. Femininity is portrayed an achievement through submission and, for this program, the highest achievement.

The pageant fosters two distinct gazes. While Garland-Thomson argues that the beauty contest creates a universal, whole male spectator, I argue that the pageant also creates an anxious female spectator. While Garland-Thomson assumes a male spectator, the audience for beauty pageants and makeover shows is mixed (and for the latter, overwhelmingly female.) For female spectators, the pageant models the evaluative, ranking gaze, and encourages them to develop and train that gaze upon themselves. Viewing the extraordinary images of femininity, the anxiety of the female spectator is activated: she compares herself to those images and ranks herself in relation to them. As Kathryn Fraser argues, identification with the “after” image of the makeover is intended to push the female spectator to desire a make-over herself.⁷⁵ If that “ugly duckling” could become beautiful, than couldn’t I? Here, the pageant does not make female viewers feel universal and whole, but inadequate, fragmented, less of a woman, and in need of a makeover.

In the repetitive structure of the pageant, the judges score the appearance of the participants over and over again, measuring their femininity through and across different outfits. First, all nine participants “compete” in the evening gown segment. The look of each participant mimics that of her final reveal: formal, exaggerated femininity—big hair, heavy makeup, high heels. The participants must not only look good in the clothes, she must also move in the right way, walk the right way, smile the right way, and follow the

⁷⁵ For an excellent analysis of the process of identification with regard to ads and the makeover, see Kathryn Fraser, “The Makeover and Other Consumerist Narratives” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2002).

choreography. Second, the participants compete in the bathing suit segment, following the same choreography of self-display. Like the evening gown look, this look is also outside ordinary femininity, as the participants wear bathing suits with high heels, big hair, and makeup. The bathing suit competition measures their transformed bodies. Third, six participants daringly wear lingerie, a performance of intimate femininity in public. Each turn on stage represents a fantasy of femininity. By scoring participants across different outfits, the judges attempt to score the “truth” of their bodies and the extent of their transformations. The judges’ scores are shown on the television screen with the average score, which invites the spectator to compare her evaluation of the participant with that of the experts, thereby training her gaze. The scoring demonstrates the measuring gaze at work and ranks the participant in relation to the “objective” feminine ideal.

In addition to evaluating appearance, these performances, especially the bathing suit and lingerie competition, are also tests of “confidence” in the rhetoric of the show. That is, if the participants have sufficiently transformed on the inside, they will be proud and happy to display their bikini- or lingerie- clad bodies on national television. During the lingerie segment (which is preceded by a photo-shoot in which the participants claim to find excitement and pleasure in being the object of the gaze), the participant gives a voice-over, the gist of which is “I feel sexy.” The participant’s voice-over showcases her internal transformation: now she gains pleasure out of wearing lingerie on a stage in front of a live audience and a televised audience. The participant becomes a better object of the gaze through her narcissism, her pleasure in her appearance. Now that the participant has been transformed, she is “confident” in her appearance, “empowered” by her new, plastic

body. The participant's confidence used to justify her display as an object: her narcissism masks the centrality of the sexualizing and evaluative gaze.

The judges also evaluate the participant's inner self. Each participant is asked a question about her transformation and her answer is scored by the judges. For instance, one judge asks Cindy if leaving her husband and children was worth it for four months.⁷⁶ Cindy responds that though difficult, it was worth it because she is now a happier wife and mom. Her answer justifies the show's existence and shows that she learned to put herself first while maintaining her primary identification through her familial roles. Each of the remaining participants explains that the show has helped her in a fundamental way and made her a better, more confident, and happier person. The show displays its power and value through each participant's testimony about her inner transformation. The inner self is again tied to appearance, for as each participant talks about herself before the program, her "before" face is shown, while the transformed inner self is represented by the present participant. It is only because they are now "beauty queens" that they can be confident and have a sense of efficacy. Each participant's answer is scored by the panel of judges; apparently, the inner self as well as the outer can be evaluated and ranked.

The final task for the three finalists is to explain why they deserve to be "crowned" the Swan. Rachel, the winner, says:

The reason I would like to be the swan is I believe that this program has given me so much. It's given me my self-esteem and a sense of who I am. And now I'd like to actually be able to give that back and teach everybody else that they matter, that they have a place in this world, and that they have to believe in themselves that they can bring out the best that they can

⁷⁶ Three months for her episode and one month to prepare for the pageant.

be because even though you might think it's a dream, they do come true and I'm living proof of that, standing right here today.⁷⁷

Rachel demonstrates the power of the show to transform the participant on the inside. Now that she looks beautiful, she values herself. Rachel altruistically wants to serve as a role model and to help others see that they matter. Beth announces that she found her “heart and soul” in the show and has a man whom she loves, while Cindy offers to represent all the women who have worked hard for a dream. The main themes of the show are echoed in these speeches: to be *given* self-worth by the show (the participant receives what the show gives); the achievement of the feminine gender role, through being beautiful, having and keeping a man; hard work; and finally, the fairy-tale figuring of *The Swan* as a “dream come true,” a dream that is imposed by the show but is enunciated by the participants themselves. Appearance is made the foundation of woman's self in these speeches, as the makeover enables the participants to value herself and to do good in the world.

Throughout the pageant, the image of the “before” self haunts the “after.” First, each participant's story is recapped in the pageant, chronicling her transformation from inadequate to beautiful and confident. Second, when each participant's entrance is announced, the image of the participant's “before” face, which is projected on a large screen, dissolves in light and then the screen lifts to reveal the “new” transformed participant, standing in her evening gown. The old self literally disappears, which allows for the emergence of the new self. Third, in the lingerie competition, each participant is joined by a seemingly real phantom of her “before” self clad in grey underwear. Here, the

⁷⁷ Rachel, “The Pageant: Part Two,” Season One, Episode Ten.

“before” image seems to take up space on the stage next to the participant, who is present, thus throwing the reality of both the “before” and “after” images into doubt. At the same time, the pairing of the “before” and “after” of the participant in her underwear emphasizes how deep, how real, how complete the transformation is. Fourth, the “before” self is shown again when the participant answers questions from the judges. This image represents her old self—miserable, insecure, and lost. The transformation is only visible through the “before” image, as the new self can only maintain its newness through the haunting of the “old” self: humiliation treads on the hem of triumph.

The “money-shot” of the pageant is the announcement of the winner. In the first season, Amanda announces that the winner is Rachel, whereupon confetti erupts, fireworks go off, Rachel smiles, laughs, and cries, and the audience applauds. In the midst of all of this, Rachel asks if her makeup is running, showing her awareness of herself as an object-to-be-looked-at even at the moment of her triumph. Like any beauty contestant winner, Rachel is crowned, given a scepter and a sash. Rachel tells her husband “I love you,” and the camera gives a reaction shot of husband, crying and smiling. The emotional moment is prolonged and excessive. We could be watching any pageant, as the makeover is collapsed into the competitive pageant. Rachel is crowned the ideal, the winner, better than all of the other women made over, the paragon of femininity.

The feminine ideal, as demonstrated through the pageant, is white. Although the first pageant features three women of color, only one woman of color makes it past the first cut. In fact, two out of the three women who are cut first are women of color. Of the three women of color in the pageant (representing the grand total of women of color

featured in the first season), two are Latinas and one is an Asian-Caucasian woman. No black women are featured in the first season and therefore, no black women are featured in the first-season pageant. In the second season, the pageant is entirely white. None of the three women of color (two Latinas and one black woman) featured in the second season make it to the pageant. Strikingly, the black woman, Kim, refuses to submit to the program and is portrayed as beyond the “help” of the show because of her resistance. The whiteness of the first pageant is somewhat obscured by the tokenistic inclusion of the three women of color and the inclusion of one woman of color in the final three, but the whiteness of the second pageant is absolute and horrifying. The second season pageant clearly shows the racism inherent in the show’s ideal of femininity. In both pageants, the woman chosen as “the Swan” is white, tall, slender, large-breasted, with plastic Anglo-Saxon features: a vision of the white beauty ideal.⁷⁸

Winning the pageant brings material as well as symbolic rewards. Unlike shows like *America’s Next Top Model*, in which the prizes are announced each week, the actual prizes are glossed over in the eight episodes leading up to the pageant. Only in the pageant does Amanda announce the “fabulous” prizes. In the first season, they are: a modeling contract with Champagne Trott talent agency; a designer wardrobe provided by: Tadashi, Saint Pucchi, and Claire’s Collection; paid vacations to Hawaii and Las Vegas; a \$50,000 scholarship from Western International University; a \$10,000 scholarship from Anthony Robbins Mastery University; a Jaguar; and \$50,000 in cash.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The only expert of color is Nely Galan, a Latina and the show’s creator. The show has a strong preference for Latinas over other women of color.

⁷⁹ The second season prizes include most of the first season prizes, minus the jaguar, substituting House of Thai dresses instead of the ones listed above, and adding a home

The winner takes all the prizes; everyone else gets a diamond necklace in compensation. In comparison to shows like *Survivor*, the cash prize is quite low. Most of the prizes are in kind. The prizes outline the ideal woman of the show. The modeling contract assumes that the best kind of a profession for a woman, the definition of feminine success, is to be a professional object-to-be-looked at. Whatever career ambitions the winner may have are ignored. Further, to truly be the feminine ideal, the winner must have a designer wardrobe, a collection of formal hyper-feminine dresses. Vacations are also part of the magic of becoming “the Swan”; the winner is rewarded with trips to Hawaii and Las Vegas. The prizes donated by the two “universities” mimic the scholarship function of the Miss America pageant and allow the show to pretend that it is also concerned with inner transformation. The prizes the winner consumes enables her to be feminine and renders her consumable herself.⁸⁰ These prizes groom the winner to be a woman who derives her confidence and her livelihood from her looks.

Where are they now?

The first episode of the second season shows the effects of the transformations in the participants’ lives, highlighting their recent feminine successes.⁸¹ As Amanda says,

gym, a supply of skin-care products, vacation to Thailand and a \$100,000 diamond necklace. The biggest difference is that there is no cash prize in the second season. Instead of a modeling contract, the winner gets a \$100,000 spokesperson contract with Nutrisystem, the diet used and promoted in the program. The winner is still an object-to-be-looked-at, but her status as a spokesperson is less than it would be as a model.

⁸⁰ Mary Ann Doane argues that consumption is essential to femininity: women consume to become (feminine) subjects, and are turned into objects as they are themselves consumed. *The Desire to Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 30.

⁸¹ We also learn that after the episode ended, the participants looked at themselves naked for hours, examining their new bodies. This speaks not only to narcissistic pleasure, but

“[t]hese women returned home as confident beauties after a lifetime of feeling like insecure ugly ducklings. And you just know their lives are never going to be the same again.”⁸² In other words, their makeovers are profound and have powerful effects on their lives. In this episode, the participants appear in better, tighter and brighter clothes and more makeup (in home interviews and on the show) in comparison to their appearance before the show. They appear to have moved up in class and look more feminine.⁸³ The show highlights the fact that three participants (all of whom were in relationships before the show) got engaged: their worth as women was proved by the fact that men wanted to marry them. Those who already had husbands already boasted of their new sexual intimacy. In addition to the stress on new and/or improved relationships, a particular kind of career was stressed: that of the model or actress. Christina, Cindy and Rachel (the winner) are working as models, while Tawnya is pursuing acting as a career. These women are the models of success for this show because now they are being paid to be objects-to-be-looked-at. Their new worth is reflected in their new careers. In both the private realm of relationships and the public realm of careers, the participants have learned to enjoy being objects of the gaze and have profited from their new position either as wives/girlfriends or as actresses/models. These successes demonstrate the ideal at the heart of this form of femininity: to judge oneself by one’s body, to enjoy being

also to the fact that transformation was *not* instantaneous; they had to reintegrate their new image into their notion of self over a period of time.

⁸² “Where are they now?” Season Two, Episode One. There is no corresponding follow-up feature for the participants of Season Two.

⁸³ On the show, they aren’t in pageant-drag, but are still dressed in a hyper-feminine manner.

looked at, and to be looked at. The perfect marriage of the public and private in this ideal is the trophy wife: an individual whose worth and career depend on her looks.

Conclusion

The narrative of *The Swan* works against its referent, Hans Christian Anderson's tale of the Ugly Duckling.⁸⁴ In Anderson's tale, the duckling leaves the ducks, grows up, and discovers that it is a beautiful swan. In *The Swan*, nature fails to produce the women as good (beautiful) women and the show must intervene. The participants do not discover their pre-existing beauty; rather they must submit and be made-over inside and out. Confessing their sadness, they are diagnosed as ugly, lacking femininity, and in need of intervention. Their confession serves as the ground of their objectification, as each participant is fragmented and compared to the fixed feminine ideal and found lacking. Entering the *Swan* program, they must cede their self-mastery and take up the position of penitent. They are severed from their image and therefore from governing it; obedience to the directives of the show replaces the interaction with the mirror. The pageant is used to shape their desire and to lead them to actively submit to the transformation. Through obedience, hard work and suffering, the participants do penance and are "saved," transformed from one state of being into another. For the price of repeating and altering their thoughts, bending their will to that of the show, enduring surgery, actively dieting and working out, they are promised a life of "happily ever after." Transformed inside and out, they can now take pleasure in their mirror image, which renders them confident,

⁸⁴ Deery notes this as well. Deery, 167. However, Deery compares the intervention on *The Swan* to American colonization and expansion, a taming of nature. This metaphor renders the participants totally passive and repeats sexist binaries.

happy, and better objects-to-be-looked-at. Having done penance, they can leave behind their sad histories, the sins of their bodies and souls, and be reborn as “new” feminine selves. Though only one wins the pageant, the others are promised happiness if they maintain their new, pure state. But having been taught to place their self-love on the state of their mortal decaying bodies, they must vigilantly work to keep up appearances. Salvation is never stable; they must continue to obey the dictates of the experts, submitting themselves to the fixed feminine ideal of the show, even after the show is over. Here, femininity spirals around itself: the pay-off for the continual work of femininity is narcissism and objectification, as self is defined through appearance. The show promises glamour, celebrity, feminine success and happiness for the price of constant submission to the inflexible feminine ideal.

Chapter Four: Learning to be a Man in *Queer Eye*

“I want to thank you guys for everything, everything that you have given me today, everything you have provided me with. You’ve really shown me what it is to be a man.”¹

Like the other makeover shows discussed in this dissertation, *Queer Eye (QE)* marries a program of self-improvement to a “gender project.”² Challenging older forms of hegemonic masculinity, *Queer Eye* attempts to win consent for a new ideal of masculinity through persuasive makeovers. Straight men are classified as deficient according to *QE*’s standard of masculinity; in the logic of the show, straight men must learn to care for themselves in order to truly become “men.” Like *What Not To Wear (WNTW)*, *QE* draws on discipline and the panopticon to reshape participants and, like *WNTW*, *QE* promotes neoliberalism, promising success in the public and the private through caring for the self. However, unlike *WNTW* and the female makeover shows, *QE* does not define the care of the self through the body, but through performance across a range of sites. *QE* foregoes mechanisms of transformation—such as the ritual apparatus of the gaze, confession, and self-revelation—which tie the body to the self. Instead, participants are made “better” through learning how to care for themselves in traditionally feminine domains such as dressing, grooming, appreciating interior design, cooking, communicating emotions, and hosting. Now that women are no longer required to be economically dependent on men, men can no longer rely on women to manage the domestic and emotional spheres. While *QE* challenges the *content* of masculinity, it maintains the *structure* of masculinity as an evaluation of performance by men (the Fab

¹ Chris L., 2004.

² The term “gender project” is Robert Connell’s. See Robert Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 72.

Five). John Berger's formulation that "men act and women appear"³ is rearticulated in *QE* through postfeminist neoliberalism: masculinity is still defined by performance, but the domain of performance is now the care of the self.

The Show

Queer Eye, originally titled *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* ran on Bravo from 2003 to the Fall of 2007. In each show, five gay men, Carson Kressley, Kyan Douglas, Thom Felicia, Jai Rodriguez, and Ted Allen, help a straight man to overcome a particular problem, stage an event, and alter his wardrobe, apartment and eating habits, supposedly all in one day.^{4,5} The *Title Sequence* shows the gay men improving straight men's life. Each episode begins with the five gay men a.k.a. the Fab Five discussing their subject as they drive to his apartment in their *SUV*. In *the Humiliation*, they invade the participant's home, mocking, and criticizing the participant's bathroom, kitchen, interior decoration, grooming, wardrobe, and taste. Having been defined as inadequate and deficient by the Fab Five, the participant is then schooled by each member of the Fab Five in his respective area of expertise, *learning* about clothing, decorating, grooming, cooking, and culture. As the participant shops, consumes, and learns, his apartment or home is made over. In *The Reveals*, the participant views his new home and shows off his new look.

³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 47.

⁴ This formula is broken towards the end in a special series of "Weight Loss" episodes, in which the Fab Five work with the participant over a period of months to motivate him to lose weight. There is also a "special" episode, the satiric "Straight Guy Pageant" which takes place in the last season.

⁵ In reality, it takes place over four days. Kylo-Patrick Hart, "We're Here, We're Queer -- and We're Better Than You: The Representational Superiority of Gay Men to Heterosexuals on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*," *Journal of Men's Studies* 12.3 (2004): 251.

The participant then *toasts* the Fab Five, thanking them for all of their help. For *the Event*, the Fab Five retreat to their loft to watch and critique the participant as he carries out his assigned tasks and hosts his event. The show ends with a *Tips* section, in which the Fab Five teach the spectator how to care for him/herself.

When I first began the work that would lead into this dissertation, I began by looking at *QE*. Unlike the other shows I have written about in this dissertation, *QE* garnered a great deal of critical attention because it violated the fundamental rule of the makeover show, which is that women are the subject and the audience for such shows. The fact that men were being objectified, made-over, and set up as a consumer market on *QE* was repeatedly commented on with shock by scholars.⁶ Many scholars grappled with the question of whether or not the show challenged hegemonic masculinity.^{7,8} In general,

⁶ For instance, Denis Allen argues that men are objectified and taught to consume in terms of the body on *QE*; he argues that this creates an equivalence between men and women. Denis Allen, "Making Over Masculinity: A Queer "I" for the Straight Guy," *Genders* 44 (2006). See also Jay Clarkson, "Contesting Masculinity's Makeover: Queer Eye, Consumer Masculinity, and "Straight-Acting" Gays," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29:3 (2005): 235-55.

⁷ For the argument that *QE* **transgresses** hegemonic masculinity see: Allen 2006; Clarkson 2005; Joanna Di Mattia, "The Gentle Art of Manscaping: Lessons in Hetero-Masculinity from the *Queer Eye* Guys" in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 133-150; Liz Morrish and Kathleen O'Mara, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: Confirming and Confounding Masculinity," *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004): 350-52; Kyra Pearson and Nina Reich, "*Queer Eye* Fairy Tale: Changing the World One Manicure at a Time," *Feminist Media Studies* 4:2 (2004): 229-231. For the argument that it **reinforces** hegemonic masculinity see: Beth Berila and Devika Choudhuri, "Metrosexuality the Middle Class Way: Exploring Race, Class, and Gender in Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," *Genders* 42 (2005): 1-33; E. Michele Ramsey and Gladys Santiago, "The Conflation of Male Homosexuality and Femininity in Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004): 353-55.

⁸ Much of the literature is concerned with whether the representation of gay men is positive or negative. This question is outside the purview of this chapter. On the "positive" side see: Hart, 242; Pearson and Reich, 229-231; and David Weiss,

the critical work on *QE* analyzes the show in a vacuum, without reference to other makeover shows. Like those writing on *QE*, I too was initially struck by the objectification of the straight man by gay men and the focus on the body in *QE*. However, returning to this show after writing on *10 Years Younger (10YY)*, *WNTW*, and *The Swan (TS)*, my own gaze has shifted. When compared with other makeover shows, it becomes clear that objectification and the body are not central to *QE*. Rather performance and the domains of performance set *QE* apart from other makeover shows. By analyzing *QE* out of context, these authors miss the central project of the show.

The Participants

Like participants on *WNTW*, those on *QE* are primarily able-bodied, middle-class, straight and white.⁹ Unlike the participants on all other makeover shows, they are nearly all men (a man is made over every episode, but on occasion, a woman may be included as part of a heterosexual couple.) In the first two seasons, the full title of the show was

“Constructing the Queer “I”: Performativity, Citationality, and Desire in Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” *Popular Communication* 3:2 (2005): 73-95. On the “negative” side see: Berila and Choudhuri, 31-33; Dana Heller, “Taking the Nation ‘From Drab to Fab’: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004): 347-50; Anna McCarthy, “Crab People from the Center of the Earth,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:1 (2004): 97-101; Jose Esteban Munoz, “Queer Minstrels for the Straight Eye: Race as Surplus in Gay TV,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:1 (2004): 101-02; Ramsey and Santiago, 352-355. For a nuanced article that acknowledges the commodification of gayness and the subversion of camp, see: Steven Cohan, “Queer Eye for the straight Guise: Camp, Postfeminism and the Fab Five’s Makeovers of Masculinity” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 176-200.

⁹ *QE* does feature some “exceptional” makeovers of disabled men. The practice on the show is “accommodation”—wider spaces for wheelchairs and special closets and shelving units that can be pulled out and down-- rather than “fixing” the disability (as on *TS*). The treatment of the disabled body and the reconfiguration of space around the disabled body in *QE* is worthy of analysis, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

“Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” reflecting a narrow focus on straight men (though one gay man was made over in this time period.) However, the name was changed to “Queer Eye” in the third season, justifying the inclusion of women (as part of a heterosexual couple) and gay men. The participants are mostly located near Manhattan, though *QE* has produced two special series—one set in Texas and the other in Las Vegas. Unlike *WNTW*, *10YY*, and *TS*, which only allow one mode of application, one can either apply to be on the show oneself or one can be nominated by another to be on the show. In return for participating in the program, the participant receives a newly furnished house, event-planning and funding for the event itself, a new wardrobe, various gifts, kitchen products, a haircut and grooming products. The participant also receives the expertise, companionship, and help of five expert gay men.

Masculinity

In order to map out *QE*'s challenge to hegemonic masculinity, it is necessary to first provide a brief discussion of the theory, content and history of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is normative; it sets the standard of what it is to be a man, “*the way for men to think and live.*”¹⁰ Hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity of the normate. As Kimmel argues, “the masculinity that defines white, middle-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting.”¹¹

Hegemonic masculinity is defined through its hierarchical relationship to subaltern,

¹⁰ Robert Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19: 6 (2005): 845.

¹¹ Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity and Homophobia” in *Feminism & Masculinities*, ed. Peter Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184.

resistant and alternative masculinities. As Connell and Messerschmidt argue, hegemonic masculinity may draw upon and rearticulate aspects of non-hegemonic masculinities in the service of preserving hegemony; hegemonic masculinity is not static or fixed, but the product of contestation and consent.

When considered on a theoretical level, hegemonic masculinity tends to be described in static and ahistorical ways, as a reified ideal. Although I historicize U.S. masculinity below, I first sketch out some of the properties that were ascribed to hegemonic masculinity by theorists in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. First, and primarily, hegemonic masculinity is defined through its exclusion and abjection of femininity and gay men. As Michael Kimmel argues, “[w]hatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means ‘not being like women.’”¹² In a similar move of abjection and opposition, “[g]ayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity...”¹³ In this ideology then, “[r]eal’ men are intrinsically heterosexual; gay men therefore, are not real men.”¹⁴ In other words, as Robert Brannon argues, masculinity means “no sissy stuff,” where “sissyness” refers to both gay men and women.¹⁵

¹² Kimmel 2004, 185.

¹³ Connell 2005, 78.

¹⁴ Gary Kinsman, “Men Loving Men: The Challenge of Gay Liberation” in *Feminism & Masculinities*, ed. Peter Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166.

¹⁵ Robert Brannon, “The Male Sex Role: our Culture’s Blueprint of Manhood and What It’s Done for Us Lately” in *The Forty-nine Percent Majority*, ed. D. David and R. Brannon (New York: Random House, 1976), 14. See also Emmanuel Reynaud, “Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity” in *Feminism & Masculinities*, ed. Peter Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 136-148; Lynn Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 123; Kimmel 2004, 185; John Stoltenberg, “Toward Gender Justice” in *Feminism & Masculinities*, ed. Peter Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 41-49.

Second, the content ascribed to hegemonic masculinity is based on oppositional binaries which follow from the dichotomy generated between straight men and women/gay men. As Reynaud argues, man “wants to be strength, rationality and transcendence, whereas woman is weakness, irrationality and immanence.”¹⁶ Brannon’s remaining three aspects of hegemonic masculinity, “the Big Wheel, the Sturdy Oak, and Give ‘Em Hell,”¹⁷ represent masculine traits defined in opposition to feminine traits. “The Big Wheel” represents success in the public sphere (like Kimmel’s marketplace masculinity, discussed below), which is based on women’s exclusion from the public sphere. “The Sturdy Oak” refers to confidence and control over emotion: where women (and gay men) are weak and show emotion, men do not. Finally, “Give ‘Em Hell” refers to a masculine aggressiveness defined in opposition to feminine (and gay male) passivity. In addition to these binaries, it is possible to list many more binary pairs that would generate the content of masculinity and femininity, such as men produce and women consume; men are strong and women are weak; men are dominant and women are submissive, and so on.¹⁸ This form of ideal masculinity still haunts the collective image of the American masculine ideal.

However, hegemonic masculinity is not static, but responds to changes in economic, political, and social structures.¹⁹ According to Michael Kimmel, our notion of ideal masculinity is rooted in the “Self Made Man,” born in the American Revolution and

¹⁶ Reynaud, 142.

¹⁷ Brannon, 14.

¹⁸ For a feminist analysis of these modernist binaries see Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁹ In other words, as Connell argues, changes in power relations directly affect hegemonic masculinity. Connell, 90.

enabled by the rise of capitalism, and the corresponding construction of separate spheres in the 19th century.²⁰ This new masculinity was defined by “success in the market, individual achievement, mobility, wealth,” as opposed to land-ownership and craftsmanship.²¹ For Kimmel, the “Self Made Man...[is] born anxious and insecure”²² for “[n]ow manhood had to be proved.”²³ Susan Bordo also locates significant changes in masculinity and femininity in the 19th century.²⁴ Bordo speculates that the divergence of men’s and women’s clothing—men’s clothing became “honest, comfortable, and utilitarian” and women’s clothing became “‘frivolous’ and ‘deceptive,’²⁵—“anticipate[s] the emergence of the middle class and the nineteenth-century development of distinctively separate spheres for men and women within it.”²⁶ Men’s clothing signified action in the public sphere, whereas women’s clothing signified consumption in the private sphere. Bordo claims that this divergence is where the idea that “men act and women appear” is “written” into gender.²⁷ Both Bordo and Kimmel point to a shift in the 19th century in which masculinity becomes defined through the public sphere, the market.

²⁰ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 9.

²¹ Kimmel 1996, 23. According to Kimmel, prior to the American Revolution, two forms of masculinity were dominant: the Heroic Artisan and the Genteel Patriarch. For Kimmel, the American Revolution made the new man possible.

²² Kimmel 1996, 9.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Lois Banner likewise argues that beauty and adornment became the province women with industrialization in the 19th century. *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²⁵ Anne Hollander as quoted in Susan Bordo, *The Male Body* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999), 202.

²⁶ Bordo, 202.

²⁷ Bordo, 202.

Though hegemonic masculinity is historically defined through the public sphere, the gendered definition of public and private spheres has been under attack since the 1960s. As Kimmel argues, the definition of manhood through the marketplace began to fall apart in the 1960s, as “[t]ogether feminism, black liberation, and gay liberation provided a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood—against an other who was excluded from full humanity by being excluded from those places where men were real men.”²⁸ Similarly, as women moved into work previously defined as “masculine,” men could no longer define themselves as men based on their masculine careers.²⁹ Men began “to search for affirmation and identity outside the workplace, in the realm of consumption.”³⁰ These economic, political, and social shifts of the 1960s set the stage for upheavals, contestation, and transformations in hegemonic masculinity for the next forty years.

In the 1990s and the contemporary period, hegemonic masculinity arguably shifted away from the definition of manhood through the marketplace.³¹ However, the extent of and the reasons for this shift are debated. For Kimmel, the transformation of the workplace led men to define themselves outside the workplace and, like women, to define themselves through working out and body-oriented consumption. Bordo and Susan Alexander find similar changes in modern hegemonic masculinity, but link them to the

²⁸ Kimmel 1996, 280.

²⁹ See also Segal, 132.

³⁰ Kimmel 1996, 264. In addition to consumption, Kimmel argues that men sought to redefine masculinity through men’s liberation, the mythopoetic movement, and men’s lodges.

³¹ Steven Cohan locates capitalism’s discovery of men as a market a bit earlier than Bordo, tracing it to the (sexually suspect) New Man of the 1980s, this version of masculinity never became hegemonic. Cohan, 181.

workings of consumer capitalism, rather than to the erosion of separate spheres. Bordo argues that men have become subject to and objectified by the cultural gaze. Bordo argues that the distinction that “men act and women appear”³² is fading because both men and women must consume and work on their bodies in order to be seen as disciplined and (she implies) be successful.³³ The success of targeting men as objects of the gaze and therefore as consumers is evidenced by a surge in men’s “vanity” consumer spending, such as plastic surgery, between 1992 and 2003.³⁴ Alexander takes Bordo’s argument further, arguing that “[m]asculinity is no longer defined by what a man produces, as in Kimmel’s discussion of Marketplace Manhood, but instead by what a man consumes.”³⁵ For Alexander, masculinity and femininity are now equivalent; both are defined by consumption for the sake of consumption. For Alexander, men do not dress well to do well in their careers, but simply for themselves.

In the new set of power relations (the political, economic, and cultural changes described above), which can be designated *postfeminist neoliberalism*,³⁶ masculinity has shifted even while Brannon’s notion of hegemonic masculinity maintains a hold on our collective imagination. Women are now legitimate actors in the public sphere, and men

³² Berger, 47.

³³ Bordo 220-221.

³⁴ Naomi Wolf argues that there has been a significant increase in male “vanity” spending in the U.S. between 1992 and 2002. *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 7-8. Toby Miller notes distinct increase in male vanity spending between 1996 and 2003. Toby Miller, “Metrosexuality: See the Bright Light of Commodification Shine! Watch Yanqui Masculinity Made Over!” in *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 110-112.

³⁵ Susan Alexander, “Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinity in Men’s Health magazine,” *Sociological Perspectives* 46:4 (2003): 551.

³⁶ Here, I mean post-feminist only in the sense that the second-wave occurred in the past and that we live in a world shaped by second-wave feminism.

are now legitimate actors in the private sphere; the gendered definition of the spheres no longer holds true. The workplace has become insecure and class mobility—or even maintenance—is no longer assured in these times of deregulation, privatization, and global capitalism. In this climate of anxiety and competition, neoliberalism and consumer capitalism both promise that one can survive and get ahead if one takes responsibility for oneself through taking care of oneself. Against Alexander, I argue that masculinity is *not* currently defined through consumption as opposed to production, but that neoliberal masculinity and neoliberal femininity converge in the articulation of consumption with production. As Bordo implies and as I discuss with regard to *WNTW*,³⁷ one must look the part to get the part; one must look successful to become successful. The neoliberal global economy has the effect of bringing masculinity and femininity closer together through the ideal of self-enterprising individuals, where the self is just another product to be marketed.³⁸ Despite this seeming convergence, there are, as we will see, still differences between neoliberal masculinity and femininity. The definition of “the care of the self” is gendered; against Bordo and Alexander, I argue that the distinction that “men act and women appear” still operates, though differently than it did in the 19th and early 20th centuries.³⁹ Women’s “self” is evaluated through the body, while men’s “self” is evaluated through *performance* across a range of activities (though these activities have

³⁷ Chapter One, this dissertation.

³⁸ Angela McRobbie’s description of the “post-feminist self” is remarkably like that of the neoliberal self, supporting the idea of a convergence in normative femininity and neoliberalism. See Angela McRobbie, “Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 27-39 and Chapter One in this dissertation.

³⁹ Bordo 1999.

changed). Although hegemonic masculinity has shifted and is shifting, some of the aspects of the older form of hegemonic masculinity still hold sway. Indeed, I would argue that hegemonic masculinity is in a state of flux, caught between a reified cultural ideal and changing economic, political and social realities.

QE is an important site in the struggle over hegemonic masculinity. Culture is a key arena for the formation of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell argues, “[p]art of the struggle for hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes: setting standards, claiming popular assent, and discrediting those who fall short. The production of exemplary masculinities is thus integral to the politics of hegemonic masculinity.”⁴⁰ *QE* follows this mode of disciplining masculinity by “setting standards,” “claiming popular assent,” and “discrediting those who fall short.” *QE* challenges an older form of hegemonic masculinity by rearticulating masculinity through neoliberalism and elements of “gay” masculinity or femininity for men. *QE* sets out a new ideal of masculinity, a sophisticated, consuming, and caring masculinity, and attempts to persuade spectators that this is *the* ideal masculinity. While Connell and Messerschmidt argue that elements of gay masculinity have *not* been taken up by hegemonic masculinity, *QE* highlights an important area of contestation. Whether or not *QE*’s version of neoliberal masculinity has successfully become hegemonic, the popularity of the show demonstrates that such a version of masculinity is now thinkable.

Why Gay Men?

⁴⁰ Connell, 214.

The choice of gay men as the instruments of the makeover for straight men is overdetermined. First, gay men are stereotyped as cultured consumers. Second, gay men, unlike women, are stereotyped as actively gazing at men, possessing the power of the look. Third, under the codes of hegemonic masculinity only men can validate another man's masculinity. Fourth, gay men are stereotyped as feminine in particular ways, granting them an expertise which straight men lack. Finally, gay men are often portrayed as "helper figures" for straight people. Adding up these stereotypes, gay men are seen to possess a masculine authority denied to women and a feminine expertise denied to straight men.

First, gay men are stereotyped as exemplary consumers. Blachford argues that "[g]ay men are 'better' consumers because of their higher disposable income and fewer commitments."⁴¹ In other words, gay men are imagined to be free to pursue culture and consumption because (as this fantasy goes) they are not married and do not have children. Gay men are also "better" consumers because they are stylish and set the trends for straight people.⁴² As Gustavus Stadler points out, there is a long "Anglo-American tradition of cultural homophilia" which gay men are imagined as tasteful, witty, and cultured.⁴³ As the official website for "Queer Eye" claims of its agents, "They are the Fab Five: an elite team of gay men dedicated to extolling the simple virtues of style, taste and

⁴¹ Gregg Blachford, "Male Dominance and the Gay World" in *The Making Of The Modern Homosexual*, ed. Kenneth Plummer (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), 208.

⁴² Blachford, 208; Segal, 155.

⁴³ Gustavus T. Stadler, "Queer Guy for the Straight 'I'," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:1 (2004): 109.

class.”⁴⁴ Rather than being seen as traitors to masculinity or failed men, the Fab Five are portrayed as cultural leaders and tasteful consumers.

Second, gay men have the power of the look. In one sense, gay men can look at and sexually objectify men in a way that a straight man is not supposed (or trained) to do. The “queer eye” of *QE* is precisely the gay male gaze at the straight guy.⁴⁵ As Allen argues with regard to *QE*, straight men learn to perceive themselves as objects through the gay male gaze.⁴⁶ Indeed, as Bordo argues with regard to clothing and fragrance ads, the media which teach men to see themselves as objects rely on gay male practices of objectifying and stylizing the body.⁴⁷ The gay “look” then structures both the representation of the “ideal” man and the kind of spectatorship associated with the representation. Gay men, then, are uniquely empowered to objectify straight men and teach them to see themselves as desirable objects.

In the another sense of the look, gay men are empowered to survey men in a way that women are not. As Kimmel argues,

We [men] are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance.⁴⁸

Here, Kimmel is clearly speaking of straight men. *QE* repudiates hegemonic masculinity by endowing gay men with the power to look at and not just objectify men, but also judge and reform their masculinity. On the other hand, *QE* also works within patriarchy by

⁴⁴ http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye, accessed March 2005. This description is no longer on the website (July 2008).

⁴⁵ Allen, 14.

⁴⁶ Allen, 14.

⁴⁷ Bordo 1999.

⁴⁸ Kimmel 2004, 186.

granting this power to survey masculinity only to gay men. As Sasha Torres argues, “...only men can impart these lessons; that it is crucial that the Fab Five are gay *men* as that they are *gay men*.”⁴⁹ As others have noted, women are decisively written out by *QE*, their desires supposedly ventriloquized by the Fab Five.⁵⁰ In giving gay men the power to survey, judge and reform masculinity, *QE* works against and within hegemonic masculinity.

Fourth, if, as Connell argues, hegemonic masculinity is defined through its abjection of femininity and the projection of that femininity onto gay men, then gay men are like women without being women.⁵¹ Indeed, E. Michele Ramsey and Gladys Santiago argue that the Fab Five are rendered stereotypically feminine on *QE*.⁵² Stereotypical femininity is central to the gifts that gay men can give on this show: the Fab Five can teach the straight man to be concerned with his body, to take pleasure in the body, both actively (styling one’s hair) and receptively (a facial), to consume products, to enjoy the look of a well-designed interior, to cook for others, to connect with others, to communicate and express emotions, to receive gifts, and to be cared for. As Segal argues, “the place where male homosexuality is likely to have its most lasting effect on conventions of masculinity is in its unambiguous affirmation of sexuality—of the pleasures of the body, every aspect of it, as a realm of the senses to be enjoyed.”⁵³ The

⁴⁹ Sasha Torres, “Why Can’t Johnny Shave?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:1 (2004): 96.

⁵⁰ Torres, 96; Cohan, 181; Morrish and O’Mara, 352.

⁵¹ Connell, 78.

⁵² Ramsey and Santiago, 353-355. See also: Michaela Meyer and Jennifer M. Kelley, “Queering the Eye? The Politics of Gay White Men and Gender (in)Visibility,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4.2 (2004): 214-17. Others have disputed this charge. See Weiss, 89-90.

⁵³ Segal, 156.

“softer” pleasures—the pleasures of cooking and eating, the pleasure in sitting on a good, soft couch, the pleasures of being touched and cared for physically—these are the pleasures that the Fab Five introduce their participants to. Everything hegemonic masculinity has cast out is reclaimed through the work of the Fab Five. Gay men can restore to masculinity what it has lost; gay men have the power to make straight men whole again. They are the hinge between masculinity and femininity—masculine enough to look and judge manhood, feminine enough to partake of those things cast out of hegemonic masculinity.⁵⁴

Finally, gay men are generally represented as “helper figures.” As Helene Shuggart argues “gay characters are presented devoid of gay social and political contexts” and “their presence is used as a catalyst for heterosexual characters’ growth and understanding.”⁵⁵ In other words, gay men serve as a different version of the “magical negro” for privileged (white, straight) people.⁵⁶ As with people of color, representation as “helper figures” renders gay men acceptable and unthreatening because they exist only to make straight people’s lives better. *QE* follows this mode of representation; the Fab Five are “helper figures,”⁵⁷ specifically Eros figures. Gay men are portrayed as “superior” to both straight men and women,⁵⁸ but this “superiority” is used only to make straight men’s lives better. As a result, queerness is commodified, privatized and stripped of its political

⁵⁴ Cohan too argues that gay men straddle masculinity and femininity. Cohan, 181.

⁵⁵ Helene Shuggart, “Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Culture,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20:1 (March, 2003): 69.

⁵⁶ Krin Gabbard, *Black Magic* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Ramsey and Santiago, 354; Cohan, 180.

⁵⁸ Hart, 250.

meaning in *Queer Eye*.⁵⁹ In enabling heterosexual love and teaching straight men how to care for themselves, the gay men of the Fab Five are themselves turned into commodities to be consumed. Thanks to their association with culture and consumption, the objectification of men, femininity, and bodily pleasure, gay men are made lifestyle experts, given the power to transform men through the makeover, even as sexuality and politics are stripped from the representation of the Fab Five as gay men.⁶⁰

Neoliberalism

Like *WNTW*, *QE* relies on and promotes the neoliberal subject.⁶¹ Like *WNTW*, it promises that taking care of the self will lead to success in both the public and private spheres. While the “self” in *WNTW* is defined primarily through the body-as-constructed-by-clothes, the “self” of *QE* is not tied to the body, but is articulated across a range of sites and in relationships. On *QE* one must care for the self in terms defined by each member of the Fab Five’s area of expertise—the home, cooking, clothing, grooming, and “culture.” As Miller argues, “[*QE*] indicates the spread of self-fashioning as a requirement of personal and professional achievement through the U.S. middle-class

⁵⁹ Paul Allatson, “*Queer Eye*’s primping and Pimping for Empire *et al.*,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4:2 (2004): 208-211; Berila and Choudhuri; Jaap Kooijman, “They’re Here, They’re Queer, and Straight America Loves It,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:1 (2004): 106-09; McCarthy, 98-100; Meyer and Kelley, 214-217; Miller 2006, 115-116; Munoz, 102.

⁶⁰ Cohan, 179-180; Mark Gallagher, “Queer Eye for the Heterosexual Couple,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4:2 (2004): 223-26; Kooijman 107; McCarthy, 98-100; Ramsey and Santiago, 354.

⁶¹ Miller 2006, 115-117; McCarthy, 98-100; Munoz, 102. Further, as Miller argues, *QE* is the product of neoliberal deregulation and exemplifies neoliberal relations of production—it is cheap to produce thanks to contingent, flexible labor.

labor force.”⁶² That is, to do well at work, the participant must care for himself. While hegemonic masculinity depends on and disavows the work of devalued femininity, under *QE* the male participant becomes a man through learning to do “women’s work,” that is, the labor of the private sphere.⁶³ Caring for the self in these terms renders a man a more attractive mate to women, making him more competitive in the private sphere. In accordance with the neoliberal project, *QE* promotes marriage.⁶⁴ Ambition in the public and the private spheres is signified and enabled by the care of the self. In order to become a man, the participant must care for himself, do well at work and marry: *QE* defines masculinity through neoliberalism.

The Title Sequence

QE’s (original) title sequence draws on comic book iconography in a playful manner, restaging the spectacle of heroic masculinity around gay men. Defined as “Gay” by a helpful street sign, each member of the Fab Five is introduced in his “native” environment. For instance, Kyan is shown styling hair in a salon and is labeled as “Kyan Douglas, Grooming.” Like the Green Lantern, each member of the Fab Five is defined by and identified with his tools, such as a paintbrush for Thom. Each man is interrupted in his work by his phone ringing, hailed by the *QE* logo on the phone. A *QE* spotlight recalls the bat-signal from Batman, as does the repetition of the flashing “*QE*” logo on the phones. This iconography defines the situation as a call for heroic intervention:

⁶² Miller, 116.

⁶³ The demand that men change in the private goes against postfeminist ideology. See Bonnie Dow, *Prime Time Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 103.

⁶⁴ McCarthy, 98-99. Jose Munoz argues that the show “privatizes” and depoliticizes gayness in accordance with neoliberalism. Munoz, 102.

someone is in trouble and urgently needs the help of the “Fab Five.”⁶⁵ As they cross from “Gay” street to “Straight” street, they enter a boring world of black and white and badly dressed men. These signs link the expertise of each of the Fab Five to their sexual orientation and the bland lives of straight men to theirs. Together, the Fab Five have the power to transform and colorize the men and the city. In drawing on comic book iconography, the show “butches it up”: it calls on a language of masculinity and heroics, even while it sends up this masculinity through its camp appropriation. Rather than facing comic-book villains, the Fab Five face ugliness, dullness, colorlessness; it is their job to make things brighter, colorful, and “better.” As the theme song claims. “all things just keep getting better.” This sequence positions gay men as the saviors of (urban) straight men, whose lives are expanded for the better through their expert intervention.

The SUV

In the introductory scene of the show, the Fab Five are shown driving in their black SUV to the straight man’s house. As they drive, they (and we) learn about the straight man they will makeover. The Fab Five take turns reading aloud about and commenting on the straight man and his situation. For example, Jim M. is a widower with three kids who has stopped going out, caring for himself, or taking care of his kids. His mother-in-law lives with him and the kids and sleeps on the floor. He has not cut his hair since his wife died. The Fab Five agree that he needs to learn to live again (and get a haircut.) Jim must become a man (again) by taking up the responsibilities of manhood: caring for himself and his children. Most often, the issue is about moving forward with a

⁶⁵ The term superheroes is also used to describe the Fab Five by Di Mattia, 136 and Hart, 249-250.

heterosexual relationship. Other situations are family and work oriented. In every case, the Fab Five create a goal and a plan for the makeover—what they will do to/for him and what he will do (go on a date, host a party, propose to his girlfriend). This scene is often intercut with very short clips of the straight man himself, corroborating the information given in the briefing. This short scene establishes the problem and the expert solution.

However, this scene is important because of what it does not do. It takes the place of other forms of “learning about the participant” such as watching and listening to a confession (*TS*), orchestrating spectacle (*IOYY*) and watching secretly filmed footage of the participant (*WNTW*). In other words, the participant is removed from the diagnosis of his problem. He is not broken down in confession; his appearance may be spoken of but it is not the fixed object of the camera’s eye. The Fab Five learn about the participant not through the participant’s participation, but through information given to them by the show; they become experts on the participant by proxy. Clearly information has been gathered and the presentation of this information bespeaks surveillance and investigation; but that surveillance and investigation is erased in the narrative. The self of the participant is protected by this removal; he is not objectified or broken down the way female participants are on other shows.

The Humiliation

In the next scene, the Fab Five arrive at the straight guy’s home and there they directly establish the participant as pitiful, inadequate, and incompetent.⁶⁶ The Fab Five

⁶⁶ While this is the general pattern, there are exceptions. Some straight men are constructed as both “heroic” and in need of help. Most (but not all) of the “heroic” men are men of color—Lee F., the “world’s best dad”; Hector D, a Latino Iraq war vet who survived a horrific ordeal; and Steve, a white firefighter who was horribly burned. To be

literally tear through the participant's house, making fun of unmade beds and gross sheets, nasty sinks and fridges full of dishes, disgusting bathrooms, anything to do with sex like used condoms or porn tapes, bad clothes, ugly furniture or decorations, and so on. As Thom says to Joe H., "I think we're fully in agreement. That your house is just kind of lame and pitiful. And the fish. Can we kill it? It looks like a cesspool of filth in your dining room. You eat next to that?"⁶⁷ While Stadler argues that the straight guy's home is "a place that heterosexuality has made abject,"⁶⁸ I argue that the grossness of the home is not simply about heterosexuality, but explicitly tied to hegemonic masculinity: straight men are incapable of taking care of themselves, their possessions, or their home. As Kyra Pearson and Nina Reich argue, on *QE*, the straight men are constructed as "knuckle-dragging Neanderthals" who lack "sophistication" and "maturity."⁶⁹ The humiliation scene in particular demonstrates what Sasha Torres calls the straight guys' "abject incompetence in the care of the self,"⁷⁰ and the corresponding necessity of the makeover.

While the home is the focus of the critique, the participant himself is also examined and evaluated by the Fab Five. They comment on physical features like acne, the participant's unattractive nude body, thinning hair, "country toes," or an over-grown

heroic does not exempt one from mocking and ridicule, but it protects the straight man from the implication that he is **generally** inadequate and incompetent. These narratives partake of the sentimental politics of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," in which the deserving are gratefully helped.

⁶⁷ Thom in Joe H, 2005.

⁶⁸ Stadler, 109.

⁶⁹ Pearson and Reich, 229-230.

⁷⁰ Torres, 96.

beard.⁷¹ In each case, the “problem” is something the straight man has enabled by failing to properly care for himself. As Rebecca says with regard to her father Jim, he needs to “learn how to take care of himself. Sometimes he lets himself go because he’s more worried about other people.”⁷² In addition to physical issues, each member of the Fab Five talks briefly with the participant about his feelings around the problem/event of the episode. For instance, Steve, a firefighter, held a party to thank his family and friends for helping him through the ordeal but literally could not make his planned speech. These men need the help of the Fab Five because they cannot take care of themselves.

While this scene demonstrates the necessity of the makeover, it is very different from similar “humiliation” scenes in *WNTW*, *IOYY*, and *TS*, in that it does not tightly link the participant’s inadequacy to his body/self. First, unlike all the other makeovers shows discussed in this dissertation, *QE* does *not* make use of a ritualized technical gaze to constitute the body as an analyzable object. While the Fab Five briefly examine the participant’s body and may comment on the state of his haircut, beard, hands, or toes, they do not make the body the focus of the humiliation through a ritualized apparatus of viewing. The participant’s body is only examined in passing, while most of the critique is focused on the straight guy’s domicile and living conditions. Second, and closely related, unlike the other makeover shows discussed in this dissertation, *QE* never denies or erases the participant’s subjectivity. In turning the participant into a body to be analyzed,

⁷¹ However, unlike the others (with the occasional exception of Kyan), Carson does not react with horror to the abject; he changes diapers with élan, pragmatically examines “gross” features like the “country toes,” strips naked when he finds his host, Jim, naked, and embraces him without repugnance (while the others react with horror to Jim’s unattractive nude body.) Carson is compassionate to people whom the others consider abject.

⁷² James B., 2005.

WNTW, *10YY*, and *The Swan* reduce the participant to an object. In contrast, while the Fab Five tease and mock the straight guy for his failure to care for himself, they do not turn him into an object.

Third, unlike *WNTW*, *10YY*, or *TS*, *QE* does not compel the participant to agree that his problems stem from a flaw in his self.⁷³ Rather, when the straight guy does discuss his problems with the Fab Five, it takes place in short snippets that attempt to divine his feelings. These short dialogues do *not* build into an indictment of the participant's self. On *QE*, the participant's failure to care for himself is portrayed as evidence of his traditional masculinity, not constituted as a flaw in his self. Most of the time, the participant bemusedly agrees with the Fab Five's critique, because he has not invested his selfhood in the object of the critique. Unlike the female-oriented makeover shows, on *QE* the critique does *not* build to an emotional breakdown that acknowledges a deep flaw in the self; rather, the straight guy accepts the critique in a coolly detached masculine manner. He is not required to admit that his failure to care for himself springs from a flaw in his self, because his failure to care for himself is marked as evidence of straight masculinity. While Di Mattia argues that the participants are marked as "deviant" on *QE*,⁷⁴ the expectation of the show is that *all* straight men are terrible slobs incapable of caring for themselves; the problem is not with the participants, but with hegemonic masculinity itself.

⁷³ In fact, like *WNTW*, *QE* makes use of the testimony of the participant's friends and family to indict the participant. On *QE*, the speakers agree that the straight guy does not dress well, take care of his apartment or treat his girlfriend romantically. Unlike *WNTW*, the straight guy is not required to view his friends' critique.

⁷⁴ Di Mattia, 144.

Fourth, the campiness of the Fab Five detracts from the force of the critique and turns the focus back to the Fab Five, rather than the participant. The seriousness of the critique is defused by the manner in which it is delivered and the surrounding playful scenes. When the Fab Five visit Danny Kastner's home, Thom dances in white platform heels with goldfish in the heels, while Ted shoots a foam gun at various people and Jai drapes a cloth around his head. Unlike the serious hosts of female oriented makeover shows, the Fab Five camp it up.⁷⁵ The focus is shifted from the participant as the "object of hilarity"⁷⁶ to the Fab Five through their campy antics; both become objects of hilarity. The straight guy's humiliation is softened by both the delivery and the focus on the playful men who deliver it.⁷⁷

In all, *QE*'s scene of humiliation proves the participant's "need" for the makeover without tying it to a flaw in the participant's self. The participant's self is not tied to his body in this scene. Instead, the Fab Five's critique is defused over his taste, kitchen, grooming products, cultural objects, as well as his appearance. Unlike the female-oriented makeover shows, the Fab Five do not use ritualized techniques to objectify the participant, deny the participant's subjectivity, or emotionally break down the participant. As *QE* says of itself, it is a "make better" show rather than a "makeover" show; the participant is not required to reform his self because the problem is not located in the participant's body/ self.

⁷⁵ For an analysis of the politics of camp in *QE* see Cohan, 176-200.

⁷⁶ Karen Tongson, "White Men Are Hysterical," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10:4 (2004): 631.

⁷⁷ The only way in which this scene could be truly humiliating is if the straight man were homophobic (as they very rarely are.) If you are afraid of being the object of the gay male gaze or even being around gay men, it would be particularly humiliating and frightening to be judged by that which you fear and loathe.

Learning

Though the order and exact activities vary, the makeover itself requires that each member of the Fab Five spend one-on-one time with the participant and teach him something about his particular specialty. The participant is made-over primarily through *learning* about stereotypically “feminine” activities such as clothing, grooming, interior decorating, food, and ‘culture’ (including the expression of emotion.) The purpose of the neoliberal makeover is to discipline and “educate” the participant so that he can care for himself (according to the show’s standard of masculinity). While the participants are “educated” and are disciplined through learning “how-to” dress, cook, shave, and so on, they are also transformed through the emotional experience of being cared for by the Fab Five.⁷⁸ After a “single day’s” worth of experience, having been re-parented by the Fab Five, the participant learns to care for himself and become a “new” man.

Carson teaches the straight guy how to dress. Like Mark of *IOYY*, Carson takes the straight man to a particular store ostensibly because the store reflects some aspect of the participant’s identity. Carson picks out various outfits for the straight guy to try on, and, as on *IOYY* and *WNTW*, explains his choices, telling the participant why and how he should wear certain kinds of clothes. For instance, Carson explains to a shorter man that vertical stripes will make him look taller and to a thin man, that horizontal stripes will give the appearance of bulk. Carson fragments, analyzes and reforms the participant’s body through clothing. However, Carson’s discussion about clothing is fairly short and is given little narrative time, as is the case *IOYY*. While the participants of *WNTW* must

⁷⁸ Di Mattia also highlights the emotional connection between the Fab Five and the straight guy. Di Mattia, 134.

shop for clothes under the direction of Stacy and Clinton, the participant of *QE* shops briefly under Carson's direction, leaving Carson to do most of the shopping. While the participant's body is analyzed and fragmented in this scene, it takes up little narrative time and the participant is not required to demonstrate his understanding or agreement. The mirror is rarely used, and when it is, it is downplayed in the narrative. The focus of this scene is *not* on changing how the participant sees his body in clothes (as it is on *WNTW*), but on Carson's sexualization of the straight guy.

While the gay male gaze is used to produce better consumers in *QE*, it is also implicated in the most transgressive element of the show: the sexualization of the straight man. For instance, while trying on clothes, Ralph remarks that he likes his clothes. Carson replies "Sexy! Ohmygod. I almost want to make out with you!" Carson steps closer to Ralph and looks up at him. "Almost?" Ralph asks coquettishly. "Are you feeling the same way?" Carson responds flirtatiously. "Yeah, Almost" Ralph replies. "Oh God!" Carson says as he moves in to kiss Ralph on the cheek and hug him, before pulling away and being more "professional."⁷⁹ Unlike other participants, Ralph assents to the flirtation and plays with being the sexual object of the gay male gaze. Usually the straight man is not so receptive to Carson's flirting and the encounter does not progress.⁸⁰ The level of flirtation is guided by the straight man, but the move to objectify and flirt with him is a part of every episode (admittedly more in some episodes than others).⁸¹ These flirtatious

⁷⁹ Ralph S., 2004.

⁸⁰ The question of whether or not this interaction is "transgressive" is beyond the scope of this paper. Allen and Gallagher all independently argue that this gaze is not transgressive, while Di Mattia argues that it is transgressive.

⁸¹ Ironically, it is in these interactions where "gayness" is performed in the show; as others have noted, any real portrayal of gay sexuality is banished. Even when the

comments construct the straight guy as the sexual object of the gaze and give him the chance to perform for it. The flirtation also trains the spectator to see and evaluate the straight man in through that lens. As Dennis Allen argues, the objectification of the straight man inserts him into commodity logic—he becomes both a consumer and a commodity.⁸² The audience and the straight guy are taught that one must consume to be attractive. However, this moment of gay objectification-commodification is brief. In *QE*, the gay male gaze is “privileged” to remake the straight man for the appreciation of a woman.⁸³

Kyan teaches the participant about grooming and guides him through a grooming ritual. Unlike Thom, Ted, and Carson, Kyan engages with the participant on an emotional level. This scene is not simply about learning how to groom oneself and what to consume, but about the sensuous pleasure of being cared for and, like the other “learning” scenes, becoming a man. Sensual bodily pleasure and femininity are articulated together in dominant culture. As John B. says during his relaxing facial, “I always thought this stuff was like girl’s stuff you know.”⁸⁴ Kyan asks John B. what the guys in Virginia would say and John B. responds “I can’t repeat what they’d probably say. This is definitely what they all need, you know... everybody needs this.”⁸⁵ As a gay man, Kyan can open the realm of sensuous pleasure to straight men.⁸⁶ Here, John acknowledges that he had felt that such bodily experiences were closed to him by virtue of sexism and

makeover subject is a gay man, gay sexuality is absent. Cohan, 179; Gallagher, 223; Kooijman, 107; McCarthy, 99; Ramsey and Santiago, 353.

⁸² Allen, 21.

⁸³ Allatson, 209-210; Clarkson, 254; Cohan, 183; Morrish and O’Mara, 352; Torres, 96.

⁸⁴ John B., 2003.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Segal, 156.

homophobia, but adds that facials should be allowed for everyone. For John, “everyone needs a facial” because it is such a pleasurable, relaxing experience. Getting the facial also liberates John from his preconceived notion that facials are only for women. While the straight men experience the liberating pleasure of metrosexuality, they are also disciplined; as they learn of the pleasure of caring for themselves, they learn that such care is mandatory.

Kyan also often uses the grooming experience to make an emotional connection with the participant that will help the participant grow up and become a man. For instance, Richard M., a middle-class white father, has worn a toupee for thirteen years. His mother initially encouraged him to get the toupee and still wants him to wear it. Richard is worried that others will agree with his mother that the toupee looks better. Kyan disagrees and tells him that it is really about what Richard thinks and feels, not what other people think. Kyan convinces Richard to take off the toupee, promising to tell him the truth about how he looks without the toupee. As the toupee is removed, Kyan stays by Richard’s side, talking to him and reassuring him. Kyan even applies the solvent to dissolve the glue himself. After Richard’s hair is shaved short, Kyan tells him “I think it looks great bro. It looks like you... Give me a hug I’m very proud of you my friend.”⁸⁷ The two men tearfully hug, honoring the ordeal and violating the masculine dictate to be a “sturdy oak.” Here, Richard becomes independent from his mother in removing the toupee; he is no longer guided by her wishes for him, but learns to discover what he wants for himself. With Kyan’s help, Richard frees himself from his mother’s care and begins to care for himself. Kyan makes an emotional connection with the participant

⁸⁷ Richard M., 2003.

through caring for him in the grooming ritual, thereby helping him transition into manhood.

In a scene unlike that featured in any of the other shows discussed in this dissertation, the participant learns about interior design from Thom. Interior design plays no role in the female makeover shows because they define the participant's self through her body. *QE* does not fuse the self to the body; rather the participant's home is linked to the participant's self, such that he must care for the home as part of caring for himself. Like Carson, Thom takes the participant to a store chosen to reflect some aspect of the participant's self. Thom points out the furniture he likes and tries to elicit a response from the often taciturn straight guy. The straight guy is forced to think about furniture and discuss his likes and dislikes. They examine tables and chairs and test out sofas and beds. While interior design was a traditionally feminine pursuit, because it concerns decoration in the private space of the home, *QE* argues that the straight guy must now take also take responsibility for the home because it is now part of being an adult. In order to be a successful man—to have women over to his house without scaring them, to entice women to couple with him, to host a family meal, to entertain friends or superiors from work—the straight guy must have a tasteful, well-furnished and cared-for home. However, while the straight guy learns about interior design and how to appreciate furniture and art, Thom actually designs the interior, based on his discussion with the participant.⁸⁸ In *QE*, Thom teaches the participant to care about and for the space of his home as part of being a man.

⁸⁸ In the tongue-in-cheek “Straight Guy Pageant,” the semi-finalists must remove items from a display that are not tasteful and select and place tasteful items. They are judged

Ted teaches the straight guy how to cook and/or appreciate food. Again, cooking is traditionally tied to femininity, a code which *QE* violates. In appreciating food, the participant is opened to another realm of sensuous pleasure and a way of caring for the self. Once again, the care of the self is extended beyond appearance. Most often, (in the “reveal section,” but I include it here because it is part of learning) Ted teaches the participant to cook a meal himself. Under Ted’s direction and with his help, the participant actually cooks a sample meal. Cooking is constructed as a discipline which the participant must learn through doing. Later, the participant will make this meal for his wife or girlfriend, his parents, or a party. For instance, Miles is taught to cook a meal for his parents as a demonstration that he can now take care of himself as an adult; John Z., Paulo, Ron Ben, and many others cook meals for their wives or girlfriends, taking care of them, as the Fab Five put it, for a change. Sometimes, the participant does not learn how to cook a meal, but instead, chooses food for a party, taking care of his guests. By taking responsibility for a meal, the participant is liberated from his dependence on “women’s work”; he becomes a “new” man, one who can take care of himself and others.

Jai teaches the straight man about “culture.”⁸⁹ For those who analyze masculinity as consumption in *QE*, Jai is marginal.⁹⁰ Along with Ted, Jai often gets the least amount of narrative time. Unlike the others, his job varies widely from week to week. However, Jai is responsible for one of the most important parts of the makeover; teaching the

for their performance as decorators. This suggests that the straight guy should take responsibility for the construction of his home as a “tasteful” place.

⁸⁹ Like Ted, Jai’s part tends to be featured in the “reveal” section rather than the “day out” section; I include it here because it is part of the makeover. When Jai does have a part in the “day out,” he teaches the participants about some aspect of culture. For instance, Jim, a nudist, learns to do nude drawing, which “elevates” nudity (for Jai).

⁹⁰ Munoz, 101-102.

straight guy to communicate and express emotion.⁹¹ In one of the most touching episodes, Jai teaches John B. to say “I love you” in Armenian to his Armenian girlfriend.⁹² Jai often arranges a cultural activity, which sets up an emotional event, creating a context in which the participant can (and should) talk about his feelings. For instance, Jai takes John Z. to an art gallery, to pick out a piece of art for his new wife. When he presents the framed drawing, entitled “Travel is Happiness,” to her, he explains that: “It’s something that I felt that kinda represented you and me, the two people in this glider, and the glider itself represents that thing—an effortless movement towards something we want to be at.”⁹³ While others point out that the Fab Five are employed in a circuit of heterosexuality, they overlook the fact that the constant is not in fact heterosexuality (many other encounters with family are featured) but emotional expressiveness, communication, and connection with others. This focus on expressing emotion (outside of a sporting event) specifically violates one of the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, “be a sturdy oak.”⁹⁴ Jai teaches the participant to recognize and express his emotions, performing a kind of therapy and enabling the straight guy to form relationships. In order to grow up and become a man, the participant must learn to express himself and form deep connections with others. All together, the Fab Five work to teach the straight guy to care for himself across a range of “feminine” sites; his self is

⁹¹ While Berila and Choudhuri argue that Jai is “sentimental,” this misses the point that Jai *teaches* emotional communication. Berila and Choudhuri correctly argue that Jai is feminized and racialized in highly problematic ways, as the only man of color in the Fab Five. Berila and Choudhuri, 13.

⁹² John B., 2003.

⁹³ John Z., 2004.

⁹⁴ Brannon, 14.

constructed across the domains of clothing, the home, grooming, cooking, and “culture”.⁹⁵

The Reveals

After a “day” out, the straight guy returns home for a series of reveals, including the newly-decorated and furnished home, the new wardrobe, and gifts.⁹⁶ The participant, his eyes covered by the hands of one of the Fab Five, is led into his new abode. Before he sees his new place, Thom or one of the other guys will make a joke about gay taste being feminine. The hands are swept away and the participant gasps in shock as he looks at his new home. Before and after shots stress the amazing transformation of the home. The home is personalized to the participant; Carlos the zoo-keeper gets a jungle theme; Hector’s home is made wheel-chair accessible with low-pile carpet and wide corridors and doors; Jim the nudist, is given a special fenced in outdoor area with a hot tub.⁹⁷ In other words, the home is linked to the participant’s self. It reflects the participant’s personality, interests, and bodily ability. Thom, as an expert, is able to remake the home for the participant (rather than reflecting his own taste, as the teasing comments suggest.) The home becomes a place to reflect and prop up the self of the participant through the mediation of the expert. The participant’s jubilation validates the claim that the home reflects him. The cared-for home becomes an aspect of caring for the self; with the right

⁹⁵ *QE* is different from other makeover shows in its focus on emotional expressiveness and communication, interior design, and cooking—all traditionally “feminine” domains. In female makeover shows the care of the self is defined through appearance and the body. Perhaps the assumption is that women have already mastered these other domains—or the opposite, that these domains no longer matter for women.

⁹⁶ As I note above, Ted and Jai’s part in the makeover takes place at the straight guy’s home, but since it is part of the makeover itself, I discuss it above.

⁹⁷ James B., 2005.

design the home can be a place that bolsters and reflects the self, making one happier, more confident, and more “at home.”

In the greatest difference from the female makeover shows, the participant tries on his new look, not to see himself in the mirror, but to show himself to the Fab Five.⁹⁸ The tight link between body and self created in the mirror scene is avoided; the participant’s transformation is not secured in the identification with his image. Rather than facing his reflection in a mirror, the participant is evaluated and validated by the “queer eye.” As the participant shows off different outfits, the Fab Five audibly express their appreciation. For instance, when Joe H. models a long-sleeve shirt with shorts, Kyan remarks “that’s really hot,” while, in response to a different outfit, Thom says “It’s gorgeous.”⁹⁹ As gay men the Fab Five know how to evaluate male attractiveness (and are allowed to express it). This affirmation stresses the relational aspect of the self; the participant is bolstered through their gaze and admiration, not his own. However, because the participant does not identify with his new image in the mirror, his self is not defined through the appearance created for him (and there are other ways to win the approval of the Fab Five). In fact, the participant often does not wear the outfit that Carson picked out for his big event precisely because his new self has *not* been vested in his new clothes.

Further, unlike the before-and-after shots of the home, which are a staple of every episode, before-and-after shots of the participant are only occasionally used. This stands in distinct contrast to female oriented makeover shows in which such before-and-after shots are an essential part of the formula. In female makeover shows, the before and after

⁹⁸ In episodes without this scene, Carson demonstrates another aspect of consumption, explaining how to wear sandals, jewelry, or sunglasses.

⁹⁹ Joe H., 2005.

demonstrate the transformation; on *QE* the participant's new appearance does **not** signify his transformation. The reveal of the participant's new appearance is downplayed because, unlike female makeover shows, it is not the narrative apex of the show.

The Fab Five deliver advice with gifts, using the exchange as one last way to teach the straight men to take care of themselves. Kyan presents individually tailored grooming supplies to the participants. For instance, he teaches Miles, a transman going through puberty again, how to take care of his acne-prone skin with anti-acne products. Jai gives the participant some kind of "cultural" present: a piece of art, Broadway tickets, scrapbook supplies, jars to be filled with jellybeans for a participant's girl-friend, or a digital camera and printer. Jai teaches the participant how to share his emotions and care for his family or significant other with thoughtful presents. Carson sometimes presents an appearance-oriented gift for the woman in the participant's life, for example a sweater for Joe's wife, Penny. Ted and Thom give presents associated with the kitchen and house. The men are taught to care for themselves through products and through maintaining their relationship with their significant other with presents. Consumption is promoted as a means of caring for the self and caring for others.

Traditional gender roles are flipped as the gay men give and the straight men receive. The gay men are put into the stereotypically masculine position of giving. As "expert consumers" the Fab Five can teach the participants how and what to consume. On the other side, to be in the position of receiving the gifts puts the participant in a stereotypically feminine position. He receives, he takes, he is taken care of. In this set-up, the gay men have the power to give what the straight man lacks. In receiving these gifts

and being taken care of, the straight man is transformed. By stepping into the “feminine” position, he can become more of a man.

The Toast

After all these material revelations, the straight man reveals his new self when he toasts the Fab Five. His toast demonstrates his transformation. Unlike the female participants of other makeover shows, the male participants of *QE* do not speak about their self-esteem or how they feel about their appearance. Rather, they talk about how they have been changed by the makeover on the inside, how they’ve learned and grown and even grown-up through the interaction with the Fab Five. For instance, Scott B., a Texan cowboy, says:

Tell you what the whole day’s been a real experience. And you guys are ... really changed a lot, showed me a lot and have probably done a whole lot more for me than I ever could have done for myself. And you know, you’re true gentlemen and I’m proud to know you.¹⁰⁰

Scott acknowledges the fact that they have expanded his world and he has learned from them. He also takes a non-homophobic stance towards the Fab Five, explicitly saying that he is proud to know them (rather than being disgusted or ashamed). Other participants, like David, stress the emotional experience of being cared for by the Fab Five. More directly, Chris tells them “you’ve really shown me what it is to be a man.”¹⁰¹ Thom replies “isn’t it ironic?” (pointing up the assumption that gay men are less than men.) But in fact, it is not ironic at all—it is the point of the show. The Fab Five have taught the straight men to become men through taking care of them and teaching them to take care

¹⁰⁰ Scott B., 2005.

¹⁰¹ Chris L., 2004.

of themselves. In giving these warm, appreciative, emotional toasts, the participants show how much they've learned and grown—they now appreciate the makeover and what the Fab Five have to offer.

The Event

In every episode, after teaching the straight man how to care for himself, the Fab Five retreat to their loft and watch through the gaze of the camera as the straight guy prepares for and hosts an “event.” Unlike the female makeover shows discussed here, the post-reveal event takes up significant narrative time—about one-third of the narrative time. This event serves a doubled pedagogic and panoptic function. The “queer eye” is literalized as the gaze of the Fab Five at the participant. As the straight guy is filmed by the camera, he is reminded that he will be looked at by the Fab Five and he is taught to watch himself through the “queer eye.” As the Fab Five evaluate the participant's *performance*, they evaluate his masculinity. Their commentary on the participant's performance shapes the spectator's perception of the participant, teaches the spectator how to perform, and trains the spectator to watch himself through the “queer eye.” As the participant successfully puts his learning into action, this scene demonstrates how much better his life is post-makeover. Although there are different kinds of events, all of the events serve to demonstrate the neoliberal point of the show: take responsibility for yourself through taking care of yourself and you will be happier and more successful. In the event scenes, the “queer eye” enables the performance of neoliberal masculinity.

Generally speaking, the climactic events featured on *QE* concern four aspects of the participant's life: heterosexual coupling, work, non-coupling family relationships, and

community. First, the vast majority of events (at least 35 percent) enable heterosexual coupling. This kind of event includes marriage proposals and weddings (a full 12 percent of all episodes); a couple moving in together; dates; and the girlfriend or wife meeting the family. For instance, the Fab Five arrange the perfect way for Brian to propose marriage to Rachel. Jai asks Brian why he is proposing, forcing him to articulate his feelings for Rachel. Brian explains that they are like long-lost soul-mates and that they complement each other. Jai coaches Brian on the proposal, telling him not to be nervous and to look her in the eyes. Carson has him wear a green t-shirt that says “marry me” under a zipped-up sweater. As both Rachel and Brian are rabid Jets (football) fans, Jai arranges for Brian to propose on the football field itself during half-time. The Fab Five create a special and memorable proposal for the two football fans. When he proposes and Rachel says yes, they cheer them on and (some of them) cry with happiness. Like Eros figures, they are wise and funny fools who enable marriage (and like Eros figures, they never have romances of their own).

The promotion of the heterosexual family is one of the primary aims of neoliberalism.¹⁰² As others have noted, these episodes demonstrate the ability of gay men to make a straight man more acceptable to women.¹⁰³ However, it is not that gay men speak women’s desire so much as they teach men to master a set of “feminine” skills. Mastering these skills makes a man more of a man because they make him more attractive to women. Indeed, it is through care of the self (and as extension of those skills, care for the significant other) that the man achieves success in the private sphere. He

¹⁰² McCarthy, 98.

¹⁰³ Allatson, 209-210; Clarkson, 254 ; Cohan, 183; Hart 250; Morrish and O’Mara, 352; Torres, 96.

must groom and dress himself attractively, prepare dinner and wait on his wife or girlfriend; act “romantically” (be emotionally open and sentimental), and “take care” of his significant other through thoughtful acts, such as warming her with his jacket. Most of these acts—considering the woman’s gaze and dressing for it, cooking, cleaning, and being emotional—go against traditional hegemonic masculinity and require men to change their behavior and take responsibility in the private sphere.¹⁰⁴ While romantic behavior can reinforce gender roles (the active man and the passive woman), here it is about the man taking responsibility for the relationship. Often the man is required (by Jai) to share his feelings with his significant other, fostering emotional intimacy. Learning “feminine” skills means that the man will no longer be dependent on a woman to take care of him, but will enable him to take care of himself and his significant other. The participant becomes a “man” in these episodes not only through coupling with a woman,¹⁰⁵ but also through taking care of himself in the broad sense of the show. In caring for himself, he can successfully fulfill the neoliberal imperative to form a family.

The second class of events is work related (about 15 percent,) in which the makeover event pertains to the participant’s career. For instance, the participant may meet with a key person in the industry (Warren L.), audition for a part (Jesan H., Kord S.), or host a fundraiser (Adam G., Danny Kastner). The neoliberal aims of the show are perhaps most visible in this section, as the care of the self is tied to success in the public

¹⁰⁴ In one exemplary instance of changing a man’s actions in the private sphere, Carson teaches Paulo to do the laundry and fold clothes for his wife and quintuplet toddlers.

¹⁰⁵ Many have argued that the show promotes heteronormativity. Allatson, 209-219; Berila and Choudhuri, 6; McCarthy, 98; Morrish and O’Mara, 350; Gallagher, 223-225. Di Mattia argues that *QE* enables boys to become men and links it to “heterosexual coupling.” Di Mattia, 135.

realm. Here, the same skills that foster intimate relationships are used to further the participant's career. For instance, Adam G. runs a non-profit, Rocking the Boat, in which disadvantaged kids make boats and sail them. He is devoted to his work, to the point of working 80 hours a week and neglecting his home and his appearance. As Carson says, "you don't take care of yourself Adam Green."¹⁰⁶ His nonprofit is struggling because they haven't raised a great deal of money. For his "event" the Fab Five arrange a fundraising party, with the help of the non-profit PR firm, Fuel, to coincide with a planned boat launch.¹⁰⁷ While the Fab Five have preserved Adam's "crunchiness" as Ted puts it, Adam must shave and clean himself up to look presentable for his event. Looking respectable will help him raise money from potential corporate sponsors. Although Adam initially forgets wear his respectable cotton blazer, he puts it on during his speech to the invitees. The event is a success: Adam asks for money, shows the importance of Rocking the Boat by having the kids speak about the program, and launches the freshly made boat. This event demonstrates the imperative to take care of the self (as defined in this show) in order to be to be successful: Adam must groom himself, dress appropriately (look the part to get the part), host the event, and communicate to raise money for his non-profit. As Thom says

Hopefully what we taught him is that he needs to focus on that [his nonprofit] and that needs to be the primary focus for him but he also needs to take a little time for himself. Not only for the charity but for the kids that are involved with the charity, to see him living well and having a very balanced life.

¹⁰⁶ Adam G., 2007.

¹⁰⁷ The Fab Five also arrange that REI will match the fundraiser if they raise \$10,000.

In other words, Adam must learn to take care of himself for himself, for the success of the charity, and as a role-model for the kids involved with Rocking the Boat.

The third class of events is about taking responsibility for and fostering non-significant-other family relationships. For Miles, a transman, getting cleaned up and making dinner for his parents demonstrates that he has grown up.¹⁰⁸ This event shifts the relationship of parents-and-child away from dependency and towards equality. Miles no longer needs them to cook for him, buy him clothes, or take care of him; he can now take care of himself. He is empowered to begin an adult relationship with his parents. In contrast to Miles, Joe H. is a grown man estranged from his father. After Joe's daughter is born, he realizes that he wants to reconnect with his father. The Fab Five set up a reunion for Joe and his father at Joe's made-over house. Joe must discuss his long estrangement with his father, take responsibility for his side of the estrangement and manfully propose a reconciliation. In this case, communicating feelings is central. In these events, the participant must master a "feminine" set of skills to successfully prove his adulthood—his manhood.

Finally, the last kind of event, and one of the most common, is a party for family and friends (clearly many of the events described above could fit in this category, but this is used to refer to those parties that take place for reasons outside the categories above.) While this event provides the chance for the participant to show off his new look and new skills to the people in his life—the classic reveal—these parties often have another purpose built into them. For instance, Richard M. must mingle with the guests (something he usually avoids) and make his wife feel special. Often the "purpose" is about building

¹⁰⁸ Miles G., 2006.

relationships—whether with a significant other or with family and friends—through doing the work of preparing for and hosting the event, a task traditionally left to women. These events foster community. For every event, the straight participant puts into practice what he has learned from the Fab Five: he grooms himself, prepares something to eat or drink, communicates and takes responsibility for the event. In learning to care for himself, he is empowered to care for (and connect to) others.

While both *IOYY* and *The Swan* end with the reveal after the makeover (once you're transformed, you're done), both *WNTW* and *QE* require their participants to put their education into practice after the makeover itself. Both *WNTW* and *QE* have a learning self at the center of the show. While the participant of *WNTW* puts her lessons into practice first through dressing up for the hosts and then through styling her hair, applying makeup and dressing for the event, the participant of *QE* puts his lessons into action through grooming and dressing himself, cooking or otherwise contributing to the event, communicating, and hosting the event. The Fab Five evaluate the participant throughout the event: Kyan evaluates how the straight man shaves; Ted evaluates the participant's cooking skills and ability to follow a recipe; and Jai evaluates how well the participant wraps a gift, gives a speech, or communicates an emotion to another. At the end of the event, the Fab Five evaluate the participant's performance as a whole. While the participant is evaluated for her *appearance* in *WNTW*, the participant is evaluated for his *performance* across a range of "feminine" activities in *QE*. Though both require the learning, trainable self that is the hallmark of neoliberalism, the differences between the two shows demonstrate the difference between neoliberal femininity and neoliberal masculinity: the self is defined through the body in the former and through performance

in the latter. In other words, the axiom that “men act and women appear”¹⁰⁹ is rearticulated and upheld under neoliberalism.

Pedagogy

At the end of every episode, each member of the Fab Five acts out a “tip” for the audience based on his specialty. For instance, Ted explains that one should use a flute when drinking champagne, because fizzy drinks will go flat more quickly in a wide-rimmed glass, while in another episode, he explains that cheese should be taken out of the refrigerator two hours before it is served to bring out the flavor.¹¹⁰ Thom informs the audience that they should have the electrical wiring in their home checked every five years and the outlets themselves every ten.¹¹¹ Carson advises the spectator to wear fabrics that invite touch like cashmere and suede, while Kyan advises the spectator to get a massage to flush out toxins after working out.¹¹² Jai instructs the spectator to check if a particular charity is registered with the IRS and to beware of elaborate incentive gifts.¹¹³ Echoing the makeover itself, these lessons instruct how the spectator to care for him(her?)self through taking care of his/her body, home, consumption, food, and “culture.” These lessons are like the “hip tips” which are interspersed through the show. The “hip tips” are offered in the body of the show; a scene is frozen and a non-diegetic message like “Try Before You Buy” (with regard to a scene where the participant tastes

¹⁰⁹ Berger, 47.

¹¹⁰ Hector D., 2005; Jim M., 2007.

¹¹¹ Lee F., 2005.

¹¹² John Z., 2003.

¹¹³ Danny Kastner, 2005.

catered food) is flashed on the screen.¹¹⁴ Both the “hip tips” and the lessons at the end of the show are aimed at the spectator, not at the participant. Here, the pedagogic function of the show is made explicit. Not only is the spectator intended to learn from the makeover and model him (her?)self according to the makeover, s/he is specifically targeted in pedagogic lessons by the show. The spectator is constructed as learning subject him/herself, in need of the expertise of the Fab Five. The inadequacy and the makeover of the participant is extended to the spectator both through identification and direct address. In watching the show, one can learn how to care for oneself and take responsibility for oneself, becoming a better neoliberal subject.

Conclusion

In this postfeminist moment of gender instability, *QE* rearticulates masculinity in formulaic makeovers of straight guys. “Femininity,” once expelled by hegemonic masculinity, is incorporated into masculinity on *QE* as men learn to care for themselves from gay men. Though disbarred from hegemonic masculinity themselves, gay men, once discursively cast as women or failed men, serve as the instructors of masculinity in *QE*. However, hegemonic masculinity is maintained in so far as only gay *men*, not women, can judge and reform manhood. As the “hinge” between traditional masculinity and femininity, gay men can teach straight men the “feminine” skills necessary to succeed in both the public and the private spheres. According to *QE*, men must take responsibility for the private sphere, in order to become independent, grow up, and win a mate. After all, now that middle-class women have moved into the public sphere, women no longer

¹¹⁴ Chris L., 2004.

require an economic provider and women can no longer be counted on to manage the private sphere of the home. At the same time, mastering these “feminine” skills will enable men to succeed at work, a goal central to earlier forms of hegemonic masculinity. At the heart of this ideal is the neoliberal self-enterprising subject, who cares for and takes responsibility for the self. In *QE*, the care of the self is defined through the body, the home, clothing, food, culture, and communication. The neoliberal self promoted by *QE* is gendered: it is a masculine self, defined through performance. *QE* maintains the form of hegemonic masculinity—masculinity is judged by performance—while changing the content—now that performance takes place in “feminine” domains.¹¹⁵ Situated on the slippery terrain of postfeminist neoliberalism, *QE* attempts to win consent for a kinder, gentler, sophisticated, and neoliberal version of ideal masculinity.

¹¹⁵ The orientation towards performance is particularly striking in the ironic “Straight Guy Pageant.” The participants are evaluated for how they put together a poolside outfit; how they shave; how they decorate a room display; how they decorate a cake and how they answer a question. The pageant is like a rowdy sporting event, as the Fab Five provide color commentary and the participants are cheered on by the Fab Five and the audience.

Conclusion

Makeover shows are normalization narratives par excellence. Femininity and masculinity are paradoxically represented as both innate and achieved, while gender normalization is presented as desirable and empowering. Promising to improve the participant's life through changing him/her, the individualizing rhetoric of the makeover show effaces social inequality. At the same time, makeover shows reproduce social inequality, as the ways in which the participants are transformed in each show are tied to class and gender. On *QE* and *WNTW*, middle-class participants are transformed into self-enterprising subjects under a neoliberal regime, while on *IOYY* and *TS*, working-class participants submit to a fixed feminine ideal under an authoritarian regime. While female-oriented makeover shows objectify participants, defining and targeting the self through appearance, *QE* works on men's actions, promoting self-improvement through caring for the self across a range of traditionally feminine domains. However, while female oriented makeover shows all make appearance the measure of femininity, they articulate femininity differently. As makeover shows repetitively transform participants according to classed and gendered ideals, they attempt to shape the desire, knowledge, and agency of spectators in gendered and classed ways.

Makeover shows are individualizing. Both *IOYY* and *TS* hold the participant solely responsible for her poor appearance, ignoring or dismissing social barriers, the lack of resources, and the limitations of class and gender (particularly motherhood). *QE* and *WNTW* are individualizing in a different way: both shows promise that if the participant learns to care for herself, she will be upwardly mobile. In contrast, for the working-class

participants of *IOYY* or *TS*, the satisfaction of femininity is its own reward. In all of these shows, social context, fate, and other people disappear: the participant is solely responsible for her life course. However, this individualization is classed: the working-class struggles (and potential desire for upward mobility) are ignored, while middle-class privilege is effaced.

These makeover shows also enact social inequality, as the mode of governmentality used in each show corresponds with class. *QE* and *WNTW* both feature middle-class participants and are neoliberal, while *IOYY* and *TS* both feature working-class participants and are authoritarian. The neoliberal form of rule assumes that subjects can correctly exercise their freedom and need only to be taught to do so. In contrast, the participant's failure to care for herself—"proven" in *IOYY* and assumed in *TS*—justifies the authoritarian treatment of the participants. The authoritarian form of rule assumes that the subject cannot be trusted to exercise her freedom—working-class participants are basically treated like children. Following the mode of governmentality, agency is shaped according to class lines: *QE* and *WNTW* require the middle-class participant to learn and act, while *IOYY* and *TS* require the working-class participant to obey and submit to the show's agenda. Further, while the participant must put her learning into action after her transformation and the departure of the hosts on *QE* and *WNTW*, the participant is fixed, finished after her transformation on *IOYY* and *TS*. The subject produced on *QE* and *WNTW* is the self-enterprising subject, empowered to continue working on him/herself, while the subject of *IOYY* and *TS* is "fixed" by narcissistic femininity such that her work on herself is a continuation of obedience to the ideal of the show. Makeover formulas of transformation are classed.

With regard to gender and power, the female-oriented makeover shows target the body and the self through objectification, while *QE* does not. *WNTW* uses the panopticon, teaching the participant to see her appearance as Stacy and Clinton see her through viewing her secretly-filmed footage. *WNTW* also uses the 360 degree mirror to fragment the participant's body image and to teach her to see how clothes shape her body. Here, the mirror enables the participant to govern her image. *IOYY* ritualistically turns the participant into a spectacle by putting her in a glass box on a busy street and having pedestrians guess her age; here the pedestrians are directed to gaze at the participant and analyze her body in relation to the signs of age. *IOYY* also highlights the marks of age through an unflattering photo of the participant as she is now and, often, fabricating a photo of how she might appear in ten years. The participant is made to see that she has failed herself through showing her how old she "really" looks. *TS* ritually fragments, objects and analyzes the physical body through placing the body on against grid, breaking it into parts, and naming every "imperfection" in relation to a somatic feminine ideal. The participant's agency is shaped through this objectification on *WNTW* and *IOYY*, but not on *TS*; the participant of *TS* is not shown the objectification of her body because she already knows what is wrong with her. In addition, on all three shows, the mirror is used to tie the participant's self to her new appearance. The participant is transformed on both the inside and the outside through work done on the surface of the body; inside and outside are mutually imbricated. In female makeover shows, self can never be separated from appearance.

On *QE*, the body is not the target of power, because the male participant's self is not defined through the body. Unlike the female-oriented makeover shows, the

participant is not objectified or fragmented through a ritualized apparatus of the gaze. And unlike female-oriented shows, the participant is not then made whole in the mirror at the end of the makeover. The participant is not transformed on the inside through viewing his new image, but through changing his behavior: he learns to care for himself across a range of traditionally feminine domains under the direction of the Fab Five. Under the panoptic “queer eye,” the straight guy monitors his performance. With Fab Five’s help, the participant grows up and becomes a man. Here, the inside is not defined through the outside; it is not appearance that defines masculinity, but performance.

In making appearance the only measure of femininity, female-oriented makeover shows implicitly or explicitly jettison other feminine ideals. Piety and purity, which once were central to ideal femininity, have no place on makeover shows.¹ Domesticity, which serves as an important site of the care of the self on *QE*, is also absent from the feminine ideal on female makeover shows. While the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother has been a part of feminine ideology in the West since, at least, the birth of liberalism,² this ideal is explicitly rejected by female makeover shows. For instance, on *10YY*, female participants attempt to defend their femininity through naming their hard work as mothers (often single mothers), but the show rejects this appeal and castigates them for “letting themselves go.” Similarly, marks of the post-partum body are pathologized on *TS*.³ In female makeover shows, the work of motherhood is effaced as female participants are

¹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood” in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21-41.

² Wendy Brown, “Liberalism’s Family Values” in *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 135-165.

³ Elizabeth Gailey. “Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology” in *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 107-118.

hailed outside of the family as potentially-feminine individuals. Finally, while morality was once perceived as the domain of women, on female-oriented makeover shows, morality is only measured through the body. As Susan Bordo argues more generally, to be fit, thin, well-dressed and attractive is to be a good person, while to be fat, badly-dressed, or unattractive is to be a bad person.⁴ To be feminine then, is to be “good.” As Naomi Wolf argues, femininity after the second wave is boiled down to one aspect: appearance.⁵ Makeover shows make appearance the *only* determinant of ideal femininity.

In repeating the representation of ideal femininity through the image of the beautiful woman, female-oriented makeover shows exert a powerful pull on female identity and desire. In objectifying the participant, they teach the spectator how to see and evaluate the body. Female-oriented makeover shows construct particular bodies as desirable: the sophisticated, hour-glass figure constructed by clothes in *WNTW*; the young body of *IOYY*; and the sexy, nubile body of *TS*. While the “before” body of the participant is rendered abject or unfeminine (unstylish, too old or too young), the “after” body of the participant is represented as the fulfillment of the show’s particular feminine ideal. Here the message is that anyone can become feminine and beautiful. Once given the tools to evaluate one’s image and the knowledge of how to transform oneself—such as, in *WNTW*, buying clothing that will make you look sexy and sophisticated, going to the dentist and dermatologist in *IOYY*, or getting breast implants and liposuction all over one’s body in *TS*—one can (re)fashion oneself! Of course, just as these shows overlook the participants’ lack of resources, there is no discussion of how to finance such

⁴ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 67.

expenditures for the spectator. Despite the didactic tone of female-oriented makeover shows, female-oriented makeover shows offer a *fantasy* to the spectator: you too can follow these steps to become feminine and look beautiful! Rather than directly reshaping behavior, these shows shape *desire*.

Although all three shows make the body central to femininity, the meaning of femininity is not the same across the three shows. Femininity signifies ambition in *WNTW*, respectability in *IOYY*, and being an object-to-be-looked-at in *TS*. Femininity promises upward mobility for the middle-class women of *WNTW*, but for the working-class women of *TS*, femininity promises pleasure in one's objectification and for the working-class women of *IOYY*, femininity enables self-respect. While on *WNTW*, femininity is defined by governing one's image through mastery over the intricacies of feminine presentation, femininity is defined by submission to the fixed ideal of the show on *IOYY* and *TS*. On *WNTW*, femininity signifies the power of the mind over the body; on *IOYY* and *TS*, femininity is the body. These different articulation of femininity provide different hooks to desire. For the middle-class spectator of *WNTW*, the promise of upward mobility may be a seductive one; for the working-class spectator of *TS* or *IOYY*, the promise of being special and admired or respected may be a powerful one. On these makeover shows, the meanings and ends of femininity vary by class, even as femininity is tied to the body.

How successful are makeover shows in speaking to spectators' desire? Although audience research is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the success of makeover shows can be evaluated through both the length of shows' runs and through ratings. While *TS* had the highest ratings of any of these makeover shows—reaching a height of almost 15

million viewers⁶—it also had the shortest run and the fewest episodes aired. The proposed third season was cancelled when the second season received low ratings.⁷ Of course, network television uses different standards for “low” ratings than cable television. *IOYY* had the next-shortest run—two seasons, but many more episodes than *TS*. *IOYY* played in reruns after its cancellation, until it was renewed in 2008. Ratings are not available for *IOYY*. With five seasons over four and a half years, *QE* had the second-longest run of these shows. *QE* helped Bravo redefine itself. In August of 2003, *QE* “set a Bravo-record with 2.8 mil [viewers], up 62% week-to-week.”⁸ *WNTW*—after five and a half years—is still on the air. It has had the longest run of any of these shows. Like *QE*, *WNTW* has been important very important to its network—it helped save TLC after *Trading Spaces* sunk.⁹ *WNTW* averaged about 2 million viewers per episode in its first season.¹⁰ Given that *WNTW* has remained on the air the longest of any of these shows, I speculate that it is the most “successful.”

Perhaps *WNTW* has succeeded because it speaks most eloquently to the national imaginary of all of these shows. *WNTW* repeats and relies on the construction of ideal femininity through appearance, while at the same time appealing to the feminist conception of women as active agents. These two aspects of femininity are reconciled through neoliberalism: through working on one’s appearance, one can get ahead in the world. *WNTW* rearticulates femininity under the neoliberal imperative to be self-

⁶ Rick Kissell, “‘Swan’ on the Nose,” *Daily Variety* (April 12th, 2004): 6.

⁷ Denise Martin, “B'casters keep it real this summer ... while cablers go for drama.” *Variety*. 399:6 (June 27th, 2005): 21.

⁸ *Variety*. 391:11 (August 4th, 2003): 4.

⁹ *Broadcasting & Cable.*, 134:18 (May 3rd, 2004): 24-25.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

enterprising. In contrast, I speculate that *TS* attracted a great deal of attention because it was so extreme—like a train-wreck, it drew audience attention—but it ultimately failed because it failed to speak to the national imaginary. The feminine ideal at the heart of the show—objectified, obedient, and dependent—is the worst of pre-feminist femininity. Perhaps this feminine ideal or the mode of authoritarian governmentality failed to speak to viewers’—including working-class viewers’—desire. I speculate that *IOYY* may be pleasurable because it enabled middle-class spectators to look down on objectified working-class participants. However, perhaps the lack of identification with the working-class participant hurt the program’s popularity. On the other hand, working-class spectators may have found such objectification and dismissal painful. Viewers may also have disliked the authoritarian model.

QE is a little different. Perhaps, like *TS*, it was popular because it was so shocking. *QE* reinforces but also subverts hegemonic masculinity. Like *WNTW*, *QE* links its new version of masculinity to neoliberalism and promises success in the public and the private for caring for the self. *QE* had a much longer run than *TS*, though it was also hit with declining ratings in later seasons. I speculate that while viewers may have enjoyed the makeover, it was not as *fascinating* as *WNTW* because it did not involve the transformation of a woman into a beautiful woman. I also speculate that this version of neoliberal masculinity is less persuasive than neoliberal femininity: whereas neoliberal femininity is a *compromise* between the driving forces of feminism and traditional femininity, neoliberal masculinity is a *response* to feminism and consumer capitalism. Because neoliberal femininity superficially resolves the conflict between feminism and

femininity (to the profit of consumer capitalism), it may powerfully speak to conflicted female viewers.

With regard to future research, this study inspires at least five distinct approaches. First, further studies could investigate the question of desire through audience research. Analyzing viewers' response to the shows could illuminate the effect of the shows on spectators. For instance, anecdotal evidence suggests that some viewers have learned how to see and dress for their bodies from *WNTW* while other viewers have been horrified and disgusted by *TS*. Such an analysis should highlight viewer's social location. Second, the issue of race and the intersection of race with gender and class *within* makeover shows could be investigated. Are participants treated differently within shows based on their race? How does race complicate the effects of gender and class? This question could also be extended to audience members: how do viewers of different races respond to makeover shows? Third, the analysis of television in terms of class and gender could be extended to home design/makeover shows such as *Trading Spaces* (2000-present), *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2004-present), *Flip This House* (2005-present), *Flip That House* (2005-present). Is gender rearticulated in these shows? Are home makeover shows classed and if so, how? Is gender rearticulated with class in these shows, as it is on personal makeover shows? Fourth, is neoliberal femininity articulated elsewhere? For instance, the film *Legally Blonde* (2001) may be an example of neoliberal femininity. How popular or common are media depictions of neoliberal femininity? How is neoliberal femininity complicated by race? Fifth, the analysis of the makeover show in terms of power, that is, in terms of how it *works*, could be used to augment genre studies across reality television. For instance, how does power work in competition reality shows

such as *American Idol* (2002-present), *America's Next Top Model* (2003-present), or *So You Think You Can Dance?* (2005-present).

This study has three primary conclusions. First, the modes of power used on makeover shows shape spectators' desire and agency. However, not all makeover shows are equally successful in speaking to viewers' desire and agency. Second, while definitions of masculinity and femininity may be shifting, the dictum that "men act and women appear" still holds strong.¹¹ Femininity may be redefined under neoliberalism as ambition, but women still must work on their appearance. Masculinity may be shifting to enable men to take on traditionally "women's work," but men are still evaluated for their performance. However, I do not think that these positions are totally opposed, as men's appearance is part of their performance. Third, though often overlooked in feminist media studies, class matters. While middle-class people are taught to fashion themselves, working-class people are fashioned by the experts under authoritarian rule. Makeover shows dismiss or overlook the experiences of working-class women. Despite the American belief that we are all middle-class, class is still an area of oppression in the U.S. Gendered and classed ideals of selfhood are reflected, naturalized, and made seductive in makeover shows.

¹¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1990), 47.

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