A List

Queer Eye Heroes reveal how the show changed their lives

Insider's Sara Feigin caught up with memorable past participants to quiz them on life after getting the 'Fab Five' treatment

by Sara Feigin • New York • 17 June 2020

Netflix's Queer Eye - In pictures

26 images

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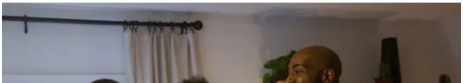
Queer Eye, originally called Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, premiered on the American cable network Bravo during the summer of 2003. The original incarnation of the show focused on giving makeovers to straight men and then started including other participants, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Queer Eye was cancelled in 2007 but Netflix gifted fans with the Queer Eye reboot they didn't know they were missing in February of 2018.

The reincarnation was an overnight success. The fifth season has just made its way to Netflix with Heroes based in the Philadelphia area.

Since the show premiered, it has made huge stars out of the leads - Jonathan Van Ness went viral with his Emmy-winning Funny or Die recap series Gay of Thrones, Antoni Porowski opened a fast casual restaurant in New York, Tan France is regularly name-dropped by stars like Brie Larson and Oprah for his iconic French Tuck, Bobby Berk's furniture line has taken off, and Karamo Brown is now a published author and podcast host.



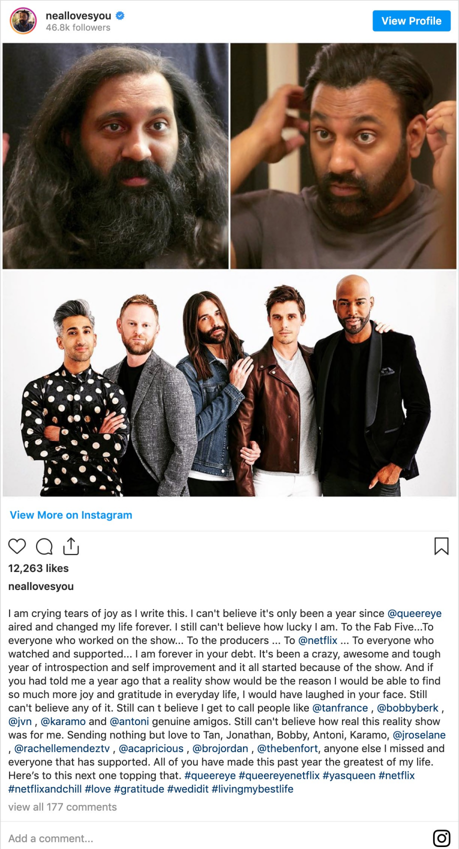
(Christopher Smith/Netflix)

Insider caught up with some of the most memorable past participants to find out how the Netflix not-so guilty pleasure made its stars A-listers overnight and similarly changed the lives of the “Heroes,” or the men and women the ‘Fab Five’ help on the show.

The Heroes unanimously praised Karamo, a certified social worker with a background in psychotherapy, for his ability to make people feel comfortable opening up. Bobby similarly received high praise. Ted Terry from Season 2 said that Bobby and his team “got it all done in a week, no TV magic here, they’re not messing around - they keep on schedule.”

We spoke with five Heroes about how their time on the show has changed their lives.

Neal Reddy, computer programmer, Season 1



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I am crying tears of joy as I write this. I can't believe it's only been a year since @queereye aired and changed my life forever. I still can't believe how lucky I am. To the Fab Five...To everyone who worked on the show... To the producers ... To @netflix ... To everyone who watched and supported... I am forever in your debt. It's been a crazy, awesome and tough year of introspection and self improvement and it all started because of the show. And if you had told me a year ago that a reality show would be the reason I would be able to find so much more joy and gratitude in everyday life, I would have laughed in your face. Still can't believe any of it. Still can t believe I get to call people like @tanfrance , @bobbyberk , @jvn , @karamo and @antoni genuine amigos. Still can't believe how real this reality show was for me. Sending nothing but love to Tan, Jonathan, Bobby, Antoni, Karamo, @jroselane , @rachellemendeztv , @acapricious , @brojordan , @thebenfort, anyone else I missed and everyone that has supported. All of you have made this past year the greatest of my life. Here’s to this next one topping that. #queereye #queereyenetflix #yasqueen #netflix #netflixandchill #love #gratitude #wedidit #livingmybestlife

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Did the Fab Five change any preconceived notions you had before? "Of course… but I also think it might have helped shatter other people's notions as well. One of the things that was kind of glanced over in my episode by a lot of people who aren't Pakistani or Indian was the interaction between Tan and myself. In our respective home countries, you would never see an Indian and Pakistani interacting in such an open and free way because of years of fighting and hate. Even my uncle who lives in India was grateful for what Tan did for me and had respect for him. My mom loves Tan and how much he seemed to care about her opinion.

Personally, a lot of my preconceived notions were changed, the biggest of which was my view on masculinity and what it means to be a man. The Fab Five helped me see how vast, complex and fluid masculinity is. It's refreshing to have that freedom now to be whatever kind of man I want to be and not have to be the man I have been told I need to be."

neallovesyou
The Bell House

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Hot damn isn't this the cutest picture? It was my first time seeing him since filming.
My Tender Tuesday shout out is for this beautiful soul, @jvn . When people ask if he's as awesome in real life as he is on TV, I tell them, "No…. he's actually much more incredible. You are just seeing the surface." Here's my Tender Tuesday anecdote.
I'm watching the new season of @queereye and it's giving me all the feels. Go watch and support the Fab 5, the heroes and all the people behind the scenes who make this show possible. (Seriously, do it now before reading this essay.) Watching season 3 is making me want to wax poetic about my own experience. I know I rarely talk about Queer Eye or what it's meant to me… KIDDING. It's literally all I talk about aside from my dog. Don't care. If you don't want to read, just like the picture and move along.
I remember when I first met @jvn and I was slightly uncomfortable to say the least… ok more than slightly. I immediately thought of all the Fab 5, he would be the one I would connect with the least. And honestly, it was fear based. Jonathan is such an open, loving and direct human that for someone like me who was insanely private and closed off, it's terrifying. He has this way of disarming you, which makes it impossible to hide. It was unnerving for me to say the least.
Fast forward to now and I my initial assessment could not have been more wrong. Despite his larger than life celebrity he still finds time to support and check in when he knows I am going through the weeds of life. If you follow him, you know that he has no problem posting the real and vulnerable. And he's helped me to start being ok with doing the same hence the increase in real post about my actual emotional state. Sorry not sorry. She's a true ally.
What I am trying to say is if you open yourself to all that life has to offer, you will no doubt open yourself up to some of the worst things in it, but you will also open yourself up to the greatest things. Don't like that cliche? Here's another… Don't judge a book by its cover.
XoXo, Gossip Girl

#TenderTuesday #QueerEye #RealTalk #JVN #QueerEye3 #CanYouBelieve #YasQueen #LoveHer #livingmybestlife

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Do you keep in touch with the Queer Eye guys by text or social media? Who do you communicate with most?
"I try to keep in touch with all the guys, they tend to respond, but everyone including myself has crazy schedules now. I communicate with Bobby the most, he's really helped me post filming. When I was in LA a few months back we spent a few days together. He opened up his home to me, we went hiking, I got to spend quality time with him and his husband. He is just one of those people who treats his friends like royalty.

I also keep in touch with JVN (Jonathan Van Ness) and Antoni a lot too. JVN is such a beautiful soul, sometimes I will reach out to him when I am feeling like garbage about myself. He just has a way of reminding me to not be so hard on myself."

How has your life changed since being on the show?
"I just expected to get some free furniture, new clothes and be on my way. I never thought I would become emotionally and mentally healthier as a person because of a reality TV show."

William Mahnken, the actor, from Season 2

(Courtesy of Netfilx)

Did Shannan [William's then girlfriend and now wife] really nominate you for the show?
"Since I'm an actor, I get casting calls all the time. So that one just happened to come through and I saw it and said, 'Shannan, you should sign me up.' I was just joking so I deleted it. But Shannan kept it and then wrote up why she thought I should be on the show. I didn't think there was anything wrong with me, but they loved the idea.

william_mahnken
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BADLY EXPLAIN why @antoni is missing in this photo...
.
.
.
#antoni @queereye #queereye #wheresantoni #badlyexplain @bobbyberk @karamo @jvn @jvntoni @tanfrance #nancydrew #andthecaseofthemissingantoni #bagofteeth #william #nipple

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What has gaining semi-celebrity status been like for you?

“When Shannan and I are out in public or visit another city, we get recognized quite a bit actually. Right before I left work for today I was recognized. It is weird to have such an online presence, I feel like it's a great thing because it is really promotes my creativity. I have kind of a weird sense of humor and so I like to showcase that.”

Ted Terry, the small town Mayor of Clarkston, Georgia, from Season 2

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@antoni visited Atlanta tonight! He is my hero :-)

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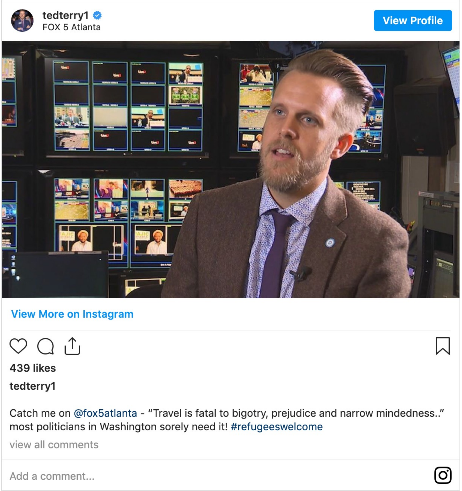
Whose advice or lessons were most helpful to you in this process?

“Jonathan was encouraging about me being ready for politics. Then Karamo [said] if you're running for something run for it, don't be shy about it, just go out there and do it and you can be forceful and be firm and be confident. It sometimes takes someone to tell you that critically on international television.”



tedterry1
FOX 5 Atlanta

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Catch me on @fox5atlanta - “Travel is fatal to bigotry, prejudice and narrow mindedness..” most politicians in Washington sorely need it! #refugeeswelcome

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Were there any downsides to being on the show?

“It was important for me as a candidate, as an elected official, to be transparent, to be open, to put myself out there. A big part of the show is trying to not just help out these Heroes, but trying to inspire people who are watching it to say, you know what, maybe I could make some changes in my life.

I learned a long time ago that if you're going to be a leader, you shouldn't just tell people what they should do. You should just do it, lead by example. I would never ask anyone to do something I wasn't willing to do myself.”

Jody Blanton Castellucci, prison guard huntress, Season 3

(Christopher Smith/Netflix)

What do you think it is about the Fab Five that helped you make such substantial change to your life?
“I don’t know how they do it, I really don’t. I thought, Karamo is like a wizard or something with being able to get inside your soul. He does it to everybody - the cast, the crew. I would’ve never thought to put my brother dying that long ago together with why I stopped caring about myself on the outside.

I’m using lotion on my skin, I get up and I actually use face cream on my face. I think about Jonathan all the time - now that these wrinkles are coming, I’m gonna start fighting them.”

(Christopher Smith/Netflix)

How did you meet the other Heroes?
“We have a group email chain through Facebook and Instagram. It’s so fun to meet all these new people that have this stuff in common that nobody else has.”

It must be great to have that shared experience...
“It’s one of those things that you get to also share with the people who reach out from all over the world. There’s a guy who’s from South Africa, he’s always reaching out because he sees my canning, veggies and my garden.”

Joey Green, summer camp program manager, Season 3

(Denise Crew/Netflix)

How has your life changed since being on the show?
"I guess the biggest change has been in my relationship with Isaac, my son. I love the fact that I feel more like the Dad I want to be. I also feel more like doing things I love just because it's something I love, not because it might impress others."

(Denise Crew/Netflix)

What has it been like dealing with public interest since the show aired?
"Public interest in the last few weeks has been a gift. Ironically the first few months after the episode aired I was in full camp mode, it was a few weeks before I realized just how many friends and followers I had picked up.

I do occasionally get recognized on the street, but again the first six months after airing I was isolated at camp. In July, I was informed that my position at the camp was being eliminated and at the end of my service I would have two weeks to vacate the remodeled apartment as onsite housing was part of my compensation agreement.

Those friends and followers on social media poured in support, well wishes, kind words, networking opportunities, and even a few job offers."

Queer Eye

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