

GAY-CENTRIC IDENTITY: A CHALLENGE TO GAY CULTURAL SCRIPT, GAY  
GHETTO AND PERFORMANCE

by

Robert D. Beebe III

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

December 2008

Copyright by Robert D. Beebe III 2008

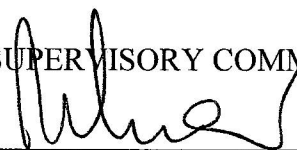
GAY-CENTRIC IDENTITY: A CHALLENGE TO GAY CULTURAL SCRIPT, GAY  
GHETTO AND PERFORMANCE

by

Robert D. Beebe III

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Noemi Marin, School of Communication and Multimedia Studies, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

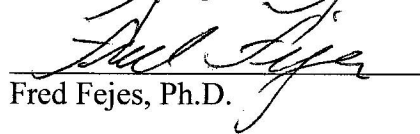
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



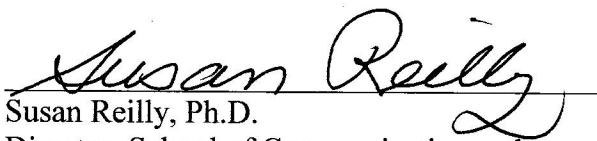
Noemi Marin, Ph.D.  
Thesis Advisor



Patricia Darlington, Ph.D.




Fred Fejes, Ph.D.



Susan Reilly, Ph.D.  
Director, School of Communication and  
Multimedia Studies



Manjunath Pendakur, Ph.D.  
Dean, The Dorothy F. Schmidt  
College of Arts and Letter



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.  
Dean, Graduate College

11-4-08

Date

## ABSTRACT

Author: Robert D. Beebe III  
Title: Gay-Centric Identity: A Challenge to Gay Cultural Script, Gay Ghetto and Performance  
Institution: Florida Atlantic University  
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Noemi Marin  
Degree: Master of Arts  
Year: 2008

For many gay men performing a gay-centric identity can be challenging. By adopting a set of expected behaviors known as the gay cultural script, many of these men are potentially met with discrimination from both heterosexual and homosexual communities. The gay cultural script is readily available as it is found within the gay ghettos and through various representations of gay men in the media. This research question examines how the gay cultural script when found within the gay ghetto and through the media's representation of gay men provides a lens to which the performance of a gay-centric identity may be communicated and shared. The focus of this research is separated into three interconnected areas: (1) exploration of gay-cultural script, (2) location to which the gay cultural script operates and, (3) analysis of the relationship between the gay cultural script and gay-centric identity performance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Challenges for a Gay-Centric Identity . . . . .	1
Cultural Script and Gay Cultural Script. . . . .	2
Literature Review. . . . .	4
Cultural Dimensions to Develop a Gay-Centric Identity Performance . . . . .	9
CHAPTER TWO: Gay-Centric Mode of Identity Performance: . . . . .	13
Cultural Script Overview in Light of Gay-Centric Identity Performance. . . . .	14
Gay-Centric Cultural Script . . . . .	19
Camp as a Part of Gay Cultural Script . . . . .	21
“Cruising” as Another Dimension to Gay Cultural Script . . . . .	25
Some Models of Gay Identity: A Challenge to Gay Cultural Script . . . . .	32
CHAPTER THREE: Gay Ghetto: Locating Gay-Centric Identity . . . . .	38
Gay Ghetto: From Home to Heartache . . . . .	39
Challenges of Gay Ghetto . . . . .	42
Performing Gay-Centric Identity in the Gay Ghetto . . . . .	46
CHAPTER FOUR: <u>Queer Eye for the Straight Guy</u> and Performing Gay Cultural Script. . . . .	51
<u>Queer Eye for the Straight Guy</u> : An Analysis. . . . .	52
Fab Five Meets Performative Dimension of Gay Cultural Script . . . . .	53

A Man Named... Carson: A Single Voice or the Voice of the Gays . . . . .	57
CHAPTER FIVE: Gay-Centric Identity: A Challenging Cultural Question. . . . .	65
Heuristic Value of Other Starting Points. . . . .	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	76

## CHAPTER ONE

### Challenges for a Gay-Centric Identity

Growing up as a gay man in American culture can be problematic. Although gays and lesbians today share more freedoms and liberties than in the past, there are still many inequalities they contend with. What does it mean to be gay, male and American in today's ever-changing culture? One aspect could be a tremendous amount of pressure to belong, whether to one's family, a social group or even to one self. For many gay men they have unwillingly sacrificed their own sense of self in order to belong to a group that can potentially wield much power and influence. These gay men who live and grow in American culture quickly discover that one of the most fundamental forces driving their lives is the need to be accepted. There are times when the power of acceptance can be so strong that gay men might abandon their former identities and forge new ones, often carrying a price. For these gay men who perform a duality of identities many experience a sense of being disconnected and isolated from themselves and their surroundings.

In performing their identities gay men are demonstrating a set of culturally accepted values and behaviors which is referred to as the gay cultural script. This can be found within the urban, metropolitan areas with high concentrations of gay and lesbian residents. These modern gay ghettos foster scarce opportunities for gay men when performing their identities as they offer only stereotypical and cliché representations of what it means to be a gay American male. The gay ghetto is not the only arena that

disperses the gay cultural script. For the millions of men who do not live in a gay ghetto they too are bombarded with the gay cultural script but this time through the media and its limited representations of gay men. What makes the gay cultural script even more troublesome is through the gay ghetto and the media one finds double the discrimination not only from the straight world but from the perceived safety of the gay ghetto itself. This problem's double-edged sword dimension makes it seem to have no solution, however this work may be able to provide an overview that can continue to explicate and shed light on some of the major issues. The thesis proposes a cultural argument regarding the challenges between terms utilized in different cultural literature namely: "cultural script," "gay cultural script," "gay ghetto," "gay-centric performance of identity," and "media representation."

This research question introduces the reader to the potential conflict that many gay men face when performing their identities as they move from their residences to the gay ghetto. It also introduces the concept of the gay cultural script found within the gay ghetto and through gay representations in the media highlighting the impact it has when learned and replicated within gay culture. Another dimension that this research question examines discusses how the gay cultural script acts as a lens to which the performance of gay identity can be negotiated and understood. By viewing the gay cultural script as a methodology used for gauging gay-centric behaviors and thought it is easier to understand how it is learned and dispersed through any given area. It is imperative to look at the gay cultural script as this research begins to ask questions regarding whether or not the gay cultural script has influence over gay-centric identity performance and how? If the gay cultural script acts as a lens that views the cultural and personal identity



performance of gay men then it is critically important to understand where this takes place as the stage that this is set plays a pivotal role in the outcome of the process.

The gay ghetto thus becomes one stage to which the performance of gay identity is shaped and created. The research question asks how these urban, metropolitan areas with large amounts of gays and lesbians act as a catalyst for how the gay cultural script spreads and networks to cover entire communities and cultures. One can look at these gay ghettos as epicenters for the gay cultural script to constantly evolve as it is within the confines of these localized places that many gay men find solace and acceptance regarding themselves and others. Unfortunately though, solace and acceptance are not the only things these gay men absorb while they frequent the gay ghettos. Often times gay men are learning how to disassociate themselves with the core of the gay ghettos, the people. This is hypothetically done as a reaction towards the anti-effeminacy attitudes many gay men express about their peers. Yes, gay men now not only have to face the trials and tribulations of living in a heterosexist world, but now they must face the same hatred and discrimination felt from the straight community right at home, within the gay ghetto itself. More and more gay men are finding themselves criticized and ostracized from members of their own community as the gay cultural script finds new and innovative ways to spread. As it is crucial to the argument to understand how the gay ghetto acts as a concept that potentially influences the performance of gay-centric identity; it is equally important to recognize how that performance occurs for gay individuals who are not located within a gay ghetto.

To better clarify this, the research question examines alternate mediums that might potentially spread the gay cultural script to a wider audience. No other medium

reaches a more diverse demographic of people than television. By providing a detailed analysis on gay representations found within the media the research question discloses various outlets to which the gay cultural script is allowed to permeate and spread. The model chosen to best represent this concept, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, demonstrates this ability to reach a mass audience of people from a myriad of cultural backgrounds, social-economic statuses, and religious affiliations. By being able to do this, the gay cultural script is able to thrive and flourish within millions of people who are not necessarily located at the epicenters of gay life/culture.

The claim that is presented is that by looking through a gay cultural script, found within the gay ghetto and through media representations of gay men, as a lens to which gay-centric performance of identity can be viewed, one may see that these gay men face limited options regarding their identity performances. Furthering this statement it is also argued that many gay men are learning a gay cultural script from the gay ghetto only to be shunned from the members of that very same gay ghetto. For the gay men that do not reside in a gay ghetto, they are still too susceptible to the gay cultural script through gay representations in the media, like Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.

Engaging in topics like the gay cultural script and the gay ghetto can be troublesome at times as there is no real extensive body of work that deeply covers these issues from all available angles. The research here can be traced back to a plethora of previous researchers who have tackled similar issues of related importance. Some of which are directly or indirectly related to this claim. However, it is imperative to note that the thesis acknowledges that the literature review provided contains only some of the multitude of scholars who have presented on these issues.

Although there is no formal link between the term and concept of gay cultural script found within this research with any other body of work, it is important to distinguish certain bodies of literature that have been useful and show value to the overall concept packaged here. In reference to a gay-centric cultural script and its correlation with the performance of gay identity there have been numerous scholars that have touched upon the idea of identity based within the realm of sexuality and (or) gender.

Julia Wood discusses the concept of a cultural script in her book, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender & Culture but solely juxtaposes it within a gender framework. Although her work in cultural scripts is limited, it is important to mention that her ideas regarding its role and functionality serve as one of the foundations to this argument. For the purposes of this research question, the definition of the cultural script must be broadened in order to be more inclusive but the basic foundation of the message remains the same.

The same is true for researcher David Aveline as he discusses how cultural scripts affect gay men by defining gay relationships in terms of heterosexual standards, the basis of both these arguments support the notion of a gay cultural script. In an article written in the Journal of Family Issues he argues that since homosexuals live in a world dominated by heteronormativity, gay relationships are often defined in the context of heterosexual standards; that is, one partner taking on roles deemed feminine as a socially accepted practice. Again the value of this provides the research question with an interest in the gay cultural script's potential effect on gay men. However, this example is through a social and/or gendered lens. What is essential for this research is that the gay cultural script may

not be boxed into one particular categorization or another, it must be all encompassing, happening everywhere at all times.

Another critical element to the gay cultural script is gay men's gender role conflict. The gay cultural script's relationship with conflict is rooted from a combination of both an inter- and an intra-personal dimension. Many other studies show the importance in understanding how male gender role conflict effects the healthy development of men. Whether by negative attitudes toward the help-seeking by Good & Wood, or low self-esteem put forth by Cournoyer & Mahalik, depression discussed by Good & Mintz or even an endorsement of a traditional masculine ideology by Good, Braverman & O'Neil, these studies lack both the external as well as internal dimension needed to fully contemplate the scope of the gay cultural script.

To better illuminate what a gay-centric cultural script means, scholars such as Sontag and Newton are introduced to better explain the institute of camp. It draws inference upon works from Garber when discussing gay identity as a performance or from Levine in an in-depth look at cruising. The research question relies heavily on the work of Taywaditep which explores gay men's anti-effeminacy attitudes, all of which help create and sustain an argument that not only shows precedent from within the academic arena but from the social arena as well.

For the argument that gay men learn the gay cultural script from the gay ghetto and from various media outlets to be supported the concept of socialization may be taken into account. Offered by numerous scholars: Simmel, Henslin and Chodorow, socialization can best be defined by, "inducting all individual members into its moral norms, attitudes, values, motives, social roles, language and symbols is the 'means by

which social and cultural continuity are attained' (Simmel 5). Although socialization plays an important function in order to allow the argument to grow, it is of little consequence here as only its most rudimentary definition may be used. Socialization itself is not a form of the gay cultural script it is just the vehicle that drives the user toward either accepting or rejecting it.

As the research question turns toward the gay ghetto and its implications regarding how the gay cultural script operates as a lens to see and shape gay identity performance, there is a need to explain how this "monocultural space" (Clark 198) helps define gay men. By looking at the work of Micheal Warner as he discusses the public sphere one may discern that the gay cultural script can be found within a social setting which permits its survival. Although the work of Warner is not directly related to the subject matter presented here, it is his idea that if there is *the* public, then the possibility for *a* public an ideological subset of people that serve as a counter measure (to what Warner calls) the dominant public, can exist.

Nancy Fraser's Rethinking the Public Sphere is another scholarly work that helped influence this research. Fraser is similar to Warner because both do not specialize in gay men and their issues but they differ in regards that Fraser's work often times overlaps with the marginalization of minority groups which includes gay men and women. Both Warner and Fraser's work help shape the theoretical framework illuminating how the gay ghetto operates as a concept which influences the performance of gay male identity.

Both Warner and Fraser's work may not have been directly linked with homosexual identity and how fundamental aspects of human communication help shape

that identity within a specified locale but there have been some who have. Clark and Long are two scholars who have been discussing the gay ghetto and its implications for years. One could not attempt to analyze the gay ghetto in any scholarly work without first reviewing the fundamental discourse put forth by these two men.

Another dimension of the gay ghetto that warrants a mention here is the aspect of an audience-agent dynamic that occurs each and everyday. For the gay ghetto to act as an educational space that fosters the gay cultural script, there must be an element of acquiring data passed on from one cultural member to another. In other words, gay men learn how to be appropriate gay men from their social interactions with other's who share similarities (other gay men). This process of inculturation from one member to another (or through multiple members) is what can be best referred to as the audience-agent dynamic. To better understand this, one may turn to the works of Burke (Grammar) or Perelman as both discuss the underlying notions of human motive and its impact on individuals.

In the analysis portion of this research it is necessary to look back at those who have laid the foundation for textual analysis and to show how those ideas fit (or seemingly unfit) here. Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding provides the necessary theoretical framework employed within this research. This can be implemented as a participant actively engages within a text (in this case a television program) and not by becoming a passive observer to it. Specifically this helps develop the claim that some gay men learn cultural practices and norms by viewing homosexual representations found within the media.

As Hall provides this research with integral information regarding the negotiation of meanings that gay men potentially face as they consume the limited representations being presented to them it is necessary to explain the very basis of textual analysis to help develop the argument. To best understand the beginnings of textual analysis the field of psychoanalysis is reviewed in order to provide a foundation that the argument here can build upon. An even more important aspect regarding the creation of the analysis portion is drawn from the work of Kenneth Burke and his ideas of symbolic action as it pertains to a mode of language and not necessary a mode of knowledge (Language).

The research is separated into five chapters. The first chapter, “Challenges for a Gay-Centric Identity” lays out the claim of the research question and provides some basic background information regarding previous scholarly works that have served as influence for this argument to take shape. This chapter previews the argument for the reader by providing a short overview on how the thesis will be broken up. It also explicates the visitation of different terms that explore several dimensions of gay identity engaging in history, media, and a body of literature pertinent to communication studies.

The second chapter, “Gay-Centric Mode of Identity Performance,” examines what the gay cultural script is, whether or not it is exclusive for gay men and what are the potential implications to be presented. To understand the gay cultural script completely it is important to look at its characteristics, form and function. This is done by analyzing the work of others who have touched upon this issue in some way. Not many people have written specifically about a gay cultural script, so it is crucial that the work used in this research serves merely as an educational tool that bolsters more cultural awareness regarding the topic. By analyzing the work of Taywaditep a commonality between the

link of gay men's communicative behaviors both verbally and nonverbally and the subsequent anti-effeminacy attitudes expressed is examined. To support this, ideas of camp and cruising are introduced in a way to highlight very culturally specific normalities that occur in gay life which may not be that well known. Also both camp as well as cruising serve as an ideological tool that solidifies gay-centric identity as an exclusive domain for gay (more specifically gay men) alone.

The last section of chapter two delves into certain implications a gay cultural script can have on its constituents. This develops the claim that the gay cultural script does damage to gay men by subjugating them to an increase in discrimination, intolerance and hatred. It does this in two ways: (1) first by isolating the gay man in question from the straight world or the dominant culture and (2) second by further isolating him from within his own culture or from other gay individuals.

The next portion of the thesis entitled, "Gay Ghetto: Locating Gay-Centric Identity" highlights the struggle for gay men as they revolve around two separate and unequal worlds: the gay ghetto and the dominant culture. This chapter discusses what and where the gay ghetto is, how the gay ghetto can be damaging and/or disparaging and finally if there is a possibility for the gay ghetto to be beneficial. By defining the rudimentary underpinnings of the gay ghetto its role in today's modern culture can be better illuminated. From there it is important to see how the gay ghetto acts as a location that influences gay-centric identity performance by potentially forcing a gay cultural script onto its residents furthering the destructive communicative cycle. The chapter concludes by examining how the gay ghetto can be positive for gay men and what exactly are gay individual's views regarding living within one. What is essential to the argument



here is the notion that the gay ghetto is a location to which the gay cultural script and hence, gay-centric identity performance is acculturated.

Following that is the fourth chapter, “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and Performing Gay Cultural Script,” which discusses the media’s portrayals of real life gay men. An in-depth analysis of the television show Queer Eye for the Straight Guy takes place to provide support to the argument that the gay cultural script may be learned from the media. The characters as well as the context of the show and its’ over all message is critiqued and reviewed. It is important to give some minor background about the show in order to completely understand its cultural implications. The analysis focuses on the overall impact the entertainment program has had on gay culture/life but more critically, the focus narrows to highlight the show’s main protagonist Carson as the primary vehicle to which the gay cultural script is distributed and accepted. Relying heavily on the analysis of others, this chapter is necessary to provide alternate information regarding the research question’s overall aim. This chapter’s main purpose is to examine the relationship between the gay cultural script and the media’s representations of homosexuals offering a more detailed analysis.

In the last chapter, “Gay-Centric Identity: A Cultural Question” all the concepts are tied together to fully round out the argument. The conclusion is structured so that the argument becomes clearer in so far that the reader is to be left to their own opinions towards the subject matter. The research question calls upon others to continue this work in efforts to have more cultural awareness and understanding of gays and lesbians in American culture. The thesis calls for a modified cultural script to provide a cultural and critical awareness not on the basis of any specific behavior but on the basis of the

individuals themselves. This is done in an effort to bridge the gap not only between gay and straight individuals only, but also between gay and other gay people alike. This last chapter offers recommendations for future research and possible limitations if continuing this endeavor.

The research presented acts solely as an agent of enlightenment utilizing methodologies such as phenomenology, grounded theory and textual analysis; and is not in any way an empirical study utilizing scientific data with the aim of proving any specific theory and/or notion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Gay-Centric Mode of Identity Performance

Many gay men are continuing to face difficulties in performing their identity in contrast to their heterosexual counterparts. As stigma from within the political, social and spiritual arenas of American culture pervades gay life; gay men are learning that their gay identity faces on-going discrimination through the personal sphere as well. It is from within a cultural identity of gayness that these men might view a certain set of expected behaviors, values and attitudes that come together to form a gay-centric identity consciousness. As they are being steered into this already pre-set, pre-determined mode of existence, their perspectives, ideas and lives are rigidly shaped into what is known as the gay cultural script. The gay cultural script serves as a basis for the argument that there is a set of expected values, attitudes and behaviors when combined form a gay-centric consciousness.

The research question discusses the theoretical framework that forms the very foundation for understanding what the gay cultural script is, analyzing its development and understanding its functionality all through the lens of the American gay male. To fully realize what the gay cultural script means for these purposes one must first look at the meaning of the term as defined by other scholars. Based upon a large amount of literature pertaining to gay identity, the caveat that needs addressing relates to the historical views of the cultural script and gay identity that adhere to different bodies of

scholarship in particular gay/lesbian studies. The task of this chapter is a proposed performative identity that adds to the already mentioned literature namely: camp and cruising as part of a gay-centric cultural script. Its purpose is to provide the reader with background information regarding how the term cultural script is used in other related (and non-related disciplines). From there questions regarding the existence of a gay cultural script and its relationship to the performance of gay-centric identity are discussed. To conclude the chapter expands upon how the gay cultural script is created and maintained as well as its implications are examined.

#### *Cultural Script Overview in Light of Gay-Centric Identity Performance*

When analyzing the idea of a gay cultural script one must be able to broaden their perception in so far that the script itself is not lumped into one already pre-existing category. Instead it would be more beneficial to view other scholarly works regarding cultural scripts in general to provide a starting point to which the gay cultural script can be further elaborated upon. Gay cultural script here refers to gay men's expected behaviors found within the gay ghetto and through mainstream heterosexual society.

The gay cultural script acts as an agent of hegemonic masculinity creating a gender role conflict that potentially hinders gay men by prescribing them into stereotypical boxes that will stigmatize and marginalize them. It becomes inculcated through what is referred to as the gay ghetto and mainstream television. As gay men find themselves within these arenas (either by visiting or living in the gay ghetto, or by watching television) they are being instructed on ways of behaving that serve to

ultimately disempower them not only by the heterosexual community but by the homosexual community as well.

The gay cultural script's inherent link with hegemonic masculinity and ultimately with conflict is important as it provides a fertile understanding of how gay male identity is rooted within conflict and how the continuous struggle between the masculine-feminine dichotomy is exaggerated. This potentially creates a problematic situation for gay men who are attempting to form a universal sense of self. For many of these men they are unknowingly inculcated with the gay cultural script which can possibly conflict with what their previously established set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors. Often times they received mixed messages regarding what it is to be male as what it means to be gay and male, which the terms by cultural standards can sometimes be contradictory. Hegemonic masculinity dictates that men are rugged, aggressive and macho whereas the messages received from the gay ghettos and mainstream television reinforce images of gay men who are effeminate, weak even dainty. Still though this research may not benefit from solely one author's ideas regarding a gay cultural script. For this argument to become well-rounded, multiple definitions must be viewed to include various authors' ideas regarding the gay cultural script's implications and influence on culture.

In several gender communication studies cultural script may be viewed as a concept utilized to perform and engage in discourse and behavior. Julia Wood in her book, Gendered Lives: Communication Gender and Culture defines cultural script by stating it is the, "set of expected behaviors and the values that are associated with them" (54). She states that the cultural script is based on an internalized socialization process

which results in the gender stratification that is commonly found within today's culture. For Wood the cultural script is inextricably linked with the notions of gender differentiation and more specifically within close relationships of heterosexuals. "For social specifications of behaviors to be effective, individuals must internalize them. At very young ages, girls understand that they are supposed to be nice, put other's needs ahead of their own, and be nurturing; whereas boys understand that they are supposed to take control and assert themselves" (54). She also supports this gender-related stance of a cultural script when referencing Messner as he argues, "Many parents still encourage girls to be physically reserved, sensitive to relationships and deferential to others. Boys are encouraged to be physically aggressive, to compete to win, and to control others. The combination of these two gender scripts laid the groundwork for men to be sexually aggressive and for women to defer or to tolerate abuse from men" (100). For a gay-centric mode of identity performance to flourish it is important that the internalized gendered dimension of the cultural script (the socialization that calls for boys to be aggressive and assertive and girls to be nurturing and passive) play a pivotal role when enacting this performance of identity. This lays the foundation to which men and women both learn what behavior is socially acceptable and what is not. That in turn impacts how gay men begin to formulate and perform their identities. What becomes problematic is that Wood's definition of cultural script refers to heterosexuals and their issues and does not specifically take into account the issues of gay men.

Martin Levine, in his book, Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone, ties together gender identity and sexual behavior when he argues both "are learned, socially constructed sets of attitudes, traits and behaviors that socially

demonstrate successful acquisition of an identity. Men become men through an elaborate process of socialization, negotiations between the individual and his environment” (11). For Levine the cultural script for gay men is learned through the successful mastery of negotiating certain meanings which detail what is and is not appropriate, and are faced by individuals as they perform their identities everyday. Both dimensions of the cultural script here are valuable to this research’s aim, as both a gender-based framework and as a sexual one. These two dimensions help root the gay cultural script by providing basic rules for acceptable behavior, and then are expressed through a gender or sexual performance of identity. The difference between Wood and Levine is that Levine hints briefly upon a notion of a gay cultural script which directly correlates to this research question. Even though Levine’s work begins to touch upon the idea of a gay-centric cultural script by associating gender identity with sexual behavior, he does not relate it to the actual performance of gay identity and thus leaves many open questions regarding the process of how sexual behavior helps construct gender identity performance.

The cultural script in this research is rooted in fundamental values of gender but will be transcended into an arena in which gender per se becomes of little consequence. For this study the most pertinent idea of Wood’s operational characteristics of a cultural script is its internalized dimension. This argument is valid only to the extent that as gay men potentially adopt new attitudes, values and beliefs that may not be organically their own, there must be some preconceived notion of what is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, regarding that culture as a whole. The gay cultural script can act as an agent of opposition to gay men based upon a universally understood standard that dictates appropriate ways of being. The more gay men try to perform an identity that they think is

suitable for their culture, the further they will be from ever achieving a standard of normality and will be constantly fixed within the margins of mainstream culture.

Realizing that the gay cultural script is socially learned becomes easier after understanding the idea of what Klumas & Marchant call a sex role. Sex role is defined as "a general set of norms, beliefs, duties, rights, and behavioral expectations attached to an ascribed sex status and are expected of individuals of that sex. These roles function as guidelines for behavior and help us predict and anticipate the response of others" (Klumas & Marchant 272). "Traditional [sic] sex roles are different for men and women in American culture" (272). In other words men are learning how to be culturally appropriate, normal and heterosexual men. These sex roles act as a guideline for behavior that individuals enact in order to illicit responses from others (sometimes desirable, sometimes not). Often however, for gay men, these sex roles (which help lay the foundation for the gay cultural script's ability to spread) result in sending mixed messages about how gay men view themselves from within both heterosexual as well as homosexual cultures. Davis, Thomas and Sewalish develop sex roles and ultimately connect the gay cultural script with hegemonic masculinity when they state that,

Exploring dissonance between personal and societal messages, therefore, may provide rich information about men's identity development. Gender role conflict has been correlated with higher levels of anxiety and lower capacity for intimacy (Sharpe & Heppner, 1991). Results of these studies indicate the importance of understanding male gender role conflict and its effect on the healthy development of men. (Davis, Thomas and Sewalish 295)

The performance of identity by any man will include sex roles as a basic format to help steer him into a behavior or way of thinking that will allow him to encounter the least resistance. Sex roles are essential in the performance of male identity, whether from



heterosexuals or homosexuals both perform their own cultural identities in different ways. For homosexual men resistance may often be found when performing their identities from inter-personal relationships with others to even an intra-personal relationship with themselves. This resistance leads gay men in a gender role conflict. Through this conflict gay men characterize how they feel about themselves and how they feel about other gay men, which sometimes may not be very positive.

### *Gay-Centric Cultural Script*

Can an exclusive cultural script for gay men truly exist? This research will not attempt to answer that question. The aim here is to provide an overview, a foundational study in order to explain an argument stating whether a gay-centric cultural script can exist in today's culture. This overview's goal is to not discuss in detail the scope of a gay cultural script but rather to discuss its function found within a gay performance of identity all found through an over-arching mainstream American culture. It is important to make the distinction as the movement for gay men from within the safety of their residences to the gay ghetto and often back to heterosexual normativity has an immense impact on shaping the performance of one's identity. While this chapter looks at terms which can be viewed differently through other disciplinary lenses (gay/lesbian literature and historical backgrounds of gays/lesbians) the goal here is to discuss gay-centric identity as performance.

This section supports the previously mentioned claim that a gay cultural script is gay-centric by introducing the work of Taywaditep and the anti-effeminacy attitudes that many gay men express. This is critically important in two ways: (1) this sets the tone that

many gay men share certain commonalities when it comes to verbal and non-verbal language and (2) creates awareness that gay men often times discriminate against other gay men who they perceive as being effeminate acting. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to supporting the first notion of this argument and the proceeding chapter supports the second.

There is a certain commonality when referring to gay speech. Taywaditep argues, “Contemporary research has shown a significant portion of gay men have traits, interests, occupations, and behaviors that are consistent with the stereotype of gay men as effeminate, androgynous, or unmasculine” (Taywaditep 1). Many gay men learn what accepted behaviors are (in this case certain colloquial words and phrases) and emulate them as a means of shared communication used to bridge the gap between individuals. The gay speech thus becomes the discourse in which gays not only communicate to one another but also how they begin to relate to and understand each other within a frame of reference offering comfort and ease. On the surface this discourse seems to play a positive role in the development of gay individual’s identity but by digging deeper one finds that the discourse hurts gay people by limiting their ability to perform an identity that is exclusively their own, thereby leaving them susceptible to attacks from the heterosexual culture as well as the homosexual culture.

As an important aspect of the gay cultural script the construction of language and the content of gay individual’s speech patterns play a pivotal role in how identity is performed. This research must look at the mechanics of gay speech as a starting point to understand how the gay cultural script operates. Stereotypically speaking, gay speech has been characterized by a multitude of effeminate characteristics. A strong lisp, high

intonation, exaggerated syllables and, as Taywaditep adds, “speak[ing] with breathy and seductive tones” (3) is just a small sample of the gay cultural script. It is so much more than simple language construction; it entails a much deeper understanding of an individual’s background and an individual’s behaviors.

This leads us to another dimension of a gay-centric cultural script, body language and movement. Gay men’s gestures have been generally characterized by flamboyantly campy and exaggerated effeminate movements, a limp wrist, a bodily swish, and even if a man’s “inner thighs rubbing together when he walks,” all “become indicators of effeminate characteristics” (Taywaditep 3). This becomes pertinent as it defines the scope of the gay-centric cultural script, displaying its power to become a somewhat universally shared means of performing gay identity.

One aspect that makes the performance of the gay male cultural script unique is camp. The concept of camp supports the claim that by viewing a gay-centric model one may see how gay identity performance can be sustained through a new and unique perspective. Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” discusses what she refers to as, the “sensitivity of exaggeration, artifice, and the esoteric.” Sontag looks at camp as “the spirit of extravagance- [it] is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world incarnating victory of style over content, aesthetics over morality of irony over tragedy” (59). Esther Newton in Mother Camp Female Impersonators in America adds, “drag and camp are the most representative and widely used symbols of homosexuality in the English speaking world” (100). She goes on to note that camp “is concerned with what might be called the philosophy of transformations and incongruity- it uses this incongruity to achieve a higher synthesis” (106). Incongruity plays a big part for Newton in defining camp. Paired

with theatricality and humor she argues that, “all three are intimately related to the homosexual situation and strategy. Incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style and humor its strategy” (106). These three lay the foundation for camp and ultimately the gay cultural script.

To better understand how the notion of camp acts as a gay-centered role to be performed it is useful to further explain Newton’s three tenets of camp. When incongruity is defined as the subject matter of camp it can be easily associated with, “the basic homosexual experience, that is, squarely on the moral deviation. Camp is based on homosexual thought. It is all based on the idea of two men or two women in bed. It’s incongruous and it’s funny” (Newton 107). Camp thus becomes the product of “incongruous juxtapositions” (106) either pointed out by the homosexual or by having him/her devising it. Incongruity occurs in two ways, either unintentional camp; “in that the campy person or thing does not perceive the incongruity” (106), or by created camp; also hindering on transformations and juxtapositions with an effect that is intentional.

By looking at the nature of camp and how it relates to others and on the individuals themselves the implications of performing a gay cultural script becomes more readily apparent. It is through this performance to an audience that real negotiated meanings of value are affixed to members of the homosexual community. Members of a culture view another individual’s performance of identity and then make value judgments based upon their already pre-existing set of values. This leaves an impression that further instructs gay men into modes of behaving that ultimately disempowers them since many gay men might feel the pressure to conform to a performance of identity that best suits the culture’s demands and not necessarily their own. An example of this phenomenon

could read like this: As one set of gay men laugh and chuckle at how effeminate another group of gay men are perceived to be sounding at a bar, there is an alternate set of gay men who, in turn, are laughing at the first set of gay men for their limp wrists and over-exaggerated bodily gestures. All of these gay men unknowingly complete a viscous cycle of self-deprecated loathing for others and ultimately for themselves.

Another example that supports camp being used as a gay-centric role of a performed identity is Newton's second tenet, theatricality. For Newton, she argues that camp comprises of, "role deviation and role manipulation [which] are at the core of the second property of camp, theatricality" (107). Here Newton separates theatricality three ways: style, dramatic form and the perception of "life as theatre" (Sontag 62). In camp, "importance tends to shift from what a thing *is* to how it *looks*, from *what* is done to *how* it is done" (Newton 107). Style in camp is meant to be exaggerated which might explain the emphasis on how things look or are perceived by others. Camp is meant to shock and awe and it does so with a 'in-your-face' type attitude. The second part of theatricality in camp, dramatic form, attempts to explain the structure of how camp exists. "Camp, like drag, always involves a performer or performers and an audience" (107). When referring to unintentional camp, the performance lies within the individual who is commenting on the behavior or appearance of the scene (whether it is an individual or a setting) to his audience. In created camp, the performer-audience spectrum is usually much more clear-cut.

The third and final aspect of theatricality is the perception of "life as theatre" (Sontag 59). As homosexuals are stigmatized throughout growing up they learn ways to hide their stigma. For many of these men they are forced to a life of impersonation in an

effort to pass in a world where heterosexuality dominates. Newton characterizes this by stating, “the covert homosexual must in fact impersonate a *man*, that is, he must *appear* to the ‘straight’ world to be fulfilling (or not violating) all the requisites of the male role defined by the ‘straight’ world” (108). This becomes the driving force behind the idea of life as drag as all gay men who find ways to soften their stigmatization by ‘passing’ in the straight world are essentially drag performers. Drag is much broader than one might suppose. “Drag means first of all, role playing. The way in which it defines role playing contains its implicit attitude. The word ‘drag’ attaches specifically to the outward, visible appurtenances of a role” (Newton 109). The idea that drag has heavy emphasis on the outward appearance of a role is crucial because it implies that the role itself is superficial and exaggerates the “distance between the actor and the role or act” (109). What ties role playing and drag together firmly is the notion of “play,” it is an “act or show- living role after superficial role” (109). What happens after the performance ends? When do the superficial layers or roles peel away to find something real or tangible? For many men who are embodying the idea of “life as theatre” just to get by in life, the performance sadly may never ends and they rarely end up with one unified performance of identity.

The last and final aspect of camp for Newton is what is referred to as a, “system of humor” (Newton 109). “Camp is for fun; the aim of camp is to make an audience laugh. Camp humor is a system of laughing at one’s incongruous position instead of crying” (Newton 109). Humor in camp works symbiotically with incongruity by means of them both attempting to implement the same attribute of functionality; that of transformation. The basis of camp humor can be summarized, “by accepting his homosexuality and flaunting it, the camp undercuts all homosexuals who won’t accept

the stigmatized identity. Only by fully embracing the stigma itself can one neutralize the sting and make it laughable” (Newton 111). This becomes a very problematic aspect of the gay cultural script. Even though there is a solid foundation to the argument that if one is able to laugh at their own flaws, it removes the force or impact from others who laugh at those very same issues. The problem here is that for many gay men who are “embracing the stigma” (111) as Newton argues means that they too must embrace a performance of identity that is being forced upon them. Instead of opening up a myriad of different choices to gay men regarding how they are going to perform their identity and letting them decide what is most comfortable, camp leaves the individual with a solitary option that further perpetuates stereotypical representations of gay men.

The second example of how the gay cultural script is related to an inherently gay-centric performance of identity involves the concept known as cruising. Cruising is used to highlight that the gay cultural script needs not be based solely in language construction but rather it is viewed as a lifestyle guideline that dictates everything from what you wear to how you find a sexual partner. Cruising is used to show a scope of the gay cultural script and also to reaffirm its status as being unique to the gay community primarily.

In order to better understand the total scope and function of how the gay cultural script is performed one must examine the phenomenon known as cruising. It becomes an example of how a gay-centric cultural script can be performed by examining what Levine argues as a sex script. Not to be confused with a sex role mentioned earlier, sex script is how the formulaic ritual of men who come together for the purpose of sexual pleasure is organized and sustained. It may be better know as cruising. For Levine, “cruising was the mechanism that created most sexual contact among gay men, cruising was the vehicle by

which [gay men] either signaled sexual attraction or characterized the search for erotic partners” (79). Cruising occurs mostly in gay relegated bars and metropolitan areas that contain gay ghettos. How cruising for gay men differs than how a heterosexual man picks up a heterosexual woman in a bar, lies within the manner of the action.

Heterosexual men might give women ‘the eye’ checking her out, surveying her body, in more clandestine ways. After all, with heterosexual women, one couldn’t be too overtly sexual and physical, since women’s erotic codes required that there be emotional and romantic contact as a precondition of sexual contact. But without the ‘constraining’ effects of feminine erotic standards, gay men were able to focus more overtly and obviously on the sexual activities in finding sexual partners. (Levine 79)

If a man went cruising it did not necessarily mean his ultimate goal was sexual satisfaction. “The men cruised for recreational sex with tricks chosen for their handsomeness and sexiness. They also cruised for erotic affirmation and satisfaction” (Levine 80). Many times gay men cruise someone not with the intent that the by-product of that cruise results in a sexual encounter but merely to affirm a message of desirability either from the facilitator or from the respondent. As Levine states, “they cruised for affirmation of their hotness as sexual contacts” (Levine 79). Cruising becomes a major impact on the social interaction of gay men.

As previously mentioned, cruising does not necessarily have to occur in a nightclub or bar even though often times it does. “Men routinely cruised each other in circuit gathering places. They cruised one another on West Village and Chelsea streets, in banks, Laundromats, and supermarkets. They cruised each other while talking to friends, or working out at the gym. Some cruised while waiting for dates” (Levine 79). Every setting that fosters the performance of cruising carries with it its own set of patterns and acceptable behaviors. For instance the manner of cruising differed from social,



recreational and sexual meeting places. “Cruising included verbal and nonverbal behavior in social and recreational places, mainly nonverbal conduct in sexual places” (Levine 80). It is easier to understand how cruising relates to the performance of the gay cultural script by examining what exactly cruising consists of. Levine separates the ritual into four chronological chunks: searching, stalking, signaling, and negotiating. With each individual faction an important clue emerges that begins to highlight how gay men perform and sustain the gay cultural script. Whether through the physical movement of searching or through the element of man-to-man proximity in stalking, or from the action of making contact, to finally the last act of communication or, negotiating all four stages of cruising act as tools instructing gay men how to behave and perform within the specified arena. In other words, the system of cruising is already pre-determined; if one does not choose to act upon the parameters already given, it becomes increasingly difficult to increase their social interaction.

Searching as the first step of cruising is broken up into two factions: (1) the search for a location to cruise and (2) a sexual conquest must be found for cruising to be successful. In relation to the first part of searching, “bars, discos, bath houses and sex clubs were the obvious choices,” also gay men must take into account that certain, “meeting spots were ‘cruisy’ only at particular times of the day” (Levine 80). In relation to the second part of the definition for searching, “cruising usually commenced after the men socialized with friends. Most men went to the bars and discos with friends, spent time getting high, trading stories, or ‘boy-watching’ before cruising” (Levine 80). Levine argues that cruising happens alone. “Only couples looking for three-ways cruised together” (81). Since cruising is individualistic there is immense pressure for the cruise to

be successful as “an unsuccessful cruise was a blemish on [gay] manhood” (81). In short the best way to summarize the stage of searching is gay men’s movement from location to location in search for their erotic ideal; someone’s whose physical characteristics are found to be most appealing.

One of the sharpest distinctions Levine’s work creates vis-à-vis the argument found here is that the nature of cruising is “hyper-masculine” (82). “Butch aesthetics thus shaped the cruise. By defining manly attributes as hot, this aesthetic made the type favored by clones hyper-masculine. Their erotic ideal resembled the Marlboro man or Tom Selleck. The men perceived the other men as sexy as long as they were macho” (Levine 82). The problem with this is that even though Levine is somewhat on target with gay men’s fascination with the masculine ideal and the subsequent anti-effeminacy attitudes they harbor, to say that all cruising is done in search for a man who is extremely masculine is too much of a hasty generalization. Although often times gay men are seeking only other gay men who are masculine acting, this is not always the case nor is it so simplistic. Many times gay men who search for someone who is masculine-acting might actually be looking for someone who can perform an effeminate role of identity at that time (i.e. are willing to be cruised). This stage of cruising reinforces a performance of identity that limits gay men by subjugating them into rigid roles that help define the masculinity versus effeminacy dichotomy. This is done by assuming one man acts in the masculine role by initiating the cruise as the other thereby enacts an effeminate role by being the one who is cruised. Since there are no strict guidelines that facilitate these social customs, this often times can lead to conflict as both participants might be performing the same roles of identity. Even though Levine argues that men cruise other

men who are macho and hyper-masculine they are in a sense, cruising based on a heterosexual standard which leads them in search for a man who is able to perform the effeminate role in cruising, thereby being effeminate. This example of the gay cultural script highlights the conflict that many gay men face in terms of performing an identity that is their own versus an identity that they see is popular within the culture. It does this by forcing them to negotiate between conflicting roles of identity performances. Besides this, Levine's work serves as very strong research that lays a foundation for many ideas presented here.

Stalking is the next stage of cruising that occurs once a target has been selected. "The men put themselves in cruising range, which varied according to meeting place. In bars and discos, they attempted to stand opposite the person they were cruising, so that they could make eye-contact. In sex places, they did the same. They also attempted to stand near this person in order to make physical contact, such as touching or groping" (Levine 83). Once a person was spotted and the perfect proximal location was chosen the next stage of cruising occurred, signaling.

Signaling is a necessitated stage in which one man will try to let the other man know he is interested in him in very subtle ways. Depending on the environment there are a myriad of methods employed signaling success. In social places there might be repeated exchanges of glances and eye-contact, reciprocal winks and smiles and even giving each "other the once over, glancing up and down one another's bodies" (Levine 83). In sexual places, signaling often occurs through touching. "The pursuer repositioned himself so that he was in reaching distance of the other man. While doing this, he continued to stare at the other man. The pursuer then rubbed an erogenous area on his or the other man's

body” (Levine 84). In recreational places (the gym, lockerroom, or streets) “the suitor usually relocated himself so that he was within talking distance to the desired man. After a few more glances and smiles, he made contact using a line appropriate for the situation ‘*Come here often?*’ or ‘*Crowded tonight, isn’t it?*’” (Levine 84).

For signaling to be successful the most critical element is timing. In bars and clubs, men might glance at each other for twenty or thirty minutes but if no attempt has been made after that, the cruise might be broken. In sexual places and on the streets it is even shorter. In a bath house if a man signals another man, that gesture itself justifies immediate action by both parties, if that does not occur the cruise most likely fails. On the streets, one only has fleeting seconds to exchange enough meaningful glances and non-verbal cues to secure a sexual encounter, often times this occurs in the time span it takes to walk across the street. However, if the signaling is appropriate and done within an accepted time frame and both members are consenting then cruising moves into its last phase, negotiating.

Negotiating is the last and most crucial step in securing a successful cruise. As Levine argues, “to make this encounter result in sex, the men needed to concretize erotic interest and set a time and place for sexual relations” (85), thus negotiating. Again, like signaling successful negotiations of a cruise depend on many external factors. In places earmarked for sex, (sex clubs, bath houses) negotiating becomes much more fluid with emphasis on the temporal rather than the contextual. “When the pair met in a sexual spot, the arrangements were made nonverbally, through physical contact. Touching erogenous areas specified erotic desire, and sex took place immediately following the contact. All of this occurred in a matter of minutes” (Levine 85).

Negotiating in a place that is not sexual in nature but more recreational or social (gym or a nightclub for instance) requires more flexibility time-wise but is much more content orientated. In these environments much more emphasis is placed on verbal communication in which, “plans were typically negotiated through a process that included four sequential steps: (1) offering drinks or drugs; (2) clarifying erotic interest; (3) picking a time for sex; (4) selecting a place to trick” (Levine 85). Of course all social situations do not require all steps to be done in stringent order but for Levine this is a great start in giving the reader a well-rounded general perspective. One of the most popular beginnings of a negotiation (for both hetero- and homosexuals) starts with, “Can I buy you a drink?” Almost cliché, this idea serves the purpose of, “afford[ing] the men sufficient time to put the moves on each other” (86). Usually if the pursued man objects to either drinks or drugs the cruise ends abruptly.

Finally, after all of the steps have been navigated carefully and affirmatively, the two men must now negotiate the last phase, picking a place for sex. “The suitor usually initiated the conversation about where to have sex, proposing a particular site. The place he picked depended upon the site of the initial encounter” (Levine 90). What this means is that for men who are cruising in sexual based areas, both men must negotiate where in that particular area they will go to consummate their relationship. In the social and recreational areas this becomes much more complex. A myriad a factors determine if this stage will be successful for all parties including, “living arrangements and personal preferences” (90). If the beginning offer is rejected because of a space and proximity issue, a counteroffer is usually prompted which is then accepted or in turn the cruise fails.

If the cruise gets to this stage of negotiating both men are well vested within the matter and will become more flexible in order for the cruise to be successful.

Cruising as a sexual and cultural script hurts gay men as it teaches them that random, objectified, sexual encounters are the basis of their identity. Even more importantly it instructs men who are being objectified that this is a natural/normal mode of behaving and they are benefiting themselves by securing their feigned status within the homosexual status-quo. Cruising as a gay cultural script limits gay men's ability to become individuals as it presents an unchanging system that forces gay men into similar patterns of behavior. It reinforces sexual and cultural stereotypes of gay men by showcasing the difference between how masculinity and effeminacy are performed and how the attitudes attached to those performances are presented. Cruising dictates that gay men must perform a masculine role of identity (by seeking out other men) who perform an effeminate role of identity (by being perceived as sexually desirable and attainable) and does not offer any role an option for more openness and versatility when performing their identity. It is a dangerous part of the gay cultural script because it is universal and because its rules and parameters are easily understood and then replicated.

#### *Some Models of Gay Identity: A Challenge to the Gay Cultural Script*

The cultural script is more fluid than just a classification of what men and women are supposed to say and do. It can be argued that the term leans towards a more ambiguous and culturally sensitive meaning. The gay cultural script adheres to gay men and their issues by acting as an agent of opposition that adversely affects them. The question then still remains how does this notion of a gay cultural script act as an agent of

opposition for gay men? Three reasons are presented here in attempt to answer this question. The first element of the gay cultural script's oppositional relationship with gay men highlights the adoption of the gay cultural script within a culture that is heterosexist and the impact that has on its participants. The next portion of this chapter explains the conflict that many gay men endure when they are forced to defeminize at an early age only to have to re-learn the gay cultural script, which being inherently effeminate, poses multiple problems relating to gay men confusing and misguiding their identity performance. The final section explains how "hegemonic masculinity ideology" and "masculinity consciousness" (Taywaditep 15) both serve as a foundation that reinforces negative attitudes regarding effeminacy that stems from both straight and gay members of the culture. Before that can be done it is necessary to explain the steps gay men must partake in when undergoing oppression and conflict from outside sources. This is done to set the tone to understand how difficult it can be for gay men to neutralize stigma and perform an identity without fear of prosecution.

In Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone, Martin Levine argues that there are three ways to neutralize stigma if you are a gay male: "passing, minstrelization and capitulation" (21). "Passing accounted for the secrecy of the gay world and included a set of behaviors that were designed to hide gay identity. Minstrelization explained patterns of cross-gendering associated with 'camp,' a behavioral style entailing the adoption of feminine dress, speech and demeanor." Finally, "capitulation accounted for the feelings of guilt, shame and self-hatred associated with the damaged sense of self, believing that homosexuality is wrong" (Levine 21). To go through all of this just to be treated equal, just like everyone else, seems arduous at best.

To move from passing and capitulation to minstrelization and so forth must be damaging if not tiring for all involved parties. In this regard the gay cultural script acts as an agent of opposition because of its constant maintenance and up-keep resulting in the individual facing tremendous pressure to conform.

Another pertinent example of how the gay cultural script becomes damaging for gay men stems from the research of Aveline in which he tries to point out indications of homosexuality in children from the perspective of their parents.

Why were retrospective indicators of homosexuality overwhelmingly drawn from those of atypical gender behavior? One answer surely lies in Western cultural history in which the link between feminine behavior and male homosexuality has long been ingrained as a cultural script. Because heterosexuality involves two sexes, it is characterized by morphological and gender rooted differences thought to complement each other. Homosexuality involves only one sex, and differences considered inextricable to sexual relations become elusive. As a result, the differences rooted in heterosexuality are often projected onto homosexual relationships. Femininity and passivity in one partner are thus often thought of as a necessity. In this respect, assumptions of heteronormativity extend even to homosexuality. Heterosexuality involves two sexes; homosexuality somehow involves compensatory differences. (Aveline 797)

Here we see the author arguing the case that the gay cultural script is inextricably linked with femininity and that because we live in a world dominated by heteronormativity, gay relationships are often operationalized in the context of heterosexual standards; thus one partner in a homosexual relationship taking on feminine gender roles is deemed socially acceptable. We also see how the gay cultural script is limiting as it is juxtaposed with feminine characteristics and packaged with all the discriminatory baggage associated with it. This, most importantly, shapes the argument into how the gay cultural script limits the potential of gay men.



Many gay men find themselves so rooted within hegemonic heterosexual normativity that they may view effeminate speech as unfavorable, often representing weakness and ugliness. Taywaditep argues that, “some evidence in the research literature and the media suggests that anti-effeminacy prejudice are not limited to heterosexual individuals. Ironically, some of the most visible attacks against effeminacy are expressed by those who are most likely to understand what it is like to be stigmatized: other gay men” (7). The reasoning’s behind this intolerance of effeminacy by other gays stems from two possible arenas, as Taywaditep states, “hegemonic masculinity ideology and masculinity consciousness” (15).

The attitudes that stem from hegemonic masculinity ideology may be motivated, “by one’s need to align oneself with an esteemed reference group. The anti-effeminacy attitudes among many gay men may be an extension of the dominant ideology they have adopted from society at large. This ideology predicates that masculinity is an asset, and men and masculinity are considered superior to women and femininity” (Herek 99-114). “Explanations for such ideological diversity among gay men have been offered by Nungesser and Pronger, who posited that gay men generally have two types of adaptation to their homosexual feelings: whereas some adopt a subversive and defiant status, others conform to the oppressor’s rules and, in turn reject other gay men” (qtd. in Taywaditep 21).

Studies have proven that many gay men exhibit some form of effeminate behaviors at an early age, see Bernard and his work, “Sex-Role Factor Identification and Sexual Preference of Men” (qtd. in Taywaditep 4) which discusses a Feminine Gender Identity scale and the research by Bem in, “Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive

Account of Sex-Typing” regarding the Bem Sex Role Inventory (qtd. in Taywaditep 4). Bernard states, “that gay men reported greater gender –atypical interests, behaviors and personality than heterosexual men (e.g., greater interests in aesthetics and domestic activities, more emotional expression and sensitivity and less male-typical interests as guns, fishing politics and sports)” ( qtd. in Taywaditep 4).

What becomes most interesting is although gay men have learned to defeminize at an early age, some move into the gay ghetto and are inculcated with the same gay cultural script that they have spent so long trying to eradicate, thus perpetuating a never-ending cycle all ending with a similar result: isolation, discrimination and an identity bound by a continued sense of feeling like the other or outsider. Therefore the idea of masculinity consciousness arises from, “the psychological consequence of defeminization which, aside from the benefits such as enhanced self-esteem and social acceptance, may lead to heightened salience of masculinity” (Taywaditep 18). His results included “discrimination and marginalization during childhood and adolescence, defeminized men’s ongoing preoccupation with ‘fitting in’ may unfortunately come with a price, as they have associated their own and other gay men’s gender nonconformity with discomfort and disapproval” (18). Those who exhibit high masculinity consciousness are

Those for whom masculinity is schematic, or in a prominent aspect of their self-concept. They become focused on themselves as social objects with respect to masculinity. Being highly aware of social criteria of masculinity, they are sensitive to people’s perceptions of their masculinity. As a result they constantly engage in strategic self-presentation, monitoring and regulating their behavior to ensure their masculine impression on others. (Taywaditep 19)

The combination of hegemonic masculinity ideology and masculinity consciousness both serve as tools that further stigmatize gay men as it forces limited

options regarding the development and performance of one's identity and ultimately one's awareness of today's culture. It does this by offering gay men only one option, if one wants to be accepted, that is to be male one must be ruggedly, aggressively masculine, in other words: macho. The gay cultural script does not do this, in fact it does the opposite, which on the surface seems like a positive attribute, however it does feed into this notion as it instructs its followers into an understanding that ultimately leads down the exact same path, fear, isolation and discrimination for the individual affected. Whether it is through the gay cultural script's nature to potentially acculturate effeminate behaviors or from Taywaditep's notion of gay men's need to be ruggedly masculine, both represent strict, unwavering guidelines for a gay-centric identity performance which hurt gay men as they are located within the extreme opposite ends of the spectrum, with little chance to meeting in the middle.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Gay Ghetto: Locating Gay-Centric Identity

To completely understand how the gay cultural script operates, one must comprehend where it operates as the setting plays an essential role in its process. Many gay individuals find themselves revolving around two separate and distinct worlds. One world refers to mainstream culture, to which everyone is part of. It is what may be referred to as culture, pop culture and even the dominant culture. It's the public that is so strong that its stereotypical representations of gays form the hegemonic foundation for an oppositional gay cultural script to flourish. Dominant culture already dictates appropriate action suitable for either men or women. Gay men and women do not figure in to this representation positively. Many boys grow up under the impression to be gay means to be something less of a man. For mainstream culture male effeminacy represents a weakness or undesirability for the individual. Through the very same culture which often depicts gay men as being effeminate, more and more of these men are finding themselves discriminated upon because of these characteristics. In today's culture gay men are accepted within the status-quo only as long as they fit neatly within one stereotypical classification or another which must already be justified by the culture. In other words, the dominant culture perpetuates the gay cultural script by parading stereotypical

representations of gay men as the only means of identity performance available and certainly acceptable. Although there are a myriad of examples that can be used to further explain how this transaction occurs, this research looks at only two avenues. (1) an analysis of gay representations found within the media and (2) an overview of what occurs in highly-gay-concentrated metropolitan areas otherwise known as the gay ghetto.

### *Gay Ghetto: From Home to Heartache*

Before discussing what the gay ghetto is, it is important to understand why it is referred to as a ghetto. Sibalis traces the term ghetto back to “16<sup>th</sup> century Venice and initially referred to an area of the city where local authorities forced Jews to reside” (1739). Long furthers this definition, “the word ghetto was the name given to the Jewish enclaves- those cities within cities of Europe- to which Jews were in many ways restricted by law until ‘emancipated’ to take part fully in the wider life of the cities starting in the eighteenth century” (“Sacrality” 236). He continues on by adding, “the word has been used more recently to designate those sections of modern American cities in which minorities seem to be “restricted”, not by legal, but by socio-economic reality” ( Long “Sacrality” 237). But it is not until Clark that we see how the ghettos of the past resemble the gay ghettos of today. “The ghettos of both eras shared in common an introverted, inwardly turned, monocultural focus- both ethically and religiously- delimited and confined by the surrounding culture. Such deepened Jewish identity came at a price: The ghettos in both eras thwarted full participation in the larger world while further emphasizing the Jew’s status as Other and as victim” (Clark 197). Gay ghettos emerged as the dominant culture forced gays to create their own communities. It is

important to note that the term gay ghetto used by the gay community has an ironic connotation that was a product of Sixties radicalism.

Communities which were safer from homophobic violence and prejudice but isolated from the mainstream world began to spring forth as extensions of large metropolitan areas like San Francisco, New York, Ft. Lauderdale, Los Angeles and even, “leading to the formation of gay ghettos in many other large North American cities such as the Bay Village in Boston and the Marigny neighborhood in New Orleans” (Sibalis 1740).

One of the best explanations for understanding what a gay ghetto specifically entails stems from the work of Nancy Fraser in her article entitled, “Rethinking the Public Sphere.” Fraser supplies the reader with an in-depth analysis and provides the necessary framework explaining how these communities are shaped and sustained. She argues that when public discourse is understood only as a “single comprehensive, overarching public,” members of marginalized social groups, “have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies” (123). What happens then as Fraser notes is that, “members of subordinated social groups- women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians- have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.” These “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” describe how gay individuals must form gay ghettos in order to secure a grounded sense of self that is free from stigma and scrutiny (Fraser 123). A sense of self that is shared by a community of others that (ideally) works together in creating equality and justice. It is from within the

gay ghettos that gay men see other individuals that share certain commonalities. Gay men have the opportunity to grow and develop their performance of identity in a setting that allows them more freedom of expression than the dominant culture. This freedom helps the creation of a grounded sense of self or a performance of identity to which the actor feels comfortable and connected enough to where the performance becomes autonomous or second nature. Once aware of certain negative aspects that a performance of identity can produce in an individual that participant can not have a grounded sense of self because of their potential inability to feel whole or complete as he or she contends with attributes that might seem foreign to them.

To better illuminate this issue, Michael Warner in “Public and CounterPublics,” discusses the public as “a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general” (49). Although he states that by even speaking of the public there is an implication that others exist it is when, “whenever one is addressed as *the* public, the others are not assumed to matter” (Warner 49). Mainstream culture in relation to gay men serves as a function of what Warner states as *the* public. This renders all gay individuals as outsiders and marginalized as they are not what is in the scope of value for many American citizens. We see that by labeling the dominant culture as *the* public we assume that no other publics’ exist- further perpetuating the hegemonic power-struggle gays endure with modern day discourse. Warner further elaborates by adding, “The way *the* public functions in the public sphere- as the *people*- is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized, and herein lies its power as its elusive strangeness” (Warner 51-52). If the public is self-creating and self-organized then how does it continue to sustain itself? One answer may lie in what this author deems,

“similar individuality.” Similar individuality is a notion that is purely American based as it is rooted within the ideological framework of American society’s desire for individualism. It dictates that everyone should be individualistic to a certain degree, in which too much deviation and separation from society’s traditional attitudes, values and beliefs will lead to possible isolation and even discrimination. Often times gay men find themselves abandoned and exiled due to similar individuality; while conversely, the dominant culture grows stronger as it further unifies its hegemonic ideology.

There is hope from similar individuality, as Warner puts it, “the unity of the public, however, is ideological. Other publics mark themselves off unmistakably from any general or dominant public. Their members are understood to be not merely a subset of the public but constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public” (Warner 84-85). It is this subset that provides home for millions of gay men and women; this subset is what shall be known as the gay ghetto.

### *Challenges of Gay Ghetto*

The gay ghetto acts as an agent of opposition to gay men by supplying and reinforcing a damaging gay cultural script. Clark and Long support this argument as they further analyze the gay cultural script’s role within the gay ghetto. Both author’s work is used to support the notion that the gay ghetto acts negatively towards gay men by: (1) isolating them from the rest of the culture, (2) turning focus inwardly, on self and on physical aesthetics of the self, (3) limiting the performance of identity to the performance of white, male identity exclusively, and (4) creating a sense of self-as-other by never allowing gay men to feel accepted due to other gay ghetto members’ ridicule and



discriminatory remarks against them. The gay ghetto historically played a positive role by encouraging a cultural location in which gays/lesbians are able to perform their identity. However, both Clark and Long utilized the term gay ghetto referring specifically to the 1990's and on as a locus for gay identity. With this in mind, both studies feature the negative impact of the gay ghetto by isolating gay men.

The gay ghettos today provide an alluring option for many gay men who are seeking a place to be with others who can reciprocate the values, attitudes and beliefs that they themselves hold. Often times gay men travel to these localized areas in search of a place that is free from the stigma and discrimination that the mainstream society perpetuates, only to find that the gay ghetto keeps, "gay men one-dimensional, focused on the purely sexual and all too often disconnected not only from the larger world, but from lesbians and other gay, bisexual and transgendered persons racially, ethnically, or economically different from themselves" (Clark 196). For Clark the gay ghetto does not in any way liberate but in fact incarcerates gay men into "institutionalized patterns of gay male behaviors" (Clark 196) or what I argue as the gay cultural script.

To better understand the connection of how and why the gay ghetto acts as an agent of opposition by supplying and reinforcing a potentially damaging cultural script to gay men; it is important to further explain the role of the gay ghetto amidst today's ever-changing cultural landscape. To do this, the work of Clark is analyzed as he begins to define what the gay ghetto entails. For Clark the function of the gay ghetto serves as an, "introverted, inwardly turned, monocultural space has provided safety for which to claim and to develop one's identity, in which to nurture a kind of collective, subcultural, or tribal ethnicity if you will, but, again at a price" (196). The cost of that price is directly

related to why the gay ghetto becomes “introverted and inwardly turned.” It happens in two ways. First by isolating gay men from the reality of the dominant culture it can create a sense of community that is out of touch with the surrounding world. Second, the gay ghetto creates a focus on the self that is so severe that others/issues do not matter. “The inwardly turned focus of the ghetto on stereotypes of masculine beauty and ubiquitous sexuality has unwittingly fostered a peculiar misogyny among gay men” (Clark 196). From here Clark raises the issue of how gay men may be so enamored with themselves that only those who resemble attributes found favorable, are deemed worthy or with value. However it is important to note that when this author refers to gay men being interested in *them* it is meant in a superficial manner. The gym ideology that is very prevalent in the gay ghettos is based upon beauty not health.

Ronald Long expands upon this when referring to, “the importance of the male body, masculinity cultivated, as the focus of erotic interest. Gay men who flock to the gyms to ‘get in shape’ know this intuitively. They seek less to get ‘fit,’ than to get shapely. And they know that it is gym-training, not tennis, that effects the muscular development of which males are uniquely capable” (Long “Affair” 28).

Another important issue arises with Clark’s definition of the gay ghetto as for him the emancipation from the “introverted and inwardly turned” (196) nature of the gay ghetto refers solely to gay men of color and lesbians.

This is why I believe lesbians and other minority people besides white gay men have a stake in the liberation of the gay male ghetto. For lesbians, gay men bisexual and transgendered people of color, the increasing visibility of the white gay male ghetto in the years since Stonewall has doubled their sense of invisibility. As an enclave of white middle-class privilege, however unwittingly, the gay ghetto has ignored people of color just as non-white communities have ignored or denied the existence of non-heterosexuals (Clark 200).

The second part of Clark's definition about a gay ghetto being a, "monocultural space [which] has provided safety for which to claim and to develop one's identity" (196) stems for Clark interpretation that the gay ghetto is white, middle-class, and suburban. What is interesting is that although the gay ghetto has changed demographically, culturally it still remains the same. To develop an identity from within the gay ghetto one can broadly define it as being a gay-centric identity. The gay ghetto does not foster racially differential identities as even now the gay culture has not advanced enough within mainstream society in relation to equality for such an in-depth taxonomic classification to occur. Often times gay people do not discriminate purely on race or ethnicity, usually intolerance is created from learned scripted behaviors or as Long puts it, "at the same time, one's masculine styling must be so habitual that, however one might deviate for a moment, one's masculinity is what impresses itself on the other" ("Affair" 31). It is critically for him that "one's masculine styling must be 'natural' in the sense of being unforced. In short, masculinity is the perceived effect of a consistent seamless, unforced styling. When 'masculinity'- even though styled- appears natural and native to the individual, the individual is seen as a 'hunk'" (Long "Affair" 31). As previously stated, what is perceived to be attractive is not the effeminate, flamboyant homosexual but the gay man who has a complete and genuine sense of owning his masculinity. One can not look masculine but sound feminine.

Finally, Clark's definition of the gay ghetto concludes, "in which to nurture a kind of collective, subcultural, or tribal ethnicity if you will, but, again at a price" (196). In the gay ghetto there are many shared commonalities amongst members. The most prevalent

of which, for our purposes, is the gay cultural script. By adhering to this script one is simultaneously building a sense of community and further isolating themselves from that community. As already mentioned, gay men are inculcated with a gay cultural script from within the gay ghetto and then discriminated upon from members of both the dominant culture and from member of the gay ghetto. This is the price Clark speaks of; it is the constant perception of self as *other* that plagues so many gay men today. It should also be said that by using the term of subcultural as a definition of a marginalized group further stigmatizes them as something less than the original, or sub par of average. A better choice would have been, co-cultural as it signifies being part of a whole.

#### *Performing Gay-Centric Identity in the Gay Ghetto*

While historically the gay ghetto has played a positive role for gay men it is Clark who raises various arguments about the detrimental, negative aspects the gay ghetto potentially supplies its inhabitants. From his summation it is apparent to see, that for him, living in a gay ghetto is neither a requirement nor a privilege; but how would other gay men and women feel? Surely they would disagree with him and want to live in a place that is so-called free of intolerance? That is not exactly so.

In a national poll by the magazine, The Advocate in 2007, 69% of the readers polled answered yes to the question, “Do you prefer to live in an integrated neighborhood rather than a distinct gay ghetto?” Some of the comments that supported this notion were, “Because my children are the center of my life, I choose to live in an ‘integrated neighborhood.’ It is keenly important they learn true diversity.” Or as one respondent put it, “I’ve never lived in an all- gay neighborhood, but being around gay people all the time

would drive me nuts.” Another person added an introspective view of the commonly shared notion of isolation found within the gay ghetto, “a gay ghetto confers a sense of community at the same time that it isolates us and furthers a portion of society’s unspoken sense that ‘no one I know is gay’”

The article ran two comments regarding the 31% of the people who would rather live in a gay ghetto than an integrated community, “It would be nice to live in an all gay neighborhood. You would not have the weird looks as you get into your car with the rainbow sticker on the bumper.” The next pro-ghetto commenter laments about being forced to be with heterosexuals and within their culture all the time. “We seldom have the luxury of living in a gay ghetto, but if you can, why not? You have to spend the rest of you time in straight culture.” The last comment resembles a middle-ground perspective, wanting to live in a gay ghetto but, “most gay ghettos are too expensive, and we can get more house for less living close by but outside the ghetto.”

There are, however, many reasons for why people would want to live in a gay ghetto, as Ronald Long discusses how the gay ghettoization is purely voluntary an act of liberation and a cause for celebration.

I would argue it is life as it is ritualized in the gay ghettos that is the distinctively ‘gay’ way of relating to the sacrality of male beauty and man-to man sex. Gay men, of course, find themselves in a variety of social locations and have a plurality of personal agendas. Not every gay man aspires to live in the ghetto-nor do they aspire to live like ghetto gays. Nor should they. There are many ways of living as gay men. Nevertheless, I am arguing that the life style of the ghetto gays constitutes a paradigmatically determinant ‘gay’ way of relating to the sacred realities of gay life. What is characteristically gay is the ability to own the ghetto, if not as home, at least as ‘hometown’ or ‘home base’- and to welcome ghetto gays as fellow worshippers at the altar of male beauty and man-sex. (Long “Sacrality” 236)

To celebrate the notion that to be what Long refers to as ghetto gays means to become fellow worshippers is troublesome because earlier in the same statement the author claims that gays have a plurality of personal agendas and social locations, what Long doesn't take in consideration is the idea that gays are linked together by the common attribute known as the gay cultural script. For many gays, exile into the gay ghetto is not voluntary as they are forced from the comfort and security of their homes into a space they so desperately want to belong to. The gay cultural script thus becomes a safe haven of an immensely important community building tool that sees it benefits quickly dissipate after an individual owns it.

Long also argues that the gay ghetto, being centered around the bars and baths creates a "sexual delivery system" ("Sacrality" 237) which helps create, sustain and keep in check its members, who often times are so ingrained with the stereotypical roles for gay men dictated by a heterosexist society to even be cognizant of it. He continues, "Since the 'ghetto' is not just any neighborhood, but a communal life that has grown around the bars and baths, and the bars and baths are the institutions that in turn provide a determinate sexual delivery system, sexuality is manifested as foundational to 'gay' life-to be understood as the determinative ritualization of the gay religion of male beauty and man-sex" (Long "Sacrality" 237) What is important here is the foundational development of how sex as a stereotype permeates all parts of gay culture, especially within the gay ghetto. It is Long's "sexual delivery system," that provides a seemingly important purpose to gay men as they perform their identity one must be sexual in all facets of daily living. To be gay in the gay ghetto means to be constantly focused on the act and practice of sexual stimulation and the bars and baths provide the perfect outlet for

this never ending cycle. Gay men learn how to be “hypersexual” (Clark 196) early on by accepting the gay cultural script which is facilitated through the gay ghetto and from watching gay representations found within the media.

The modern day American gay ghetto provides a place for gay men to work and live in an environment that is ideally free from mainstream culture’s discerning judgments on the homosexual lifestyle. What many of these men don’t realize is that they are being ingrained with the exact same set of values that disavows them in the first place. They are forced into (as Clark touches-upon) a one-dimensional collective, devoid of all identity that is uniquely their own and worse, forced to perpetuate this gay cultural script without their prior knowledge, nor consent.

The gay ghetto acts as an agent that fosters (what Long argues as) the “sexual delivery system” (“Sacrality” 237) of the bars which further perpetuates the stereotype that all gay men are obsessed with sex so intensely that some form of physical structure must be needed in order to facilitate this insatiable yearning. What is even more troublesome is that the bars in the gay ghetto serve to reinforce the notion that gay men’s lives are not fully complete unless they are full fledged sexual beings.

In the gay ghetto to be sexual is synonymous with being beautiful as the inwardly turned focus on the self intensifies. It has the ability to do this because its very existence remains in an oppositional relationship to the dominant culture. Constant competition between both mainstream culture and the gay ghetto help gay men turn their focus towards the one thing that has always been there; themselves. Unfortunately, due to the limiting roles the gay ghetto offers, this internal focus often times transforms into something sadly superficial- relegating gay men’s prowess into areas like

grooming/aesthetics, fashion, interior design, culinary arts and culture. Not surprising, those roles mirror the same exact stereotypical representations found in the extremely popular television show, about gay men's expertise, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and Performing Gay Cultural Script

The gay ghetto is not the only place that gay men learn the gay cultural script. There is another medium that is not limited by space or proximity that instructs gay men of certain appropriate ways of behaving. For the millions of gay men who do not live in a gay ghetto they can learn the gay cultural script through television, or specifically gay representations found on television. The challenges for a gay-centric identity call for an exploration of terms that relate to the performance of identity for gay men. Terms like: gay cultural script and gay ghetto can be viewed with different decoding on the basis of historical views in particular.

One of the major arenas where the gay cultural script flourishes can be found in about every home in the United States and abroad, the television. The proceeding chapter discusses gay representations found within the media as through the form of a popular television program entitled, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.

In the summer of 2003, the cable access channel Bravo (an NBC affiliate) premiered its newest offering, a make-over transformation show involving five openly gay men (the Fab Five) and one hapless straight guy thought to be aesthetically (and culturally) disinclined. For each episode all five protagonists tutor their straight counterpart on various aspects of beauty and lifestyle, each representing their own

distinct field of expertise- Carson-fashion, Kyan-Grooming, Thom-Interior Design, Ted-Food and Wine and Jai-culture. At the conclusion of each episode the straight guy is to be prepared enough to handle some form of special event and the Fab Five get the opportunity to revel in their hard work. Although it may sound innocent enough, it is necessary to take a closer look in order to better understand how these figures in the media serve to disenfranchise gay men and their culture.

### *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: An Analysis*

As the millennium came and past, a push for equality for people of all races, colors and creeds could be found within the hearts and minds of many. Nothing more evident than the emergence of the tremendously popular television show, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy demonstrates this point better. For those who may have missed this landmark reality series, it is centered around five openly homosexual men who each week in a ritualistic formula find a straight man who is in need of a complete life make-over. From dress to design the Fab Five covers all the bases and in the end creates a perfect package of a man to send into the world and everyone's lives are seemingly better for it.

Many critics hailed the Bravo cable network for showcasing marginalized people as centrally focused protagonists, who are able to perform a potentially beneficial service when assisting the straight men of today. The location of the show in the cultural history of reality television is pertinent to address one more time as it highlights how the performance of gay-centric identity is viewed. The show was highly influenced from a British series and while a huge success in the United States, the performance of the Fab Five is always viewed by audiences and producers as an ironic interpretation of gay

identity. The show constitutes an important statement that a performance of a gay cultural script doesn't mean moving away from stereotypes therefore the same show can be read with alternate lenses on the basis of different decoding of this cultural performance.

The gang of experts descends on the straight male subject all at once- in a manner they have personally described as 'shock and awe'- and proceed to update both his personal appearance and that of his home. The straight men are taught how to do everything from picking out their own clothes and dressing themselves appropriately to preparing gourmet meals and shopping for wines that cannot be bought in jugs. In short the heterosexual male subjects are trained by the Fab Five to become stylish and metrosexual rather than stylish and homosexual. (Hart "Representing" 60)

Hart also goes on to state how the show actually has elevated the status of the gay community by, "suggesting that gay men are actually superior-rather than inferior-to heterosexuals, thereby inverting and undermining the cumulative message that has been disseminated about gay men in U.S society through television offerings in recent decades" ("We're Here" 246). This is however; not the case. Hart's analysis becomes troublesome because he has not looked at the overall impact the program has had on the community. The impact, namely, the gay cultural script can not be better exemplified through the exploits of the Fab Five as its detrimental nature is grossly on display in nice, manageable, 60-minute chunks; easy for the public to consume.

#### *Fab Five Meets Performative Dimension of Gay Cultural Script*

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy serves to reinforce already preexisting stereotypes as it further centralizes heterosexuals while at the same time, helps the straight community's dissemination of gays by packaging gay men into nice, neat boxes of stereotypical behaviors. It also serves as a means of sustaining heteronormativity by

creating an apathy that many gay men succumb to, being so deep in the dominant culture. Remember Hart's interpretation earlier mentioned about Queer Eye for the Straight Guy's ability to showcase the notion that, "gay men are actually superior-rather than inferior- to heterosexuals" ("We're Here" 246)? Unfortunately, this is not the case as younger gay men look for some form of role model and find it within the representations of the Fab Five. By emulating their heroes, these young gay men are only opening themselves up for more hatred, discrimination and intolerance.

C. Kelly in the Fort Worth Star-Telegraph writes, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is a catalog of homosexual stereotypes, played to a throbbing techno-disco beat, that also systematically denies its gay stars their complexity and their sexuality. The straight guy, meanwhile stands back, endures some innocuous flirting and emerges as the ultimate hetero stud" (1). Kelly adds, "gay people have become complicit in their own oppression: playing up to grotesque stereotypes, and widely ignoring the troubling questions the show raises" (1). It can now be said that gays have been so entrenched with heteronormativity that by watching Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, they just become listless, passive observers who absorb anything and question nothing.

This sort of apathy fuels the gay cultural script which dictates that the way dominant culture exists today must be the same tomorrow. It is from this issue of apathetic relevancy that spurred Bob Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University to write, "In the end, who's the hero of that show? It's the straight guy. He's the guy who needs to be rescued, so he can either get the girl or the gallery showing. And these guys come in and make that possible. And then they leave before the climax, and they have to watch it on the periphery. Talk about being

marginalized- they literally have to watch the climax of the show from the margins” (qtd. in Kelly 1). The purpose of the show should never be to show how superior gays are to straights, just equal. By watching this program many gay men may be induced with the notion that to be gay means to do all the hard work and let someone “more deserving” take the credit. That is an extremely detrimental aspect of the gay cultural script that gay men see and adopt everyday. As it plays with the gay individual’s sense of worth the gay cultural script found within Queer Eye for the Straight Guy then moves into one of its most vicious stages- forced femininity.

Before beginning with the notion of forced femininity, it is important to take moment and clarify its meaning within this specialized context. For these purposes, forced femininity is an aspect of the gay cultural script that dictates that gay performance of identity is now and forever will be defined in effeminate standards. This supports the claim that the gay cultural script limits the potentiality of gay men who try to perform an identity that is uniquely their own. The most important issue to note here is that this research in no way argues that to be gay and effeminate is necessarily a negative thing. In fact it is argued that everyone is to be considered equal no matter what circumstances may arise relating to that individual. The argument asks for an increase in awareness from gay men regarding how the gay cultural script equips them with the notion that to be gay, one *must* be effeminate. This is an essential function of the gay cultural script- to limit its user’s potential and to force them into performing identities they themselves may or may not have discovered on their own. In this instance, the gay cultural script impedes on everyone’s personal freedoms and liberties without anyone noticing and without their awareness regarding the severity of the issue.

To support this idea of forced femininity the thesis turns to the work of Ramsey and Santiago when they state three main reasons for why Queer Eye for the Straight Guy acts as an agent that supports the notion that being gay is equated with what is know as feminine. “*Queer Eye* reifies public definitions of gay men as ‘feminine’ in three primary ways including the neutralization of homosexuality, the choice of men to be made over, and the focus on the Carson as the program’s primary source of humor” (353).

One may best understand how homosexuality is neutralized by, “reaffirming the notion that straight and gay are legitimate and mutually exclusive categories (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix 431). Shugart contends, “representations of marginalized groups typically reflect the biases and interests of the powers that define the public agenda” (70). The Fab Five’s own, personal identities are constantly being neutralized and ignored as it is the straight man and his issues which becomes the centralized focus. As Westerfelhaus & Lacroix argue, “*Queer Eye*’s privileged placement of straight men is made possible, in part, by the series’ premise, reflected in the show’s title: there are gay and straight men, and the former can be of help to, and should serve the interests of, the latter. Exploitation of this binary conception of human sexual orientation informs the ritual logic that shapes the show and drives the dramatic and sexual tension” (431) Again this is another example of how the gay cultural script dictates that gay men’s only objective in life is to support and bolster the *real* men in society; straight men.

Often times the Fab Five is brought in to transform the straight guy’s deficiencies when referring to relationships, socio-economic success and aesthetical value; this further, “enriches and strengthens specifically heteronormative social and political sensibilities” (Shugart 70). Homosexual’s identity must take a back seat to what is more

important, thus elevating heterosexual identity while at the same time, devaluing anything to which that dominant identity opposes.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy also reifies the public definition of gay as feminine by choosing subjects to make-over that stereotypically exemplify what it is to be masculine.

*Queer Eye* ensures that the masculinity of the men being made over is emphasized through their choice of 'projects.' The Fab Five's professions are typically associated with femininity, whereas the majority of the men that undergo makeovers often have more 'masculine' jobs such as police officer, Navy Seal, and personal trainer/kick boxer. Additionally the men of the program's first season often tower over the Fab 5 in terms of height and body mass, thereby physically framing the Fab Five as *not masculine* and therefore feminine. (Ramsey and Santiago 353-354)

It is easy to discern that by acting like the Fab Five in the gay ghetto and mainstream culture the results will most likely lead to a different outcome that is found within the entertainment program. Again this goes back to the idea that gay men learn behaviors from others, and then emulate those learned behaviors in order to fit in, only to be ostracized for acting like that in the first place. There is no other character on the show that has acquired more attention, appeal and thus emulation than that of Carson Kressley, the program's very own fashion guru. Carson's impact within the show, throughout mainstream culture and subsequently, through the gay cultural script is so profound that he garnered his very own section within this thesis.

*A Man Named...Carson: A Single Voice or Voice of the Gays*

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy frames homosexual men as stereotypical, one-dimensional representations by limiting their potentially burgeoning identity

performances. The representation that best exemplifies this notion would have to be Carson. Carson Kressley, the Fab Five's resident fashion expert and master of the tongue-in-cheek retort, demonstrates how the gay cultural script acts as an agent of opposition in two ways: (1) it frames gay men as solely sexual-based beings, and (2) it allows the audience to believe that they too share Carson's "liminal license" when he touches, teases and plays with his straight male subjects. Both of these arguments (especially the latter) leave gay men open for more challenges as they perform their gay-centric identities. By framing all homosexual men as being purely sexual based/minded and by providing a false sense of liminal security, Carson helps foster an increase in intolerance, discrimination and hatred from homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. Although there has been numerous scholarly work on Carson as protagonist of Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, Morrish & O'Mara, Ramsey & Santiago), the focus here will be on two aforementioned discursive practices. By examining Carson's role on the television program as the "hypersexual"(Clark 198) homosexual and by understanding his unique ability to engage so openly with his straight male subjects, this research question highlights how the gay cultural script fails to translate from one medium to the other. Whether it is from the gay ghetto to the dominant culture or from reality television to the reality we all exist in; the gay cultural script should not be shared nor should it be commonplace in any way; however, by its very own nature, the gay cultural script dictates that its' existence must be based upon how far it can spread to its' members. Carson Kressley serves as a great foundational backbone that showcases that the gay cultural script does not help real gay men in the real world with their real problems.



Carson's antics within the show are usually relegated to sexually based innuendos, puns and one-liners that usually leave the straight men in a stage of unease.

Carson, the catty and flamboyant member of the Fab Five, is perhaps most appreciated for his gay male stereotype-laced humor and 'come-ons' aimed at making the heterosexual men feel uncomfortable. However, even though many gay people laugh at such behaviors they help sustain heteronormative society because the humor on which the jokes (gay men making heterosexual men uncomfortable) assume heterosexuality as the norm, thereby focusing attention back to heterosexuality and away from the true subversive notion of homosexuality separated from femininity (Ramsey & Santiago 354).

Again this is dangerous as it promotes the image that being catty and flamboyant is stylish and acceptable, which in heterosexist culture and saturated with the notion of rugged masculinity, could not be farther from the truth. Also as previously mentioned, this catty and flamboyant behavior does not usually bode well with homosexual men either as effeminate men are ostracized from within their own communities as well. Westerfelhaus & Lacroix back this up by stating, "The playfully prurient tone of these statements is unmistakable. Such 'come-ons' which are typically deemed to be unwelcome by straight men according to the conventions of heteronormative mainstream, are tolerated within *Queer Eye's* ritually defined context" (434).

Another example of how Carson acts as an agent of the gay cultural script's detrimental value relating to the performance of gay-centric identity is his liminal ability to dangerously identify with his straight subjects in a sexual manner. This may be further explained by examining how gay men are framed as being feminine to straight men within this television show, and at the same time millions of young gay men simultaneously receive and decode the very same message within their own lives, furthering the detrimental gay cultural script. This becomes particularly dangerous as it

is done in a very tongue-in-cheek stylistic manner. “Masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality are constructed and deconstructed with humor and ridicule” (Morrish & O’Mara 352).

We see this continued as what Westerfelhaus & Lacroix term, “liminal license” (431). When society affords certain individual the right to engage in behaviors that are not normally acceptable that are said to have be part of a liminal license.

The liminal status provides the ritual logic sanctioning the temporary violations of selected sociocultural rules that occur during rituals of rebellion. The same liminal license allows the Fab Five to tame, tease, and touch their straight subjects in ways regarded as taboo in other contexts. The Fab Five’s liminal status is partly a function of the series’ ritual formula, which allows the five gay men only temporary and limited access to the straight world. (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix 432)

This liminal status is not universally known by all gay and straight members alike. No, unfortunately many gay men see this violation of heteronormative practice as acceptable and assume that it is now in vogue to act and behave in such a way. Often times, this adherence to the gay cultural script leads to the continuation of discrimination, intolerance and abuse.

Due to the lack of visible positive gay role models for younger gay men, Carson thus becomes the focal point for what is acceptable and what it not. As gay men seek to discover and perform identities that are uniquely their own, the idea of Carson representing all possible facets of behaving and being becomes troublesome and limiting. As Judith Butler points out “gay identity is performed by means of the citational gender transgressions. Gender is to be understood as the perceived ‘effect’ of a habitual and habituated ‘performance’” (134-141). Carson’s performance of these gender roles typifies the constant struggle gay men face in balancing masculine ideals with feminine

pragmatics. Feminine pragmatics is the potentially natural tendency of gay men to act in ways deemed effeminate. As already stated, many gay men must defeminize in order to belong to whatever group they pledge allegiance to, by viewing the very small amount of popular gay figures in the media (or the lack there of) Carson becomes a main component in internalizing how identity should be performed. It is no wonder that many gay men are left in limbo when performing their identities, as many messages they receive regarding their identity is varied and oppositional.

Carson from the Fab Five serves to hinder gay men and their identity performances by imposing a gay cultural script that is solely based on sex. “The stereotype most cheerfully demonstrated by *Queer Eye* is that gay men are obsessed with sex. Carson is most lethally witty and lasciviously-minded, but like the others, he observes boundaries occasioned by the slight awkwardness of the gay-straight culture clash” (Morrish & O’Mara 351). One of the most over-used and abused stereotypes regarding gay men is their “hypersexualization” (Clark 198). To be gay means to be inherently preoccupied with a notion of constant sexual intercourse from as many partners that one can uncover. Anything less is deemed unusual and the individual is looked at as deviant from others. Carson exemplifies this stereotype when he gasps at his straight subjects, “Any time you want to make-out with me, just let me know” (Episode 103). Or after rubbing down a heterosexual man after his tanning, he quips, “I rubbed him down like Seabiscuit. It was great” (Episode 103). Is he being serious? We may never know as Westerfelhaus & Lacroix put it, “this ambiguity deprives Carson’s sexual come-ons of any real seriousness, as does their comical delivery. In using humor in this way, any possibility of Queer sex between Carson and his client is rendered harmless, reduced

to a mere joke” (434). Morrish & O’Mara state this as, “Occasionally Carson pushes the comfort levels of some of the straight men but it is through the device of humor and queenly ridicule that Carson constructs gay identity, and deconstructs the uncontested certainties of straight masculinity” (351).

Humor as a defensive device has been employed by many gay men as a tactic for survival, but to use humor as a cover-up when understanding sex as constant construct of gay identity becomes problematic as it has multiple entendres that convey multi-dimensional levels of meanings. This may result in the performance of a gay-centric identity becoming too confusing and hurtful since boxing gay men in as only and primarily sexual beings further stigmatizes them and stunts their potential development and growth.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy serves to reinforce a detrimental gay cultural script by exemplifying stereotypical representations that are harmful and by furthering the notion that gay men are all and only effeminate. It may also be damaging as it secures a liminal status for gay men that offers no warning to its consumers about its implications and by sustaining a heteronormative and heterosexist society by simultaneously centralizing heterosexuals while decentralizing homosexuals and their issues. It instructs gay men of a gay cultural script that when learned may be used as a discursive practice limiting the potential for the individual to perform an identity that is unique and characteristically their own. Not only are gay individuals who adhere to this gay cultural script feel discrimination from the mainstream culture they also feel the same sense of isolation from their own communities, the gay ghetto; as the notion of what is attractive and of value is still so entrenched within heterosexual standards of hegemonic

masculinity. What is most troubling is the fact that since gay visibility in the media is so limited, often times this is the only image that gay men get to see when formulating who they are in relation to the rest of culture. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy has paved the way for gays to be incorporated within the mainstream media and culture, but now it is time for something positive and helpful for the gay community, to walk through that door that the Fab Five so serendipitously opened.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is just one of many examples of how gay representations within the media serve as a facilitator of a gay cultural script. It is particularly powerful as it is able to spread its message to a mass audience when compared to the miniscule scope of people the gay ghetto is able to contain. It solidifies the gay cultural script better than the gay ghetto by offering popular, comical figures that act as role-models which ease the transition that many younger gay men face when performing their identities. Conversely, the implications of the gay cultural script when learned through Queer Eye for the Straight Guy can be categorized as passive when compared to the gay ghetto where the individual plays an active role in their performance of identity as the space the gay ghetto provides becomes a tangible environment to practice these behaviors.

Whether through the location of the gay ghetto or from viewing the images represented on television, young and old gay men alike are learning and replicating a gay cultural script resulting in the performance of a gay-centric identity. Both the gay ghetto and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy equip gay men with the necessary tools needed in order to communicate their shared ideas effectively. However the paths that both

discursive arenas employ to achieve this often times may not be so simplistic and straight-forward.