Financial Discrepancies in *Queer Eye*

In the Netflix series *Queer Eye*, one recurring theme is that the show’s hosts, known as the Fab Five, have no empathy for many of their makeover subject’s financial status. In season two’s episode “A Decent Proposal,” the Fab Five go to visit William and Shannon, who live together in a trailer and have a much more modest life than what the hosts are accustomed to. This is subtextually equated to the couple living an inferior life because they cannot afford luxuries the Fab Five take for granted. This ideology is reinforced by the article, “How Queer is Queer Eye?,” which goes into detail about how the show is merely an overdramatized way of questioning social norms, such as how people should dress and what sort of lives are acceptable. In a show made to spotlight equality and acceptance, the hosts who live privileged lives have a blatant disregard for the financial status and lifestyle choices of people who are featured on their show. They are portrayed as lesser people for those very reasons, which leads viewers to question the sincerity of these representatives of LGBT community.

One way that the hosts tend to degrade the lifestyles of makeover subjects is by directly making fun of what is not “normal” to them. During the episode “A Decent Proposal,” upon first arriving to the home of William and Shannon, the assault on their financial class begins almost immediately. “Look, look at his trailer home… Oh my gosh, this is the literal definition of Bumf***, Egypt. Oh my god, I’m scared” (5:35), the hosts exclaim. The trailer is seen as trashy, but William and Shannon both work at Walmart and have a much lower standard of living due to
their lower income. A life that the couple views as normal is not seen as such by the Fab Five, who assume it to be inherently wrong due because of their assumptions made from the start. This is not only the Fab Five judging the couple; more importantly, it is the hosts going against everything the show is trying to endorse. In a series designed to win acceptance for the LGBT community, these men are dishing out what is being done to them, except for a slightly different reason. While the Fab Five still helps William regardless of his money, this should still be a more sensitive subject and should not be portrayed in a mocking light.

The hosts not only make personal attacks based on the trailer William and Shannon live in, but they also go after their personal lives – specifically their relationship and how Shannon should be treated. Within only a few minutes of criticizing the couple’s home, Karamo makes a comment about William’s couch, which is directed at not only the couch itself but also at how he should feel regarding his significant other. William tells Karamo how he purchased the couch at a Goodwill for thirty dollars a few months prior. To which Karamo responds, “So you have a woman who’s the one. Maybe she shouldn’t be sitting on things like this” (6:44). Such a statement puts too much value in material goods instead of on aspects that truly matter – such as unconditional love. Much of the LGBT community tends to emphasize that “love is love” no matter what; however Karamo is insinuating that a couch could come between the couple’s feelings for one another, which is contradictory to the messages the show endorses. The couch is not only symbolic of William and Shannon’s financial situation, but also the irrelevant details that come between the couple.

In the article “How Queer is Queer Eye?,” Spencer Kornhaber further proves how the Fab Five are not as open as they claim to be: “Nothing wrong with that, basically Seinfeld’s euphemism for fake open-mindedness, is an earnest tenet of Queer Eye.” This statement
perfectly describes how the Fab Five put on a façade during the shooting of *Queer Eye* and turn this couple’s lives into a comedy act for viewers. Serious matters for the people featured on the series are made into jokes. For example, when the hosts are introduced to William in the bowling alley, Tan immediately remarks how he comes there even though “you’ve literally got holes in your t-shirt” (4:50), instead of considering there were holes in William’s clothes due to his inability to buy more because of a lack of money. This is not seen as a significant issue to most viewers since it is played off as humor, but the underlying message is still present.

The issues of financial and lifestyle judgement present in *Queer Eye* are not only a problem because they interfere with the message and intentions of the show, but they also have consequences that are present in everyday life. If someone considers it appropriate for these men to host a television series despite insulting their makeover subjects – albeit unintentionally – then it is likely that eventually the viewers themselves will fall victim to making similar hasty judgments themselves. The two texts, *Queer Eye* and “How Queer is Queer Eye?,” complement each other because the article provides a thoughtful breakdown of aspects the audience might not notice when they first watch the show. It also allows them to take a deeper look into some of the underlying issues potentially masked by the overarching theme of LGBT acceptance. In a show with such a bold and significant meaning, it might benefit the hosts of *Queer Eye* to consider how their reactions, no matter how small, could influence the perception of people with financial problems and any other number of issues.
Works Cited
