

ONE

## **MASTERS OF THEIR DOMAIN: SEINFELD AND THE DISCIPLINE OF MEDIATED MEN'S SEXUAL ECONOMY**

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I must confess that I am much more interested in problems about technologies of the self and things like that rather than sex. . . . Sex is boring.

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Masculine representation has noticeably shifted since the 1980s with the changing tides of capitalism. Industrial definitions and images of masculinity, emphasizing the importance of personal restraint and the investing of resources into productive ends, dominated popular discourses through much of the twentieth century. A neoliberal orientation, which has become increasingly pronounced since the 1990s, has produced images of masculinity that emphasize consumption and gratification as their own rewards. The pull and play between these competing capitalistic modes has manifested in shifting cultural understandings of masculine sexuality as exhibited in men's mediated representations. Looking at the NBC situation comedy *Seinfeld*, which enjoyed a nine-year run (1989–1998) in primetime before beginning a robust life in syndication, we see emerging cultural changes in ideals of masculine sexuality playing themselves out. *Seinfeld's* effect on popular culture has manifested most clearly in white, middle-class vernacular, including sexual euphemisms such as “shrinkage,” “yada, yada, yada,” and “master of your domain.”<sup>1</sup> More than adding to the cultural lexicon, *Seinfeld* has demonstrated the ever-changing discourses of gender and sexuality in the United States as we have shifted from a gender ideology grounded in modern/industrial ideals to one directed toward neoliberal/consumerist ends.

In his most-cited works, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault demonstrates less interest in understanding prisons or sexuality in Western culture than in the social organizations—the history, politics, economies, and ethics—that both create and sustain cultural notions of correction and sexual expression.<sup>2</sup> Moving beyond the objects of analysis, Foucault dwells on what social practices reveal about the culture that produces them: “the will that sustains them and the strategic intention that supports them.”<sup>3</sup> Examining representations of masculine sexuality, then, is to analyze the changes occurring within a culture, here, the dominant U.S. culture at the close of the twentieth century. Foucault dismisses the common habit of thinking of power as a force held by individuals and used to oppress others. Instead, he argues for conceptualizing power as a productive force, one which constructs bodies and knowledge fashioned in particular ways. Therefore, it is society that “fabricates” individuals into subjects within a particular discourse.<sup>4</sup> Rather than speaking of power as repressing or restricting bodies and knowledge based on some true ideal existing a priori, this approach recognizes that individuals are produced in accordance with one model, admittedly to the exclusion of others.<sup>5</sup>

Gender performance, for both men and women, provides an especially useful instance to study the production of bodies to meet cultural expectations. Despite the diversity of personal preferences, a recognizable system of signs and performances has emerged for what is deemed respectively appropriate for men and women as an attempt to stabilize gender for the individual and for society as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Whether it be fashions that idealize women as physically appealing but restricted through the use of corsets and high-heeled shoes or an insistence that men be physically aggressive and professionally/financially successful, both sexes receive training over the course of their lives to comply with cultural ideals that maintain strict, dichotomous distinctions between men and women.<sup>7</sup>

Sexuality, too, is produced through cultural discourses. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault focuses not on describing the sexual predilections, prohibitions, and peccadilloes of Western culture but instead on the discursive practices that produce understandings of sexuality in the West and the ways those discourses are transgressed and maintained, often concurrently.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing sexual categories and definitions as discursive productions rather than natural facts places sexuality in

the “realm for the operation of power (in the sense of social control).”<sup>9</sup> Foucault cautions us against thinking of power as controlling sexuality through oppression, what he calls the “repressive hypothesis,” and urges us to recognize the myriad discourses of sexuality in culture that dwell on (im)proper sexual conduct and compel individuals to confess their sexual transgressions.<sup>10</sup> Amid the very mandates of sexual prohibition resides a discussion about sex in terms of its proper uses and functions. The enforcement of these mandates prompts further talk of sex in the form of confession, whether to a priest, therapist, parent, or friend.<sup>11</sup> To say, then, that restrictions on sexual behaviors and displays silence us is to be blind to the extent to which those rules and their effects bring sexuality into discourse.

Concentrating on performances and representations of gender and sexuality allows us to understand the operations and goals of specific ideologies for, as Klaus Krippendorf notes, “Power is most profitably seen as *embodied* in the lives of people with very real bodies saying things to each other, in their actual languaging, which includes uttering explanations, commands, dismissals, threats, and promises—as well as giving indications of acceptance, obedience [*sic*], compliance, submission or agreement.”<sup>12</sup> These productions of bodies and knowledge—gender or sexuality—occur through dispersed discourses that often act inconspicuously to perpetuate an ideology. Consequently, “[t]he analysis of the discourse of power thus must begin with the assumption that any articulatory practice may emerge as relevant or consequential—nothing can be ‘taken-for-granted’ with respect to the impact of any particular discursive practice.”<sup>13</sup> For that reason, this chapter focuses on the “taken-for-granted” discourses of a television comedy that prides itself on being “about nothing” when in fact it says a great deal about idealized masculine sexuality in the United States. As a case in point, *Seinfeld*’s “The Contest” demonstrates the tensions at the close of the twentieth century between an industrialized model of masculine sexuality and an emerging consumerist model.

Using “The Contest” as a case study, this chapter focuses on the tensions and ambiguity experienced amid the social transformation from industrial modernism to consumerist neoliberalism as they manifest in discourses of masculine sexuality. Drawing chiefly from Foucault’s project on sexuality and power in society, this chapter maps the ways in which

*Seinfeld* represents the conflict between early and late capitalism in its discussion of masturbation and abstinence. To begin, we will look at the competing sensibilities of modern and neoliberal capitalisms and their effects upon masculine sexuality as presented in discourses surrounding masturbation. Having established an understanding of masculine sexuality in U.S. culture, we will then turn to *Seinfeld's* "The Contest" as a way to understand the tensions inherent in the transition between early and late capitalist models. In conclusion, we will consider the example of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* as representing a masculinity ensconced in neoliberalism/consumerism yet retaining vestiges of a modern/industrialist masculinity.

#### CAPITALIST SEXUALITY

As a fiercely capitalistic society, the United States has succumbed to what Kenneth Burke terms an "occupational psychosis," which is to say we organize and understand all aspects of life in terms of our economic system.<sup>14</sup> As Emily Martin notes of scientific discussions concerning menstruation and menopause, human reproductive functions have long been described in terms of capital production and ability.<sup>15</sup> Sexuality, as well, has long been subject to its role in capitalism. In the following section, I will focus attention on understanding sexuality as it is produced by capitalist discourses. Here, I differentiate the ethics that result from competing modes of capitalism, specifically industrialism and consumerism. I will then highlight a brief history of discourses on masturbation in the West as a way of demonstrating industrial capitalism's pervasiveness in producing sexuality in a manner consistent with economic concerns.

From the two basic operations of the market system, production and consumption, two distinct modes of behavior emerge. On the one hand, a period of elevated market regulation and concern for national interests characterizes modernism, emphasizing the production of capital. On the other, a period of increased deregulation of the market that emphasizes personal interests typifies (neo)liberalism, wherein we see concern directed toward consumption.<sup>16</sup> Modernism, with economic behavior often described as industrialist or Fordist, sought "progress" by taming nature and human desire alike for the purpose of increasing production.<sup>17</sup> The modernist sensibility thinks more communally than does liberal-

ism, asking its citizens to consider the implications of their own actions on the collective's goals for increased capital. In contrast, neoliberalism, the reemergence of nineteenth-century liberalism, eschews government intervention and market regulation for privatizing interests.<sup>18</sup> This post-Fordist, consumerist approach bases capital's value on its use and service to individual needs and pleasures.<sup>19</sup>

The capitalistic occupational psychosis during the modernist period, a time that focused upon building industrial strength, placed the greatest emphasis and concern upon production and, when speaking of sexuality, reproduction. Michael Kimmel discusses the history of masculinity in the United States, noting the emergence of a "marketplace masculinity" during the time of the industrial revolution, when accumulated wealth represented masculine accomplishment.<sup>20</sup> Popular Christian discourses in the late nineteenth century likewise imagined Jesus as a muscular, tough, working man—he was a carpenter, after all, who made things with his hands for a living—who emboldened men to similarly develop their own bodies as testaments to their moral/industrial character.<sup>21</sup> The well-developed male body as a moral undertaking demonstrates to a modernist mindset a body perfected for increased production. In the mid-twentieth century, Jack LaLanne, in the footsteps of Charles Atlas, advocated exercise as the alternative to an early death from "pooped-out-itis," a body collapsing from complete disrepair.<sup>22</sup>

Within such a framework, men's relation to sexuality grows out of the demand to mediate between investing physical energy in material production and applying only the most necessary amount toward reproduction. In all this, the family serves as the central "deployment of sexuality," the place where children learn the role and function of sexuality as an expression of love put toward producing offspring and maintaining familial solidarity, both of which translate into financial stability.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the expenditure of time and energy in (hetero)sexual intercourse—and not in other, fruitless sexual activities—only temporarily diverts resources away from market production with the hope of profiting by the "fabrication of children," which ultimately makes a return into the coffers of the labor force.<sup>24</sup> This view, however, restricts married couples from indulging in sexual intercourse for its own sake. J. H. Kellogg, in an advice manual from 1891, details the health consequences—including the onset of tuberculosis—suffered primarily by men (as the ones who

must emit their life force through ejaculation) from having overexerted themselves by too frequently engaging in sexual intercourse with their wives.<sup>25</sup> Arguments made against sexual misconduct sought to maintain the "marital bed . . . as the only acceptable venue for sexual expression."<sup>26</sup> Such "expression" has the potential for labor force reproduction, thereby serving capitalist needs.<sup>27</sup>

Worse than men who needlessly spend their energies on sex are the men who waste their potential resources for laboring by sexually gratifying themselves. In modernism, when industrialist capitalism flourishes, sex serves the purpose of (re)production, and masturbation, therefore, contradicts the "proper" use of sex. Other than the twentieth century's medicalized use of male masturbation for the purpose of in vitro fertilization, masturbation's end is futile. The now-dismissed descriptions of masturbation's effects on men's bodies consistently related men's wasting their resources for fruitless ends with the corrosion of their overall potential for material productivity. The ancient Greek physician Aretaeus, writing in the first century of the Common Era, provides an early and strikingly clear example of such an equation, predicting that men who engage in regular masturbation risk becoming "dull, languid, dispirited, sluggish, stupidly silent, weak, wrinkled, incapable of any exertion, sallow, wan, effeminate . . . with many the disease goes on to palsy. For how could it be otherwise, that the power of the nerves should suffer when the generative principle is chilled?"<sup>28</sup> Such a calculus dooms the masturbating worker to becoming as useless as his spilled seed. Nearly two thousand years later, Kellogg describes the myriad health-wrecking consequences seen in masturbators, including heart palpitations, seizures, bed wetting, and a stiffened, shuffling gait.<sup>29</sup> An 1875 tract by Emery Abbey goes so far as to illustrate the male masturbator vis-à-vis the male abstainer, showing the self-gratifying man visibly weakened, stumbling, and seemingly suffering from facial paralysis.<sup>30</sup>

The link between men's ejaculation and their industrial potential manifested most clearly in the late nineteenth century's discussion of a "spermatic economy."<sup>31</sup> In the nineteenth century, any sexual act without the potential of procreation (coitus interruptus, homosexuality, masturbation, etc.) went under the heading of onanism, which later would only apply to masturbation.<sup>32</sup> Invoking the term *onanism* for its biblical reference to Onan, who intentionally performed coitus interruptus, links

any "fruitless" use of energy in sexual exploits with a man punished by God for not procreating when so instructed, thus further bonding industrial interests with Judeo-Christian morality.<sup>33</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell notes that women who practice birth control and those who masturbate have equally damaged reproductive organs, caused by a lack of love in sexual acts.<sup>34</sup>

Capitalism's focus on production developed into Victorian attitudes that held abstaining from masturbation as essential to maintaining a disciplined body. As Kimmel puts it, "Willful sexual control of a body was the ultimate test of mind over matter."<sup>35</sup> Kellogg so fervently supported men's mastery of their bodies and controlling their desire for sexual release through masturbation that he not only developed cornflakes as an aphrodisiac (suppressing sexual desire), but suggested such extreme measures as sewing silver sutures over a man's foreskin to prevent erections.<sup>36</sup> The euphemism "self-abuse" for masturbation frames sexual release as destructive and casts refraining from self-gratification as demonstrating "a self-respect that is exercised by depriving oneself of pleasure."<sup>37</sup> Masturbation assaults such modernist thinking by encouraging a narcissistic behavior, one that concentrates solely on the pleasurable manipulation of one's own genitals.<sup>38</sup> The virile, self-denying modernist exhibits the necessary traits for capital production and for reproduction.

By contrast, the neoliberal, who concentrates more on consumption than production, measures the quality of an act by its potential for pleasure rather than strength and wealth. Where modernism focuses on building up a larger and stronger workforce, neoliberalism concerns itself with creating more and greater opportunities for pleasure. Such a mode of capitalism seemingly necessitates masturbation to meet the constant hunger for pleasure and satisfaction. Industrial and consumerist goals do not exist in the absence of one another, for consumption itself necessitates further production for the sake of continued pleasure.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis of this later capitalism values production only so far as it continues and increases gratification. Despite neoliberalism's drive for individuality, it does not seek detachment but rather the negotiation of civic relations, which allows for individualized interests and needs.<sup>40</sup> If we use *Seinfeld* as an example, some observers challenge the broad criticisms of the show's characters as utterly narcissistic, noting that, for all their individualism, they still respect and yearn for some level of com-

mitment and do indeed care about and for each other.<sup>41</sup> Put in terms of sexuality, neoliberalism does not regard solo masturbation as the supreme sexual expression for its singular/solitary and relationally uncomplicated pleasures but instead accepts self-pleasuring as but one means of gratification—presumably not excluding other, interactive sexual possibilities.

The source of regulation—for no system operates completely outside the bounds of such concerns—takes an ironic shift from modernism to neoliberalism. Where industrialists look to the state to provide controls, consumerists take the responsibility of regulation upon themselves.<sup>42</sup> Rather than a case of the fox guarding the henhouse, neoliberalism's control in the hands of individuals forms each person as a subject for his/her control, which actually increases the level of surveillance possible as every subject becomes an object of his/her own control.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, neoliberalism depends upon confession to make each person responsible for bringing forth the truth of his/her sexuality, whether in terms of identity, desires, or acts. The confessor cements his/her own self in the restrictive discourse by feeling compelled to disclose to another acts that bear the brand of immorality. Through confession, the self grants to another power and authority by acknowledging that violations have occurred, a breach of absolute individualism that maintains the community. Thus, confession brings transgressive moments under the control of the over-riding power structures by stigmatizing the act that violates a cultural norm.<sup>44</sup> What one must confess and how that confession occurs speaks to the sustaining practices within the collective.<sup>45</sup> The very existence of a national Coming Out Day (October 11, annually) represents the increase in sexual discourses in general and the simultaneous need for persons to make public what is otherwise known in private.

The changes in economic ethics discussed here, those from industrial to consumerist concerns, though moving from production to consumption, perpetuate concern with capital itself. Likewise, the concern about behaviors manifests through self-monitoring and confession as opposed to external condemnation. We feel these transformations in our cultural norms and can appreciate them in alterations to our gender and sexual ideologies. Jim McGuigan states plainly, "We live in an age of neo-liberal globalisation—by which I mean the revival of free-market economic policy and its rapid diffusion around the world with enormous social-structural consequences."<sup>46</sup> This chapter seeks to understand the "social-

structural consequences" of the shift from modernism to neoliberalism on discourses of sexuality in general and on representations of masculine sexuality in particular. As Foucault asks:

Why has sexuality been so widely discussed and what has been said about it? What were the effects of power generated by what was said? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested by them? . . . The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse of human sexuality in our part of the world.<sup>47</sup>

The analysis that follows endeavors to grasp the effects of changing economic ethics upon masculine sexuality, as seen through mediated representation, with special regard to the function of sexual pleasure enjoyed for its own sake. My reading of *Seinfeld's* "The Contest" considers the tensions and ambiguities that arise from the transition from modernism to neoliberalism by examining the discourses that surround the topic of masturbation, which represents an abomination to the ideals of modernism and a necessity to neoliberalism. We will look at a moment in the continual ebb and flow of competing discourses that never fully replace one another.

#### TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

Paul Wells finds that audiences of situation comedies, like *Seinfeld*, have historically "empathized with characters and situations, and were offered scenarios which rehearsed their own anxieties and concerns, but in a way which afforded them the relief of humor."<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Shane Gunster suggests that television comedy shares with Brechtian theatre the possibility of political critique if not change.<sup>49</sup> While *Seinfeld* demurred from overtly offering change, it did reflect the social changes occurring in the dominant U.S. culture, displaying the conflicts and pulls people endure during ideological shifts while providing comic relief from and reminders of ethics during the transition. We will look at the display and critique of the economic transformation that occurred at the twentieth century's close. Watching *Seinfeld's* characters (re)negotiate sexuality, especially masturbation, within changing capitalist modes, we see four friends who retain the vestiges of industrial concerns as they attempt to embrace a neoliberal style. The ways in which the characters discuss

masturbation, manage it as part of their lives and interactions, and relate their sexual experiences—both acts and desires—provide an especially telling instance of cultural norms in transition.

*Seinfeld* focuses on the interactions and often-mundane lives of four principal characters: Jerry (Jerry Seinfeld), George (Jason Alexander), Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), and Kramer (Michael Richards). One of the show's best-known episodes, "The Contest," focuses on the characters competing to see who can abstain the longest from masturbating. This episode, like many others, demonstrates David Pierson's thesis that *Seinfeld* is a modern comedy of manners. As Pierson argues, much like comedies of manners, *Seinfeld* focuses on the human body and its functions.<sup>50</sup> "The Contest" provides an especially clear example by "[elevating] sexual functions of the lower body stratum to a higher discursive level."<sup>51</sup> Neither modernism nor neoliberalism has a monopoly on the concern for how individuals use their bodies. Both systems involve themselves with the body, but the ultimate focus of each differs significantly. As we have already seen in the discussion of the literature on masturbation, modernists concentrate on the proper application of the body to increasing productivity. Neoliberals maintain a concern for socially acceptable behavior but put considerable attention on using the body to maximize pleasure.

"The Contest" opens on the benign setting of Jerry, Elaine, and Kramer in their favorite neighborhood diner in New York City. When George joins the table, he confesses without any provocation that his mother walked in on him masturbating. Already, we see the power of internalized control working on the characters as George freely confesses his guilt. Although he admits to masturbating, neither he nor any other character will actually say the word *masturbation*. Instead, they allude to the activity with such phrases as "You know. I was *alone*." The hypocrisy of the repressive hypothesis makes itself apparent as individuals feel compelled to discuss that which they simultaneously feel they cannot actually name. Arguably, the absence of the word *masturbation* only heightens the emphasis on it, inviting more attention and energy from *Seinfeld's* characters and audience alike. In confessing the details of his act, George reveals that he felt inspired to masturbate while leafing through a copy of *Glamour*. The choice of text for stimulation seems rich with irony as *Glamour*, used as a pseudo-pornographic text in this

instance, encourages economic consumption broadly as well as the visual consumption of the women within its pages, the latter of which George acted on.<sup>52</sup> George's explanation for choosing to masturbate makes salient the link between a consumer-pleasure-filled text and masturbation: "I started leafing through it. . . . One thing led to another." As he recounts it, his mother implored, "Why, George, why?" to which George responded, "Because it's there." It is not exactly clear which "it" explains his reason to masturbate: his penis or the gazed-upon copy of *Glamour*. Either option justifies George's masturbation as a matter of course for a consumerist: his penis represents a supposed natural impulse to exploit all opportunities for pleasure, while *Glamour* speaks to the display of women's bodies as both inciting and gratifying sexual desire.

While George's compulsion to confess and the talk of the pleasure of consumption as natural ("Because it's there") illustrate neoliberal tendencies, some modernist concerns remain. Burdened by the shame of his mother catching him in flagrante delicto, George proclaims, "I am never doing *that* again," which sets into motion an inevitable competition of sexual discipline. Challenged by George, Jerry replies, "I know I could hold out longer than you," and wagers \$100 in a rivalry of sexual restraint. After Kramer joins the competition, Elaine upsets the men by asking to participate. As Jerry explains, the men see Elaine as advantaged over them: "It's easier for a woman not to do it than a man. We have to do it; it's part of our lifestyle." Forcing Elaine to take odds of 1½:1 over the three men makes plain the cultural discourse that assumes sex "belongs, *par excellence*, to men, and hence is lacking in women."<sup>53</sup> In general, the appropriation of athletic metaphors provides further proof of the capitalist psychosis of *laissez-faire*, which has an "intensely competitive emphasis."<sup>54</sup> It also makes stronger the links among sex, athleticism, and men by constructing men as athletes so suited to competition (and sex) that they require no allowances, whereas female competitors do.

The wager adds another point of tension between modernism and neoliberalism. At once, the money rewards a test of personal discipline while it enhances the capitalistic tone of industrial strength and weaves into it the thrill of gambling. As Walter Benjamin notes, gambling shares certain attributes with the illicit pleasures of prostitution: "For in gambling hall and bordello, it is the same supremely sinful delight: to challenge fate in pleasure. . . . Thus in the gambler and the prostitute [one finds] that su-

perstition which arranges the figures of fate and fills all wanton behavior with fateful forwardness, fateful concupiscence, bringing even pleasure to kneel before its throne."<sup>55</sup> The merging of sexual pleasure and gambling in "The Contest" demonstrates the ambiguities experienced between modernism and neoliberalism. It also provides the means by which *Seinfeld* can openly (i.e., on network television) take pleasure in friends discussing their masturbatory habits.

The means for monitoring furthers the tensions within the contest's design between modernist and neoliberal conduct. With the roster for the competition set, the persistent need for regulation rises again. Neoliberalism's dismissal of external regulation and control accepts a privatized governmentality. Accordingly, Jerry, George, Kramer, and Elaine agree to self-policing through the time-honored tradition of confession; says Jerry, "We all know each other very well. I'm sure we'll all feel comfortable within the confines of *the honor system*." As Jerry says "the honor system," he points his finger at his three peers, laying the responsibility of self-monitoring and accounting heavily before them. Against modernity's reliance upon governmental oversight, neoliberalism desires privatized regulation. George (unsuccessfully) hides his masturbation from his mother, who is an externalized agent who can castigate him for his behavior. Now, the responsibility for monitoring falls into the hands of the competitors. Relying upon confession as internalized monitoring allows the system "to discipline individuals with the least exertion of overt force by operating on their souls."<sup>56</sup> The detachment of power from a central governing figure, which simultaneously increases the level of surveillance, models the inability of neoliberalism to abandon altogether modernist practices, here the need for regulation.

The next day at Jerry's apartment, George and Jerry are discussing Jerry's current girlfriend, "Marla the virgin," when Kramer bursts into the room announcing, "There's a naked woman across the street."<sup>57</sup> The three men pile against the window to view the nude woman in her apartment (she does not close her curtains). After a few moments, Kramer quietly excuses himself and goes back to his apartment across the hall. When Elaine enters and sees that George and Jerry cannot take themselves away from the view of the naked woman across the street, she quickly assesses, "This is going to be the easiest money I've ever made in my life." Her confidence in the men's propensity to sate their desires rather than win the wager

has some merit as Kramer soon returns (not more than a minute after he left) and slams a handful of money onto the kitchen counter declaring, "I'm out!" Providing the reason for his behavior, Kramer confesses, "It was that woman across the street." In so doing, Kramer demonstrates his preference for experiential pleasures over capital, which is consistent with his status as the "most sexualized" character of the group.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Kramer proves the effectiveness of relying upon confession for policing private behaviors within neoliberalism.

Later that day, George goes to visit his mother, Estelle (Estelle Harris), who is in traction at the hospital after injuring her back when she fell to the floor upon seeing George masturbating. George must endure from his mother the reprimands of industrialism for engaging in pleasures that serve only to gratify the self. Estelle blatantly links the time and energy spent in nonproductive sexual pursuits to capital loss: "You have nothing better to do at three o'clock in the afternoon? . . . Too bad you can't do *that* for a living. You'd be very successful at it." Estelle continues to berate George's behavior, clearly striking at neoliberalism's sanction of the pursuit of pleasure: "I come home and find my son treating his body like it was an amusement park." She goes so far as to pathologize his industrially delinquent pursuits by demanding that he see a psychiatrist. George refuses to visit a psychiatrist and in so doing demonstrates the struggle between modernism and neoliberalism. The pull of modernism comes from George's mother, who has literally policed his behavior and wishes to intervene by retraining his body through a medical apparatus, while George attempts to claim/maintain a neoliberal position that allows him to seek pleasure for its own sake and to decide its appropriate application. Barbra Morris finds that George's comic relief is just that, a bit of laughter from a trickster figure who battles, upsets, and subverts faulty social systems—whether work, family, or romance—rather than simply acquiescing.<sup>59</sup> Even so, when George's cousin comes to visit Estelle and asks how the injury occurred, George defensively yells, "Is that important?" His refusal to name the practice he defends his right to enjoy speaks to an ambivalence between the positions of modernism and neoliberalism much like *Seinfeld* itself, which claims a right to discuss masturbation but only under the guise of gambling.

While at the hospital, George experiences what all four competitors must confront—temptation. For each contestant, a personal temptation



sets a standard for measuring personal restraint. In the tradition of body-building and endurance tests so familiar to industrialist proclivities, these feats of strength test individuals' mettle. Such industrialist tests resemble epicurean stoicism, which finds delight in refusing anything considered unnecessary.<sup>60</sup> For George, temptation comes in the form of an erotic shadow show. As George speaks to his mother and cousin, a female nurse enters the room and goes behind the curtain of Estelle's roommate to give the other patient, a woman, a sponge bath. From behind the curtain comes a homoerotic coded play of shadows and words as one woman undresses the other and sponges her body, providing a somewhat common hetero male fantasy. Later, George will describe to Jerry the veiled scene's erotic power: "The nurse was gorgeous. Then I got a look at the patient [chortle]. I was going nuts." For all the condemnations and embarrassment, George continues to openly consume as much sexual delight as possible without losing his bet. Estelle's presence when George witnesses the homoerotic shadow play mimics the industrial ethics that continue to nag him even as he revels in the pleasure of watching. Jerry's test comes from his girlfriend, Marla the virgin, who, as her nickname implies, stops physical activity with Jerry short of reaching orgasm. Elaine confronts temptation at her gym when she works out behind John F. Kennedy Jr., admiring his backside and then later flirting with him as they leave the health club. Kramer's temptation and competitive undoing came in the form of the nude woman in the apartment across the street from Jerry's. Initially, Kramer alone partakes of the opportunities for pleasure presented to him.

The next morning, Kramer acts in a rather biblical fashion, forming himself as his brother's keeper by monitoring Jerry's competitive abilities: "Did you make it through the night?" When Jerry affirmatively replies, Kramer pronounces Jerry the "master of your domain." The title "master of your domain" represents the hallmark of neoliberal self-governance by making explicit the body as a domain needing control as in the ancient Greek tradition in which "one was expected to govern oneself in the same manner as one governed one's household."<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the moniker "master of your domain" implies both the athletic discipline required and the activity denied. When Jerry later meets with George at the neighborhood coffee shop, Jerry inquires about George's discipline:

Jerry: Are you "master of your domain"?

George: I am "king of the county." You?

Jerry: "Lord of the manor."

Entering the conversation, Elaine responds to the same question by declaring herself "queen of the castle." Once more, we see the importance of confession to maintaining order. For all three, resisting the temptation to masturbate represents a form of discipline over their body as though it were a municipality, or an independent subject, just as Epictetus advised that "one [should] adopt, vis-à-vis oneself, the role and posture of 'night watchman.'"<sup>62</sup> Consequently, when Elaine must confess to her masturbation the next day, George exclaims, "You caved?" and Jerry proclaims, "The queen is dead."<sup>63</sup> Both men reiterate the emphasis upon discipline: George refers to masturbating as "caving"—giving in to desire—and Jerry declares Elaine's rule over her own body "dead."

As the episode nears its end, "The Contest" provides punishment to the characters who maintained the fiction of necessary restraint the longest. By this point, Kramer has long lost the contest, Elaine has succumbed only after struggling to maintain her position, and Jerry and George still persevere. On his couch with Marla the virgin, Jerry shares with Marla the contest he and his friends have invented. Before we can hear Jerry describe the matter, the camera cuts to Elaine standing outside Jerry's building for a meeting with JFK Jr. The camera returns to the scene of the apartment after Jerry has explained the contest, thus avoiding too blatant a discussion of masturbation and spoiling the hoax that "The Contest" focuses on gambling rather than sexual pleasure. Before Marla storms out of Jerry's apartment, she cries out, "Contest! Contest! This is what you do with your friends?" Marla's shock stems from the point that the four were in a contest—that they participated in this strange wager—rather than the roundabout admission to masturbating. Later that evening, Elaine and George join Jerry in his apartment, and George says that he has just seen Kennedy with Marla. Jerry's and Elaine's anger, and the humor, come from the unification of their objects of sexual desire turning to one another and denying their pursuers. The pairing of Marla and JFK Jr. mocks Jerry and Elaine for their emphasis on denying personal pleasure rather than seeking it. The anger in the scene breaks when Jerry sees that Kramer (presumably nude) has joined the naked woman across the



street. During the closing credits, "The Contest" shows each character in bed: Kramer with (we can presume) the nude woman; George, Jerry, and Elaine each alone; and Marla with JFK Jr. And the three who withheld from masturbation the longest—George, Jerry, and Elaine—have only masturbation for sexual release rather than an interactive sexual outlet.

Foucault notes Plato's concern regarding "the danger of what might be called 'athletic' excess; this was due to repeated workouts that overdeveloped the body and ended by making the soul sluggish, enveloped as it was within a too-powerful musculature."<sup>64</sup> In "The Contest," as the episode title affirms, the competitors give themselves over to the risks of athletic excess for the sake of earning the respect as the most athletically disciplined. Ancient sexual morality did see sexual release for pleasure's sake as inferior to procreative purposes, but it understood sexual pleasure along a continuum between proper and improper use, moderation and excess.<sup>65</sup> George's mother, Estelle, who rants that he treats his body "like it was an amusement park," assaults the consumerist ideology that respects the need for frequent/immediate gratification without any allowance for pleasure and release as both desirable and necessary.

"The Contest" mocks modernism's demand for athletic excess by contrasting those who have found pleasure and those who have not. Over the course of the episode, sleeping soundly is used as a metonym for satiated desire. When Kramer has masturbated and Jerry, George, and Elaine have continued to abstain, we see the latter three in their own beds frustrated and unable to sleep while Kramer rests soundly. Later, Elaine and Kramer both enjoy deep sleep, while Jerry and George toss tormented in their beds, starving themselves of sexual pleasure. George and Jerry both admit to increasing peevishness because of their sexual withholding; as Jerry says, "I haven't been myself lately." Like the classic stoic, Jerry, Elaine, and George rely upon a test "to mark the threshold where privation could start to make one suffer."<sup>66</sup> The choice to embrace suffering speaks to an industrialist mindset that prefers winning money to enjoying life. As others have noted, most of the characters—Jerry and George especially, but also Elaine—care more about winning the monetary prize and getting credit for self-discipline than about embracing pleasure.<sup>67</sup> Their flight toward industrial practices only holds out until the episode's conclusion, however, when all have experienced sexual release. Jennifer Simmons suggests that the true masters of their domains "are those who

allow themselves the pleasures and selfhood of masturbation."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, those, like Kramer, who embrace pleasure as a worthwhile part of life not only sleep better at night but also find the satisfaction of sexual partners. "The Contest" provides no final pronouncement about industrialism or consumerism, per se. It does, however, demonstrate the tension within sexual discourses as dominant U.S. culture moves from modernism to neoliberalism, trying to find the balance between building resources and regulating social behavior (modernism) and embracing the pleasures of life without slipping into complete narcissism (neoliberalism).

#### COMING TO A HEAD: TRADING KELLOGG FOR THE FAB FIVE

"The Contest" represents a vacillation amid the shift from an industrialist modernism to a consumerist neoliberalism among the baby boomers who have experienced those cultural changes in more diverse ways.<sup>69</sup> Where *Seinfeld* presents the conflict between modernism and neoliberalism occurring through the 1990s, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* heralds consumerism's prominence in the new millennium. By comparing the characters' experiences in "The Contest" with the themes developed in *Queer Eye*, we can contrast a masculine sexuality in transition between capitalistic modes, as seen in *Seinfeld*, with a gendered performance of sexuality comfortably ensconced in self-benefiting practices. Though we readily characterize modern industrialism as being built upon regimens of behavior (e.g., disciplining one's body) and suggest that consumerism frees individuals to a life without external demands, a show like *Queer Eye* demonstrates that neoliberalism merely replaces one set of personal regimens with another. Where ardent industrialists, like J. H. Kellogg, call for men to build up their bodies as instruments for hard work—largely through denying themselves pleasures (especially sexual pleasures) that sap their bodies of strength and energy—passionate consumerists, like the experts of *Queer Eye*, instruct men in the precise means of perfecting their bodies and behaviors to meet aesthetic standards.<sup>70</sup>

Both perspectives focus on forming the male body to meet cultural dictates of masculine sexuality. In coining the term *metrosexual*, Mark Simpson notes the replacement of a hard-working masculinity with a good-looking masculinity:

For some time now, old-fashioned (re)productive, repressed, unmoisturized heterosexuality has been given the pink slip by consumer capitalism. The stoic, self-denying, modest straight male didn't shop enough (his role was to earn money for his wife to spend), and so he had to be replaced by a new kind of man, one less certain of his identity and much more interested in his image—that's to say, one who was much more interested in being looked at. . . . A man, in other words, who is an advertiser's walking wet dream.<sup>71</sup>

Enter *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

*Queer Eye* provides a vivid example of a neoliberal orientation enveloped in consumerism that purges modernist industrialism and fills the void with a new set of bodily disciplines. First airing in 2003 (its run ended in 2007), *Queer Eye's* catchphrase describes the show best: "Five gay men out to make over the world—one straight guy at a time." As the tagline suggests, the show participates in cultural change through aesthetically making over men, operating at the level of the individual. The Fab Five are witty gay men with expertise in grooming, food and wine, interior design, fashion, and culture, who teach a single straight man (though occasionally two or a few at once) how to style his hair and preserve/improve his skin, prepare a somewhat epicurean meal, live in a stylish home, select a fashionable wardrobe, and demonstrate cultural sophistication. The basic format for the show begins with the Fab Five invading the straight man's home and mocking his personal tastes and behaviors, ranging from his choice of clothes and furnishings to his generic shampoo-conditioner combination and the food he keeps in his refrigerator. After a series of one-on-one sessions between the queer experts and the straight student, the show releases the transformed man back into his own environment to show off the new style he has inherited. The process creates a man reborn, washed in the joy of displaying his newfound style: "This call to personal redemption through product consumption, reflected in *Queer Eye's* metrosexual aesthetic, is driven by contemporary culture's moral imperative that we always look our best."<sup>72</sup> The remade man in *Queer Eye* ends the show with the confidence of a man now well suited to engage with a restyled capitalistic ethic.

The new body ethic established by metrosexuality and reinforced by *Queer Eye* perpetuates capitalism and masculinity as dominant forces but does so by giving both a more attractive appearance. Scholars studying the industrialist tradition define *hegemonic masculinity* as emphasizing physi-

cal force, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality.<sup>73</sup> Neoliberalism's emergence hardly challenges the privilege of men in society, for the real transformation within *Queer Eye* occurs by giving hegemonic masculinity a fashionable makeover, transforming brute force into physical perfection, occupational achievement into cultural literacy, and frontiersmanship into urban sophistication.<sup>74</sup> Through developing heterosexual men's sexual prowess—training them as more desirable relational partners—and class performance, the Fab Five "safeguard the reproductive logics of capitalism."<sup>75</sup> The consumerist paradigm co-opts any challenges by way of diversity by producing varied masculinities but only to the extent that each demographic market segment has the best tailored pitch.<sup>76</sup> The subsequent model of dominant masculinity remains a white heterosexuality—only now with a refigured class performance.<sup>77</sup> The means of expressing capital success, not the need for it, constitutes the ultimate change from *Seinfeld's* masculinity to *Queer Eye's*.

A sample episode from *Queer Eye* demonstrates a new discipline of bodily maintenance replacing modernist demands for productivity. In season 3, the Fab Five chose to make over Jim B., a nudist.<sup>78</sup> The Fab Five's experience with Jim demonstrates the compulsion to apply appropriate material prescriptions to the body, even when the individual enjoys shedding the material. As they discuss clothing-free socializing, Carson, the fashion expert, notes nudism's democratic potential:

Carson: Very egalitarian, this nudism.

Jim: Everybody's equal, right. Because you do have your doctors, your lawyers, your businesspeople, and when you're nude—and everybody's nude—you're on the same level.

Jim, who works as a mechanic and lives with his mother, seems to enjoy opportunities where class and capital distinctions lie in a heap in the corner. Despite Carson's admiration for egalitarianism, the Fab Five's time with Jim focuses on "elevating" him, which partly involves inscribing class acuity whenever possible. When Carson tries nudism for himself on the show, Kyan (the grooming expert) compares Jim's and Carson's nudism to note Jim's poor performance:

Kyan: Carson's nude, and you are nude. But Carson has a refined sort of nudity to him. His hair is done. He's got an accessory [a necklace with a small

trinket hanging from it]. I think that even though you are a nudist there is still a way to sort of *elevate* your experience, your look [emphasis added].

Ted [food and wine expert]: You can be a more sophisticated kind of naked.

Throughout the episode, the Fab Five attempt to elevate nudism, which they elsewhere recognize as equalizing and liberating. When the culture expert, Jai, takes Jim to a life-drawing class, he tells Jim, "You get a lot of slack for being a nudist, but I wanted to find a way to *elevate* that" (emphasis added). In teaching Jim about the nude form in art and how to draw it himself, Jai seeks to add a consumerist validation to nudism by recognizing nudity as part of a sophisticated tradition and craft.

Other comments directed toward Jim's clothing, appearance, and home emphasize the need to create a capitalistically savvy performance, even if one is enjoying literally shedding material. The comments made about clothing reveal the inability of consumerism to quietly let go of those who prefer clothing-free opportunities. While explaining the need for Jim to have a Brooks Brothers tuxedo, Carson says, "If you're going to wear clothes, you might as well wear beautiful ones just for a night." Kyan quickly chimes in, noting the need to display one's capital until the last moment possible, "And even if you're going to take them off, take off beautiful clothes." Comments about Jim's existing wardrobe mock his clothing and imply that nudism seems appropriate for those with poor capitalistic taste. Looking in Jim's closet, Kyan remarks, "Maybe it is good that he's a nudist" (emphasis in original). When Jim puts clothes on, Carson jabs at Jim's attire, saying, "I think I liked you better nude." Though he may want to go clothing-free, the Fab Five make sure that Jim finds plenty of other ways to display and consume capital.

Early on, Kyan asks Jim, "What is this [nudity] about for you?" Jim replies, "Being comfortable with yourself; being comfortable with your surroundings and around other people." Despite Jim's desire to find comfort with himself and his surroundings, the Fab Five identify his deficiencies. After redecorating a den for Jim's use, Thom, the interior design expert, notes that the frosted-glass door he installed provides privacy and protects the aesthetics of the new space from Jim's mother's decorating: "Not only does this door allow you to be nude in the house but—with all due respect—it kind of keeps out the ugliness." Near the end of the transformation, Kyan says flatly, "My whole vision for you was to get you looking your best naked." To that end, he hands Jim a tooth-bleaching kit

(to be used twice a day for thirty minutes for ten days) and moisturizing gloves and socks (to be worn twenty minutes a day in conjunction with moisturizing creams). Kyan's cosmetic disciplines substitute nicely for the bodybuilding regimens of old.

At the show's conclusion, alone in their stylish loft, the Fab Five toast Jim—without any sense of irony or self-awareness—and celebrate his liberation to be himself:

Ted: Let your freak flag fly, Jimmy; that's all I say.

Carson: Here's to letting it all hang out and being yourself.

Ted: To letting it all hang out.

Kyan: To each his own.

Despite using their talents to show Jim how to dress nicely when he does wear clothes, select expensive eyewear, improve his teeth coloring and skin texture, choose stylish furnishings, mix special cocktails, and express nudism through accepted artistic practice, the Fab Five celebrate "letting it all hang out and being yourself." Their celebration of personal liberation amid the commands to conform to consumerist ideals embodies the inherent irony of neoliberalism, which purports to shun governance as it recreates it in a myriad of ways.



The conflict between the two strands of capitalistic, occupational psychoses, one driven by production, the other by pleasure, is the strife that *Seinfeld* attempts to reconcile. The absence of such tension in *Queer Eye* speaks to a possible completion of our cultural shift. *Seinfeld* is able to discuss masturbation on network television by transferring the subject of sexual gratification to the related topic of gambling. Gambling represents the ambiguity between modernism and neoliberalism: the competition itself has a clear modernist orientation (emphasizing discipline toward sex as a reproductive technology), yet as a contest with wagers it carries the erotic pleasures of gambling and the necessity for individualized regulation in the form of intimate confession. Unburdened by such tensions, the straight men of *Queer Eye* go through a public makeover of their intimate lives, shamelessly immersing themselves in capitalist pleasures. This is true even of those like Jim, who prefer to find comfort within themselves and egalitarianism by freeing themselves from material concerns.

This charting of "The Contest" and its comparison with *Queer Eye* demonstrate the ambivalence that occurs when discussing the topic of masturbation as exemplary of the tension-filled transition between modernism and neoliberalism. "The Contest" transgresses the shame of (discussing) masturbation by bringing to the forefront the idea that masturbation occurs as a regular part of (at least some) people's sexual lives.<sup>79</sup> *Seinfeld* frames the willful refraining from masturbation as unnatural as compared to performing the act itself, for when George, Jerry, and Elaine impose austere notions of sexuality upon themselves, they are beset with anguish and lose the opportunity for (possible) sexual fulfillment with another. The "perversion" of "The Contest" lies in treating masturbation as an athletic event as opposed to a more natural part of sexual life. Torn between modernism and neoliberalism, we see the taboo concurrently maintained by the protected discussion of masturbation that never uses the actual word *masturbation*, thus preserving its forbidden nature. The text again represents the tensions and contradictions of the repressive hypothesis by bringing the topic of masturbation into the field of play but then demanding that the discussion occur in a clandestine manner. *Queer Eye*, by contrast, openly discusses both material and sexual pleasures, often sexualizing the Fab Five's talk of the material.<sup>80</sup> When showing Jim his new hot tub, Thom notes, "Look, there's a *blower*. Everybody loves a blower" (emphasis in original). The comment helps to mark the hot tub as a display of both consumerist ability and bodily/sexual pleasure.

For all this discussion of the effect on masculine sexuality brought about by changing and competing tides in capitalism, we must still consider the related yet distinct experience that women have when managing the cultural shift from modernism to neoliberalism. For instance, "The Contest" shows women as both sexually restrained and sexually desirous. Elaine mocks the men's lascivious reaction to the naked woman, and Marla the virgin, by her name alone, represents the stereotype of women's sexual restraint. Both women, however, succumb to sexual desire, Elaine even before two of her three male competitors. Further exploration of the cultural tensions present in discussing women's sexuality will likely find differences as masculine and feminine gender performances play different roles in all social discourses. The depiction of women as shopaholics who spend their husbands' money, for example, creates a subject posi-

tion distinct from men's in discussing market relations, just as women's established presence in beauty culture will certainly inform a different analysis of capital tensions from that implied by men's late entry into that culture.

As *Seinfeld* lives on in the world of DVD boxed sets and syndicated reruns, it will remain a reminder that the 1990s were neither a hell nor a paradise. The comedy that prided itself on being "a show about nothing" proves to be fertile ground for analysis as the critical studies of its impacts and meanings continue with this chapter and most assuredly beyond. In this study, we have seen that media texts for entertainment purposes speak to us about cultural trends operating below the surface but manifesting in diverse ways. Also, we observe that, for all the complaints about modernism's industrial preferences and the resultant pressures to make our bodies conform accordingly, neoliberalism's consumer predilections incite just as much worry and concern about bodily disciplines and the proper performances of gender and sexuality.

Let us revisit one last time George in his mother's hospital room gazing at what he perceives to be an erotic shadow show put on by two attractive women. As George recounts the tale to Jerry, to his left neoliberalism held out the opportunity for him to sate his desires and enjoy visual and sexual consumption, while to his right his mother's voice, the voice of modernism, beckoned him to remember his social responsibilities. In his effort to mediate the tensions between competing dictates, George is not alone.

#### NOTES

The epigraph is quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 229.

1. In "The Hamptons," much masculine panic ensues when a woman sees George nude as he changes out of his swimsuit following a swim for, as George explains, the cold water caused "shrinkage" of his penis, leading others to assume he is less well-endowed than he protests he is. "The Yada Yada," in part, gets its title from characters using the expression "yada, yada, yada" to dismissively mention having sexual intercourse, sometimes in cases that were less than noteworthy. The expression "master of your domain" from "The Contest" receives considerable attention later in this chapter.

2. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

3. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 8.

4. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.

5. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 8.

6. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 135–136.
7. Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power"; Murphy, "Hidden Transcripts of Flight Attendant Resistance"; Brannon, "The Male Sex Role"; Trujillo, "Hegemonic Masculinity."
8. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 11.
9. Connell and Dowsett, "The Unclean Motion of the Generative Parts," 60.
10. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 18.
11. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
12. Krippendorf, "Undoing Power," 107.
13. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric," 96.
14. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 38–41.
15. Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 27–53.
16. McGuigan, "Neo-Liberalism, Culture and Policy."
17. Clarke, *Consumer Society*, 106–108.
18. McGuigan, "Neo-Liberalism, Culture and Policy," 230; Scholte, *Sources of Neoliberal Globalization*, 7–9.
19. Clarke, *Consumer Society*, 66–67.
20. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," 123–124.
21. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 177–181.
22. *Ibid.*, 251.
23. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 108–109.
24. *Ibid.*, 114.
25. Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young*, 465–469.
26. Morris, *The Male Heterosexual*, 81.
27. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 140–141.
28. Qtd. in Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 15.
29. Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young*, 249–259.
30. See Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, 65.
31. Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy."
32. Bullough and Voght, "Homosexuality," 83–84.
33. In Genesis 38:8–10, Onan refuses to bear a child with his late brother's wife, as mandated by the custom of levirate marriage, and dies for his transgression. Though Onan's case deals with an instance of coitus interruptus, *onanism* became a term used euphemistically for masturbation.
34. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, 49.
35. Kimmel, *Manhood*, 45.
36. Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young*, 290–327, esp. 296. Regarding the development of cornflakes, see Kimmel, *Manhood*, 129.
37. Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 41.
38. For a similar discussion, see Gantz, "'Not That There's Anything Wrong with That,'" 182.
39. Clarke, *Consumer Society*, 24.
40. Olbrys, "Seinfeld's Democratic Vistas," 405.
41. Skovmand, "Culture of Post-narcissism," 207; Morris, "Why Is George So Funny?" 50.
42. Sender, "Queens for a Day," 135–136.

43. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 28; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206.
44. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 62–63.
45. Dow, "Ellen, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility," 136.
46. McGuigan, "Neo-Liberalism, Culture and Policy," 229.
47. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 11.
48. Wells, "'Where Everybody Knows Your Name,'" 184.
49. Gunster, "All about Nothing," 219.
50. Pierson, "A Show about Nothing," 60–61.
51. *Ibid.*, 61.
52. For a brief discussion of pornography as "preparatory to or as inciting the act of masturbation," see Buchbinder, *Performance Anxieties*, 104.
53. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 153.
54. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 41.
55. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 489–490.
56. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 192.
57. The previous episode of *Seinfeld* introduced the character Marla (Jane Leeves), who—as the name implies—is a virgin, thus the characters' private nickname for her.
58. Simmons, "Visions of Feminist (Pom(O)Nanism)," 25.
59. Morris, "Why Is George So Funny?" 48, 51–52.
60. Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 59.
61. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 75.
62. *Ibid.*, 63.
63. As an ironic note, "little death" is a French euphemism for orgasm.
64. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 104.
65. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
66. Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 59.
67. Gantz, "'Not That There's Anything Wrong with That,'" 184; Simmons, "Visions of Feminist (Pom(O)Nanism)," 25–26.
68. Simmons, "Visions of Feminist (Pom(O)Nanism)," 27.
69. Skovmand, "Culture of Post-narcissism," 207.
70. Clarkson, "Contesting Masculinity's Makeover," 239.
71. Simpson, "Meet the Metrosexual."
72. Westerfelhaus and Lacroix, "Seeing 'Straight' through *Queer Eye*," 429.
73. Trujillo, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 291–292.
74. Clarkson, "Contesting Masculinity's Makeover," 239–240.
75. Allatson, "*Queer Eye*'s Primping," 210.
76. Alexander, "Stylish Hard Bodies," 552.
77. Clarkson, "Contesting Masculinity's Makeover," 252.
78. "A Nude Scary Garcia: Jim B."
79. Skovmand, "Culture of Post-narcissism," 211.
80. Weiss, "Constructing the Queer 'I.'"

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## SEXUALLY SUSPECT: MASCULINE ANXIETY IN THE FILMS OF NEIL LABUTE

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As several books and articles have suggested, men, particularly white men, are facing a crisis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. At least partial blame for this crisis is being laid on changing patterns of consumption and the displacement of the white male in the corporate arena—the displacement of what Michael Kimmel calls "Marketplace Man" who "derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status" (34). As Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* and Susan Bordo's *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* suggest, men have been facing a crisis since the mid-1980s because society no longer offers them a clear sense of what manhood means. Instead of participating in society in a useful and meaningful way, men are "surrounded by a culture that encourages people to play almost no functional public roles, only decorative or consumer ones" (Faludi 35). Both authors note that the crisis is, significantly, similar to the crisis women faced at the beginning of the feminist movement: "The fifties housewife, stripped of her connections to the wider world and invited to fill the void with shopping and the ornamental display of her ultra-femininity, could be said to have morphed into the nineties man, stripped of his connections to a wider world and invited to fill the void with consumption and a gym-bred display of his ultra-masculinity" (ibid., 40). Men, then, are being taught that "masculinity is something to drape over the body, not draw from inner resources" and that manhood is "displayed, not demonstrated" (ibid., 35). Significantly, masculinity is something that can be bought and paid for, if one only has the resources, as films such as *Fight Club* (1999) and *American Psycho* (2000) demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> Consumer capitalism courts these men