

Teen identities in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*

How do *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* represent teen identity?

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Abstract

Teen television series *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* have been praised for their portrayals of teen characters. The teen characters depiction of struggling with discovering their identities, sexualities, and gender makes for two very interesting teen television series'. *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are two completely different series, but they both explore teen identities in their respective ways. This master thesis will go into depth on how teen identities in both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are depicted by the teen characters through their representation of the following subjects: identity, sexuality, and gender. The method used for the analysis is based on Roberta Pearson's model on character analysis, as I believe the character elements she includes as the foundation of what a character consist of is precisely what I will be analyzing in regard to my three chosen aspects of teen identities. The thesis argues that the identities, sexualities, and gender identities displayed by the characters in both series are built on preexisting norms and expectations set by the society around them, which is analyzed through relevant theory. The characters behavior and attitude to each aspect differs, and so how they deal with the struggles and triumphs they experience in regard to teen identity will also widely differ.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research topic

This MA thesis is a character analysis of the characters in the teen series *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, two television series made primarily for a teen audience and that display different depictions of what being a teen searching for their identity is like. To answer my research question of *How do Euphoria and Sex Education represent teen identity?*, I will take a look at further sub-questions such as *What narrative and stylistic techniques, such as character storylines and setting, are used to display the representation of identity, sexuality, and gender in the series?* *What part do the characters costumes play when it comes to their teen identity?*, and *How does Euphoria and Sex Education fit into the youth television category with its depiction of teen identity, sexuality, and gender?*, to further highlight my point on how representation of characters identity, sexuality and gender are portrayed in teen television.

My goal is to give an insight into how identity, sexuality, and gender is represented through the tv series' depiction of the modern-day teen through their characters and their relations to other characters. Some additional aspects to this main research question that might be useful to discuss can be: How do the teen characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* express themselves and who they are based on the three fields of interest; identity, sexuality, and gender. How do these characters interact with each other and the society around them based on this? How do the characters experience and deal with this coming-of-age time in their life when trying to understand who they are? To be able to answer my main research question I will for example discuss what the different costumes the characters wear has to say about their identity, sexuality, and gender? I will also take a look at what their physical behaviour towards each other, and psychological traits linked to this behaviour tell us about their teen identities.

The reason I have chosen this as my research question is because of the relatability I find in it, as well as my own interest in teen drama series. I have also been a teen once and found myself looking up to the characters in teen televisions series, the life events that happened, the situations they found themselves in, and the search for finding out who we are as a human being with our own identity. This is why I find it fascinating to look at how teen television

series depict that specific developing time in a person's life, and whether its depiction can be seen as real or just over the top cliché.

1.2 Method

For this thesis I will be using character analysis, a kind of textual analysis, to compare *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* and answer my research question and my overall topic through close reading. I have chosen to use a textual analysis in the form of a character analysis to help me interpret meaning from the text (Bratberg, 2017). The texts in this context being the chosen television series, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. By using textual analysis to answer my research question I will be seeing the television series as empirical data.

Seeing as a textual analysis has its basis in the critical interpretation of all texts, whether that be books, films, commercials, paintings, and so forth, it can thus be considered speculative and not verifiable within science making it fall in under the category of qualitative research (Creeber, 2006, p. 26). Being based on the analysers own close reading of a text the method of textual analysis has come under fire for being too subjective and with text with little to no empirical data as evidence (Creeber, 2006, p. 26). However, for the purpose of my research project the claim that close reading within a textual analysis method is considered too subjective I feel does not necessarily mean that is it any less credible when studying a television series. My interpretation and research discovery linked to my chosen television series' may differ from other researchers, whose own research into the same research data can have a different answer as their already pre-existing opinions and viewpoints to the material may be different than mine. My own understanding and collected meaning from the television series' character analysis are drawn in a way that helps answer my own specific research question.

The method of textual analysis used within television studies can be seen as a bigger umbrella for an array of different research methods, all stemming from structuralist and post-structuralist traditions, and sometimes film and cultural studies (Creeber, 2006, p. 29). Having textual analysis branching into and from so many different traditions it allows for a wide array of critical readings of texts, whether it be narrative theory, genre study, semiotic study, discourse, content study and psychoanalysis (Creeber, 2006, p. 29). For me in this thesis I have chosen to focus on the character analysis to answer my research question of *How do*

Euphoria and Sex Education represent teen identity?. My character analysis can be viewed as a crossover of different branches of textual analysis such as narrative study, genre study and stylistic analysis. This is because I will discuss different aspects around the characters varying from costumes, actions, and behaviour, as well as how the characters feel and think linked to their identity, sexuality, and gender.

In Michael Allen's book *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope* (2007) Roberta Pearson presents her theory on the six different elements that make up a character. For Pearson the six elements include: physical appearance and traits, psychological traits and habitual behaviour, interactions with other characters, speech patterns, characters backstory and the environment surrounding the character. These six elements used to construct a character can then subsequently be used in an analysis of the character where the analysis is based on the six aforementioned components (Pearson, 2007, p. 43). For my character analysis the focus on physical appearance, such as their costumes, their interaction with other characters, and the psychological traits and behaviour patterns linked to my chosen characters is what I will base my research question on. My analysis of the setting fits under the category of the environment surrounding the characters, as the environment lays down the foundation for all the other character elements. Based on this I believe Pearson's model for character analysis to be an excellent model to consider and refer to for my own character analysis.

When analysing material such as film or television a stylistic analysis might also be useful, which is a subgenre of the textual analysis. Using a stylistic analysis will let me understand the meaning behind the television series through multiple aspects. The narrative form of a series or film combined with the stylistic techniques make up the overall form and style (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 311-314). When it comes to stylistic techniques the patterns of these techniques are often implemented to reinforce the already existing narrative form, and what the techniques and narrative patterns together create is what becomes and make up the overall style and meaning of a series or film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 311-314). The style of a film or a television series can shape how we understand and experience what we see (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 311). Here I will also incorporate mise-en-scene, specifically looking at the setting, to be able to analyse and take a look at the way in which the television series has staged the narrative and the characters that are on screen. Key aspects

to look at and discuss when analysing a film or televisions use of mise-en-scene or camera techniques are lighting, props, costumes, camera work and angles, colour, frame, and composition (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 111). In relation to my thesis and research question something I will be looking into is for example, what part does the characters costumes have to play in their representation of the characters identity, sexuality, and gender? How does their costumes play into our understanding of how they want to be portrayed as? What part does the setting have to play in order for us to understand the characters choices in relation to their identity, sexuality, and gender?

For my character analysis of both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* within the teen television genre the analysis could also be considered a genre study. Genre study is according to Creeber (2006, p. 30) an analysis that tries to categorize and create meaning of the core characteristics of textual groups including cartoons, soap operas, documentaries, sitcoms and so on. Teen television can be interpreted as its own genre with its own target audience and specific storylines and thus it would be beneficial to see the textual analysis of my two chosen series as genre as well as throughout the text the discussion around teen television and its form is present. Both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* contain the main characteristics for a teen television series, but in different ways. This in relation to how they discuss topics, albeit the same in both series, related to teens and their coming of age such as identity, sexuality, gender, friends, love, family, and school and so on. Even though I will discuss how teen television is a main factor for how characters in the series are portrayed my main field of study will be a character analysis on the different characters in both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In this thesis I will go through and discuss the different representations the characters of *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* have in regard to their identity, sexuality, and gender. This first chapter is an introduction chapter where I go through and present the theme for my master's thesis along with my research question. Chapter two is where I will be presenting the research and theories I used in order to answer my research question. The purpose of the theory chapter is to have a foundation for my analysis that is later to come in the thesis. In chapter three I give an introduction and present theories surrounding the emergence of teen television and discuss how *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* can be considered teen television. Chapter four

is where my analysis of the chosen objects, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, starts. The chapter is split into five parts of analysis: setting, costumes, identity, sexuality, and gender. The parts where I analyse costumes, identity, sexuality, and gender is a part of my character analysis, so each section under these parts is divided into different characters. Lastly, in chapter five, I will go through my research finds and present a conclusion to my research question.

1.4 Objects of analysis – introducing *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*

Before I start my analysis, I will give a description of my chosen objects that I am using for my character analysis. As mentioned previously I have chosen the two teen television series' *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* as objects. The characters in these series are what I am basing my analysis on when discussing their representation within my chosen fields of interest. I will now give a brief introduction into what series *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are, and what the main storylines revolve around.

1.4.1 Euphoria

Euphoria is an American teen television series written and created by Sam Levinson. Levinson created the television series for the subscription-based platform HBO, and the first episode premiered on 16 June 2019. *Euphoria* can be categorized as a teen-drama television series due to the topics and discussions featured in the series that deals with coming of age as a teenager and all the things that being a teen encapsules. The audience demographic for *Euphoria* can also be considered to be teens or young adults because of the relevancy of the topics and age of the characters in the series. *Euphoria* as a teen television series approach to the topics surrounding teens can be seen as slightly cold, rough, and straight to the point, which is a contrast to other teen dramas that use comedy and a more light-hearted mood to tell their stories.

Euphoria follows the story of teenager Rue Bennett, a drug addict, who at the very start of the series has just gotten out of rehab after almost dying due to a drug overdose two months prior. Rue, having struggled with her addiction and mental health ever since she was young, can't seem to find her place in the world she lives in. Not feeling like the future, or herself, will emit to anything grand Rue does not see the point in trying to stay clean after being released from rehab, but her outlook on life changes when she meets new girl Jules Vaughn.

As well as following the storyline of Rue and her struggles we get to follow along the lives of other teenagers around Rue and her circle of friends as they try to navigate high school and deal with friendship, love, sex, drugs, and partying. Notable characters include Jules Vaughn, Nate Jacobs, and Katherine Hernandez, which are some of the characters I will be mentioning during my character analysis. Through the series we get to follow Rue and her classmates' storylines growing up in the suburban town with their struggles and triumphs linked to their teen identities. Rue herself is doing the voice over narration and giving us all the insight into everyone's lives.

1.4.2 Sex Education

Sex Education is a British television series created by Laurie Nunn. It premiered on the subscription-based streaming service Netflix on the 11 January 2019. Netflix is also the network creator of the television series. The *Sex Education* series can be considered a teen comedy-drama series because of its light-hearted and fun storyline that is centred around teenagers and produced for a teen demographic. As of today, the series is now in its second season, with season 2 having premiered 17 January 2020, and has been renewed for a third season.

Sex Education follows the story of teenager Otis Milburn who lives with his mother Jean Milburn, a sex therapist, in the small English village of Moordale. As a teenager Otis is not very sure about himself when it comes to sex, and throughout series one we see him trying to become comfortable with the aspect of sex and himself. In episode 1 of the first season Otis agrees to help the school bully, Adam, with his inability to climax during sexual intercourse with his girlfriend Aimee. After being able to help Adam with his problems Maeve, a friend of Otis, proposes to him that they should start a sex therapy clinic to earn money and help the kids at their school. Maeve explains that she can run the logistic of the clinic and set up schedules whilst Otis, with all his sexual knowledge learned from his mother being a sex therapist, can take the role as therapist.

The series follows not only Otis' storyline, but several of his teenage friends, their lives and relationships to their parents and other characters. Notable teenage characters in *Sex Education* are Eric, Maeve, Adam, Aimee, Jackson, Ola, as well as parental figures such as

Otis' mom Jean Milburn, headmaster and Adam's dad Michael Groff, Jean's love interest and Ola's dad Jacob Nyman and a handful of teachers at Moordale Secondary School.

1.5 Theoretical framework

I will now present a brief summary of the main theory I will be using to answer my research question in this thesis. A more in-depth discussion of the theory will be presented later in the chapter about theory.

1.5.1 Identity and gender

One of the main parts of my research question focuses on the teen characters representation of identity and gender. My thesis with the character analysis is based on the understanding of identity and gender as proposed by theorist and researchers such as Judith Butler, Jørgen Lorentzen, Kari Nyheim Solbrække and Helene Aarseth. Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990, pp. 9) proposed her theory that gender is not something we are born with, but rather a social construct we develop over time through performing and repetition. According to Butler an individual's gender is formed to performing and repeating behaviour and gestures that follows the social norms linked to be considered feminine or masculine (Butler, 1990, pp. 191). This theory is also seen in the research done by Lorentzen, Wencke Mühleisen, Solbrække and Aarseth. Solbrække & Aarseth, similarly to Butler, argued that social practises and behaviour could be categorized as being either being part of a feminine or masculine identity (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 65). Lorentzen's theory focuses on the masculine identity and gender roles, and he argues that masculinity is rooted on a set of variables all differing based on the context, whether that is time, culture, or an individual's own viewpoint of what is considered masculinity. For my thesis all these different theories and opinions regarding gender and identity are relevant when analysing the teen characters own identities and gender. It allows me to analyze whether the characters own understanding of their identity and gender correlates with the existing theory on each of the subjects.

1.5.2 Sexuality

Another part of my research question focuses on the representation of the teen character's sexuality and sexual identity. When analysing the teen characters sexuality I have used theory from theorists such as Heidi Eng, Maura Kelly, and Glyn Davis as my theoretical foundation.

Eng, Kelly and Davis all have theories on subjects linked to hetero-, queer- and homosexuality, and heterosexuality as the societal norms. Eng (2009, p. 143) argues that heterosexuality is the societal norm, and individuals are predetermined to be heterosexual unless they at some point state otherwise. Kelly's (2009, p. 480) theories are similar to that of Eng, and she adds to the theory by claiming that the portrayal of teen male sexuality on television suffers from this heterosexual norm set by society, which prohibits them from truly exploring their sexuality as traditional masculinity is considered one of the main traits linked to teen male characters. The heterosexual norm as a standard is according to Davis (2004, p. 129), similarly to Kelly, very much prevalent in teen television series and has an impact on the ways in which queer and homosexual characters storylines get told. These theories regarding sexuality in characters on television is relevant theoretical framework for my thesis as my character analysis focuses precisely on the ways in which my chosen characters sexuality is displayed.

1.5.3 Teen television

British Youth Television: Transnational teens, Industry and Genre by Faye Woods is a book I believe relevant to my research into *Sex Education* as a series about teens made predominantly for teens. Woods' book delves into British youth television programs specifically made for teenagers as the series' chosen as her examples feature characters in their adolescence from the early 21st century, such as *Misfits* and *My Mad Fat Diary* (Woods, 2016, p. 4). This is relevant as *Sex Education* can be placed within that same category as a British television series created within the early 21st century targeted at teenagers. The book is also relevant in the sense that it focuses on the transatlantic differences between British and American teen television, and so both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* fit under. The article 'Sexuality and Teen Television: Emerging Adults Respond to Representations of Queer Identity on Glee' (2013, p. 438) by Michaela D. E. Meyer & Megan M. Wood is also relevant for my analysis as their research focuses on the construction of teen characters within the field of teen television. Their article is relevant for my analysis of the characters as teens that are at a developing stage in their life in relation to identity, sexuality, and gender. The characters I analyze are all developing themselves in relation to these three aspects of life.

2 Theory

2.1 Identity, sexuality, and gender

Before I start my character analysis of the characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* I will present and go through the theory I am basing the analysis on. For the analysis I will be discussing the topics of identity, sexuality, and gender. The main authors and their theories that I will be presenting in this chapter in relation to gender and identity are Lorentzen, Mühleisen, Solbrække, Aarseth and Butler. For my section about sexuality theorist such as Eng, Kelly, and Davis with their theories on teen sexuality, heterosexuality, queer- and homosexuality are used as basis for my later analysis. I have also included explanations from psychology researchers David E. Purcell, Stephanie Swann, and Sarah E. Herbert in order to explain the basic fundamental terms in relation to sexuality. I will now go through the theoretical framework that makes up the basis for the analysis and that allows me to answer my research question.

1.2.1 Traditional gender roles

When we think of gender one might easily think of man and woman as the two genders, at least in the biological sense. Whereas our sex is determined by our biological characteristics, our gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990, p. 9). The anatomical and biological differences between man and woman is the key argument when talking about differences, and consequently when talking about how many different biological genders that exist. However, if we look away from just the thought that there only exist two genders and start looking at gender as a social construction, we realise that there are more than just the two. The idea that what separates a man from a woman are the anatomical, biological, and physiological differences is called biologism (Lorentzen & Mühleisen, 2009, p. 24).

Gender studies within social sciences and humanities studies take a different approach to the understanding of gender. As explained by Solbrække & Aarseth in *Kjønnsforskning: En grunnbok* (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 65), one of the gender theories supported by social sciences is the theory of gender roles. The theory of gender roles allowed for gender to not just be defined by the biological but as something that is social formed by our surroundings including our family and society (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 65). Talcott Parsons, an American theorist of the structural functionalism tradition, constructed the theory that the roles attributed to the genders were based on the norms and expectations connected to certain

positions in society, whether that be positions within a household or positions linked to a work environment (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66). This theory helped make the gender roles, and their different functions related to what tasks and roles in society and at home that was seen as masculine and feminine, become a fundamental cornerstone for how the gender roles were perceived for years to come. The role as the provider of the family was assigned the man whilst the emotional functions comprised of giving care and love was placed upon the woman (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66).

This divide in the gender roles as constructed by the theorists of the structural functionalism tradition, even though giving insight into the divide of the work between man and woman at home and in a work environment, did not clarify enough about the divide in resources and power in the society. Neither did it explain why individuals let themselves be socialized into the set gender roles (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66). For my thesis this is particularly interesting considering my chosen objects of analysis, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, include characters such as for example Michael Groff and Nate Jacobs that follow the traditional norms and expectations linked to their gender. As the theories surrounding gender roles evolved so did the understanding of how individuals let themselves be socialized in relation to gender and how the norms of the gender roles changed. This led to a new branch of the gender role theory linked to how individuals “do” or “perform” gender as a result of socialization between individuals and the constant evolvement of the norms in society (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66).

2.1.1 Performing gender

When discussing and analysing gender theory an important perspective to look at, besides just different gender roles existing in society, is how an individual is placed inside the different genders and the roles attached to them. How an individual performs or is “doing” gender help decide where one fits within the genders and roles in relation to the masculine and feminine. This understanding that how we perform different cultural and social norms to be recognized as a gender fits well in with how the different characters of *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* act as a way of establishing who they are and what gender category they feel they identify as. The characters follow the different norms linked to for example how we view the feminine and masculine roles in society, and later on in this thesis I will give concrete example of such gendered behaviour linked to norms set by society from Nates protective yet aggressive

stance towards his girlfriend Maddy to Jean's, Otis' mom, capability to functioning as both parental roles in relation to her son Otis.

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990, pp. 9) theorist Butler, who can be considered one of the leading gender theorists, makes the argument that gender is a cultural construct. It's not determined by an individual's sex nor the result of a sexual intercourse. Gender can be considered a *construction*, being both socially regulating and socially instituted fetishes that are political as opposed to natural (Butler, 1990, pp. 172). The performative act of gender is based on repetitive acts of already existing social norms linked to the movement, different bodily gestures, and style (Butler, 1990, pp. 191). Gender is not something that just exists or is, it is something that becomes by the creation of a gendered self.

Another approach is explained in the article *Doing Gender* by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman which Solbrække and Aarseth (2009, p. 70) references. For West and Zimmerman, the concept of "doing gender" has its basis in the already existing cultural norms that individuals in a society follow in order to be viewed as either being of the feminine or masculine gender (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 70). This theory, whilst relying on the earlier gender role theories focused on the feminine and masculine roles set in a society, questions why it is that men and woman have different set of ideals linked to work divided based on gender and why women still fall into the stereotypical gender roles knowing there exists a social difference between the genders. Such questions build on the recognition of the structural functionalism tradition as being considered gender oppressive towards the female gender role (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 70-71). An individual's behaviour and expectations in regard to the gendered roles set by society as being either masculine and feminine is reinforced by our own societal understanding of what is considered to be masculine and feminine (O'Neil, 1981, p. 203). These behaviours, expectations and role sets are then embodied by male or female individuals, all after which gender they are considered to be culturally appropriate to fit into (O'Neil, 1981, p. 203). This understanding of gender roles links back to Butler's argument that females and males will, through the set norms in society, perform and express themselves according to the set genders and gender identities that we already know of (Butler, 1990, pp. 191).

2.1.2 The masculine and the feminine

An important part of how we perceive the different genders is how we understand the concepts of masculinity and femininity. The terms masculine and feminine can be understood as a way for us to differentiate between men and women and the characteristics linked to each gender. However, the concept of the masculine and the feminine is not necessarily applicable to every individual within the gender categories, or specific to a particular gender, as through time our ideas of what is views as masculine and feminine has changed. A very straight forward example here is the way in which a queer man can be considered feminine, and a queer woman can be masculine. Masculinity and femininity are analytical terms and cultural depictions in relation to male and female gender and should be understood as separate constructions (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 124-125). Many of the characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* put a significant weight on the idea of following the set norms and characteristics linked to being feminine or masculine. These characters, such as Nate Jacobs, Jules Vaughn, Michael Groff, and Adam Groff, is something I will do a closer analysis of later on in this thesis.

In *Kjønnforskning: En grunnbok* (2009, p. 122) Lorentzen suggests that the theories surrounding man and masculinity research consist of understanding the terms and our own recognition of how they can be understood in relation to identity, discourse, and the construction of what is manly and masculine. Masculinity was a term that could be applied to all men, whilst the term manly was considered a character trait that was not inherent in all men. The term manly was more commonly used in the 19th century but as the idea of female representation and a fiercer competition between the men to live up to the manly ideal grew the term masculinity took over as a common denominator (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 125). It is important to note here that both manly and masculine is often used interchangeably in society today, all based on individuals own definition of the terms and their view on the traits linked to each (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 128). Having the masculinity term as the norm when talking about traits linked to men regardless of their race and class was important as it became a way to differentiate between men and women, and the masculine as opposed to the feminine (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 125). Lorentzen (2009, p. 125) also notes that by exchanging the term manly with masculinity it allowed for a more open and diffuse way of talking about men, and the traits and qualities related to being a man.

By using the masculinity term as a way to analyze an individuals' gendered practises and systems one can be able to make connections from them to what and how men's positions within these practises and systems are understood (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 128). Another important point when discussing masculinity is to understand that masculinity is not a singular fixed form across the board, it comes in many different forms that vary between cultures and within cultures themselves consisting of various, different men. The different forms of masculinity vary between cultures, through time within the same culture, through an individual's lifespan and through a culture at a specific moment (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 126).

These different variables uphold the idea that masculinity as a concept differs from individual to individual based on their own view on gender, positions, society and relations between for example man and woman, and man to man. What one individual would regard as being masculine, for example body hair, the way an individual carries themselves or simply how they act, can widely vary from others opinion of the masculine. This is also why a woman can be deemed masculine if they fulfil an individual's requirements for what they recognize as masculinity. An example of this can be a woman that inhabits muscles that can be considered to be of a certain size that could compare them to men, and thus be deemed to be masculine. A woman with a significant amount of muscle does not fit into what is considered feminine when looking the norms set by society, but rather fit into what is seen as being masculine when looking at the standards set for men. This idea that masculinity can be used as a term regardless of gender, for example when used in relation to women that is not feminine, means that it is a relational construct all depending on the different variables set (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 126).

For my thesis the ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity is highly relevant for the studies I do of the chosen characters from *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. I will later in the thesis look at the ways in which masculinity is portrayed through the character Nate from *Euphoria*, and subsequently how his display of masculinity, fuelled by an ingrained traditional masculinity norm, verges onto what can be considered toxic masculinity. For the femininity aspect the character Jules from *Euphoria* is interesting to analyze. Her search for validation as a female, in a manner that she deems important for her to fully be considered a woman, is something I will look at during my analysis of Jules. Both the masculine and the feminine is also a part of the costumes that the characters wear, so this will also be discussed later on in this thesis under the section about the characters costumes.

2.1.3 Identity and gender

Identity can be determined through the concepts of sexuality, gender, and sex attached to a person and their intelligibility within the culturally gendered norms (Butler, 1990, pp. 23). With intelligible genders Butler implies genders whose relations and continuity associated with sexual practises, gender, and desire offers some sort of coherence (1990, pp. 23). A person's identity comes into question when the intelligible genders are incoherent and discontinuous, meaning that they do not conform to the norms set in place by the gendered intelligibility, and are thus prohibited as they do not align with the cultural and biological sexes, sexual practices, and desires (Butler, 1990, pp. 23). These intelligible genders as proposed by the cultural and social norms set by society are binary in the sense that they are considered either *female* or *male* based on the biological sex, under the discourse of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, pp. 24). The attributes of being either feminine or masculine will then, based on the societal set intelligible genders, be assigned to each of the genders in the ways that a girl will express themselves through feminine qualities and the male through the masculine. Individuals breaking the norms of gender by not performing them right as according to the binary genders will often be exposed to punishment by society around them, where the naturalness of the binary genders are what is collectively agrees upon (Butler, 1990, pp. 190). Individuals considered to be breaking the standard binary gender norms are for example transgender, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

Sometimes a person's gender identity does not match the biological sex that they are born into. Individuals that feel this mismatch of gender identity and their biological sex is categorized as transgender (Purcell, Swann & Herbert, 2003, p. 321). These individuals may take hormones or have sex reassignment surgeries in order live their lives as the sex they identify with (Purcell, Swann & Herbert, 2003, p. 320). Jules in *Euphoria* is a transgendered character. Jules is also a character that fits in with Butler theory on performativity, which I will briefly explain in this next section.

Butler argues that gender is a performative act, based on Jaques Derridas understanding of performativity, and here they key point is repetition based on gender expression (Mühleisen, 2003, p. 35). By repetition Butler means that our expression of our gender is related to both the bodily and identity rooted *habits* linked to our gender, that in return simulate realness and

the natural (Mühleisen, 2003, p. 35). These repetitions then allow for gender identity to be an identity that continuously develops through time and by time itself resulting in an illusion of a gendered self (Butler, 1988, p. 519). The gendered self, on the basis of the gender acts performed through time, whether that be gestures, movements, or enactments, will also open up the possibility for a gender transformation if the repetition of performative gender acts are changed or other gender acts are repeated (Butler, 1988, p. 520).

In both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* we find characters of many different sexualities and genders. Examples of these characters, such as Jules, Eric, Adam, Rue, and their gender characteristics will be discussed later in this thesis.

2.1.4 Construction of teens on television

Regarding youth television a defining feature is its capability to explore and address issues surrounding the construction of identity. This identity construction, along with their sexual identity, is often a vital part of teen characters storylines within television and film according to Meyer & Wood in their article 'Sexuality and Teen Television: Emerging Adults Respond to Representations of Queer Identity on Glee' (2013, p. 438). The search for identity among teen characters in television series' is often in accordance with the real life psychological and cultural search for identity amongst real life teens and young adults in their early twenties (Meyer & Wood, 2013, p. 438). Their quest for sexual freedom and self-awareness is the foundation for which their change from adolescents to young adult is built on (Meyer & Wood, 2013, p. 438). During the 1990s the queer sexual identity was almost non-existent as a narrative on teen television, but in recent years the same-sex relationships, queer sexuality and identity narratives have become more prevalent as the teen representation on television has become more liberal in line with the moving times (Meyer & Wood, 2013, p. 438). This is of particular interest to my thesis in the way that the different characters on both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* have storylines that follow the exploration of their identity and who they are as a growing individual. Not only do we get to follow storylines that deal with the struggles of being a high school student on the brink of becoming an adult, but we get to explore how these characters deal with identity issues concerning masculinity, femininity, different sexualities, and how they view themselves as a part of a bigger picture, the outside world. I will take a closer look at queer sexuality under the section about sexuality.

2.1.5 Sexuality

Michel Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* from 1976 proposed that the understanding of *sex* is a result of effect of power-relations and not as an origin (Butler, 1990, pp. 129). As a way of self-expression Foucault took in use the word *sexuality* to describe the bodily pleasure as a cause to the effects of the power-relations linked to it within the historical discourse of *sex* (Butler, 1990, pp. 129). When Foucault talks about sexuality as being an event or effect created by specific discursive constructions, it relates back to the historical happenings that has occurred through time alongside the historical literary constructions that has followed with it (Bondevik & Rustad, 2009, p. 56). Foucault argues that the history of sexuality and gender is clouded with oppression, indicated through the prohibition, censorship and control that has taken place since the 18th century. This oppression ranges from churches banning its member from reading books containing themes they deemed to be deviant or from societal control over the genders and sexualities such creating divided public restrooms (Bondevik & Rustad, 2009, p. 54- 55). However, Foucault argued that even though the history of sexuality is undoubtably filled with oppression, this oppression and control is what led to the emergence of the discourse surrounding sexuality (Bondevik & Rustad, 2009, p. 55).

The definition of the word *sexuality* varies and is interpreted different depending on political, religious and core value viewpoint (Mühleisen, 2009, p. 256). In the book *Handbook of Professional Ethics for Psychologists: Issues, Questions, and Controversies* from 2003, by Willam T. O'Donohue and Kyle E. Ferguson, researchers Purcell, Swann, and Herbert (2003, p. 319) explains in the chapter "Sexual Orientation and Professional Ethics" that an individual's sexuality can be split into different aspect, such as sexual behaviour, sexual orientation, and sexual identity. According to Purcell, Swann & Herbert (2003, p. 320) an individual's sexual behaviour describes their behaviour regardless of what their existing sexual orientation identity is, whilst their sexual orientation describes their sexual attraction. The sexual attraction however does not necessarily have to correlate back to their sexual behaviour (Purcell, Swann & Herbert, 2003, p. 320). An individual's understanding of their sexual orientation, behaviour, and attraction is defined as a person's sexual identity (Purcell, Swann & Herbert, 2003, p. 320). Sexual orientations may include heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, and pansexuality to name a few on the wide spectrum of sexuality.

Anthony Giddens, in his book *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992, p. 15), claim that the modern day understanding of sexuality has been developed to fit a variety of different lifestyles. Sexuality is now something that each individual ‘has’ or develop over time according to Giddens (1992, p. 15). Sexuality was previously looked at as something predetermined, but now it is viewed as something each individual can choose and change at their own will in the creation of a self-identity in connection to their own body and societies social norms (Giddens, 1992, p. 15). This claim that an individual in the modern day is no longer bound to follow their predetermined sexuality fits in with my analysis of the sexuality of the characters such as Rue, Jules, Eric, and Adam.

2.1.6 Queer and homosexuality

Whereas the theories around homosexuality based themselves on the understanding of a subject as a human being that, according to Eng in Lorentzen & Muhleisen’s *Kjønnsforskning: En grunnbok* (2009, p. 139), inhabited an identity as a homosexual, queer theory offered a critique towards the homosexual understanding of the subject. Queer theory’s critique challenged the already existing categories for sexuality and gender that were put forward by gender theory and gay and lesbian studies (Eng, 2009, p. 139). The most dominant category of sexuality in today’s culture is considered heterosexuality (Eng, 2009, p. 143). In discussions about teen male sexuality theorist Kelly (2009, p. 480) claimed that the homophobic attitude was a common narrative theme in males search for their sexual identity. The teen male would feel compelled to comply with the heterosexual sexuality norm and thus the traditional masculinity would be the driving narrative for these characters. Both the female characters and the queer characters would feel the consequences of the overpowering traditional masculinity and heterosexual sexuality narrative put forth by the teen male characters (Kelly, 2009, p. 480). In the next section I will go further into detail on heterosexuality as the predetermined norm and how this causes problems in terms of individuals that does not follow this sexual norm, such as queer or same-sex desire people. I will also discuss and analyse how this heterosexuality norm is being presented on teen television in light of my chosen characters.

2.1.7 Heterosexuality as the norm

Eng (2009, p. 143) argues that heterosexuality is assumed to be the standard as a child grows up, unless they come out and prove otherwise. This is also assumed even if an individual does

not live up to the heterosexual norm because of societies view on heterosexuality as the predetermined sexual desire in individuals. This, according to Eng (2009, p. 143), is linked to the concept that gay or lesbian individuals must ‘come out of the closet’ because of the heterosexual norm in society. This view on heterosexuality as a societal norm can then be linked back to Butler’s theory that the biological sexes are the standard binary gender norms, and ‘coming out’ as a homosexual will then break these set norms (1990, p. 190). The heterosexual is considered the majority whilst deviation from this, for example gay, lesbian, and queer individuals, would be considered the minority (Eng, 2009, p. 146).

Within the realms of queer identity and sexuality represented on teen television series theorist Glyn Davis (2004, p. 129) notes that the more hetero structures of form found in television struggle to depict queer people and same-sex desire. Although the numbers of queer characters on television have increased, they are almost always represented within the heterostructural form of the television medium (Davis, 2004, p. 129). This means that the discussions and storylines surrounding queer characters are limited to being the same each time, and even though these characters have become a more ingrained part of teen television they are still caught up in and following the heterostructural form with little room for change (Davis, 2004, p. 130).

2.1.8 Sexual practises

Sexuality can also be linked, not just to the attractions and relations we have to other individuals, but also to the sexual practises that we perform alone or with others. Mühleisen (2009, p. 256) explains sexuality as containing a variety of practises and desires with multiple significance. This can range from sexual acts to relations to institutions (Mühleisen, 2009, p. 256). As mentioned previously sexual behaviour or practises does not necessarily correspond with an individual’s sexual orientation (Purcell, Swann & Herbert, 2003, p. 320). An example of this, which I discuss later on in my analysis, can be *Sex Education* Adam giving Eric a blowjob even though he is adamant that he is heterosexual. Other sexual practises besides oral sex can be penetrative intercourse, kissing, masturbation, or simply touch. All of these sexual practises are depicted in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*.

In regard to the homosexual or queer sexual practices and activities shown and seen on teen television, as opposed to their heterosexual counterpart, the exposure is at a minimal (Davis, 2004, p. 130). For queer or homosexual characters their storylines usually focus on the

development of their sexual identity and ‘coming out’ instead of their sexual desires and behaviours (Kelly, 2009, p. 483). This is particularly interesting in connection to *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* as they, in my opinion, manages to go against this in the way that they include and show different scenes of sexual activity between queer characters as well as going more in depth on topics around queer sexuality and activities. Examples of this will be discussed later on in the thesis. That is not to say however that the television series *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are not prone to sometimes fall into the same standard storylines and lack of sexual behaviour between queer and homosexual characters as Davis and Kelly argue.

3 Youth television

In order to understand how teen television became what is it, and how it is that the subject of analysing and discussing the representation of teen identity, sexuality, and gender is important within this genre, I will now give some background information on the emergence of teen television, what audience it targets and why, the authenticity aspect of teen television, as well as explaining why *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* can be considered teen television.

3.1 History and development of youth television

In America after World War II television series targeted towards teens with storylines focused on the lives of teens were up and coming because of the economic market it created (Osgerby, 2004, p. 72). The American teen had since the 1920s become a consumer due to rising financial power and thus the market for exploiting teen consumers newfound finances, spending habits, and entertaining their rising demographic numbers skyrocketed (Osgerby, 2004, p. 72). With the boom of teens and young adults as a target for consumer industries even Hollywood and television broadcasters saw this as an opportunity, not just to capitalize but as a way of trying out new programs on television focused on other demographics than just adults (Osgerby, 2004, p. 72). However, the expansion of television programs in pursuit of targeting teens and young adults after World War II did not extend to everyone.

Predominantly the target audience was middle class, white teenagers causing black teenagers to be left out of the mainstream society and out of the loop as being the target audience. This was rooted in the economic inequality between black and white people as well as the racism ingrained in the American society (Osgerby, 2004, p. 77).

When looking at teen television's history the majority of teen television series targeted for a teen audience have emerged for the United States, and thus helping teen television become the big television genre that it is today (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 11). Even though teen television didn't officially become a recognized genre until the 1980s the emerging of television programs targeted for a teen audience can be found way earlier (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 11). During the 1950s the television found in American family households became the chosen medium when it came to entertainment. Teens growing up in households with television as the mass medium of choice for the majority of entertainment could be seen as multimedia consumers, spending hours at home watching television with family members or

going to the cinema with friends the same age to watch teen films (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 11-12). With teens becoming consumers of television at such a big scale it allowed for competition amongst the already existing broadcasting networks, such as ABS, CBS and NBC, and the birth of new networks, such as MTV, WB, CW, and FOX, that aimed for a younger, teen demographic (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 12). The main big three networks that dominated the showing of family sitcom entertainment programs, before the new networks were on the rise, did manage to draw in teen audiences even though television series and programs weren't specifically targeted to them. Osgerby (2004, p. 72) reports that networks, such as ABC, did not specifically target teens but rather families with children and youths, which was seen as more acceptable by the industry, critics, and viewers themselves.

Several years later, when the 2000s rolled in, American television embraced teens and young adults as the target demographic for their teen television programs and their network branding (Woods, 2016, p. 5). Networks such as WB and FOX gained a large teen audience when making the shift over to becoming entertainment networks targeting a teen demographic in ways that had not been done before (Wee, 2008, p. 47). Here it is also important to note, as according to Valerie Wee in Ross & Stein (2008, p. 47), that the term "teen" and the idea around the "teenage" oriented programs in the 1990s focused on the cultural and lifestyle of a teen, not just the biological age demographic. Moving on from the 1990s and into the 2000s the same ideas around "teen" as a program audience and concept developed into including not just the lifestyle of a teen but also the qualities associated with being a teen (Wee, 2008, p. 47). So, when looking at the development and history of teen television in America it has changed from being television shows featuring teen characters and their issues being targeted towards families with young members to gradually becoming fully targeted television shows for teens exclusively featuring all teens with their topics and storylines on the new rising broadcasting networks (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 13).

Across the pond, in Britain, the market for teen consumerism and commercial consumption moved at a slower pace than in America. However, after World War II the teen consumer and commercial market had a big rise. British teens income had increased after the war, and their spending on the consumer market, such as for example record players and bicycles, had increased with 100 per cent (Osgerby, 2004, p. 78). With teens rising as members of the consumer market, and a need for entertainment and programs targeted towards this demographic increased, the pop music programs, featuring pop music and choreography, rose

to the occasion during the 1950s and 1960s (Osgerby, 2004, p. 79-80). When the 1980s and the 1990s rolled around soap operas and children's television had featured teen storylines and topics, alongside the music industry with its pop shows (Woods, 2016, p. 15). However, the original boom of teen television programming in Britain is set to be around 1987-1995, largely thanks to the new existence of cable and satellite television that brought television competition with them and the fast-growing demographic of that generation's teens (Woods, 2016, p. 14).

According to Woods (2016, p. 16) the time slots on British television was programmed to follow the age from child to adult in order to be able to cater to everyone. Teen drama television programs were directly after the children's programs, but before the young adult time slot where people on the brink between teen and adulthood fit. However, some of the British television shows aimed at teens did balance more than just one targeted demographic at the time, such as large cast ensemble series like *Misfits* and *Skins* (Woods, 2016, p. 16). As Woods points out (2016, p. 16) this way of mixing targeted demographics were seen as fitting considering the young characters portrayed in the television series' search for identity and self was continuously shifting just as the targeted teen and young adult demographics own self was shifting and evolving. Both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are series that can be considered to feature a large cast ensemble, consisting of both teen characters and their parental figures, that will be able to hit a wide demographic in terms of who will watch the series and feel like they can relate to one or more characters. The character ensemble has a wide variety of different genders, sexualities, identities, and of different socio-economic backgrounds and ages.

3.2 Teen authenticity on television

When talking about television or film targeted towards the specific demographic of the 16-34-year-olds the British industrial discourse uses the term "youth" as a common denominator (Woods, 2016, p. 5). Faye Woods in her book *British Youth Television: Transnational teens, Industry and Genre* (2016) use the term "youth" when describing television targeted to the demographic of the 16-34-year-olds as the term "youth" not necessarily defines a specific age group, but rather an attitude of "youthfulness" and the traits and beliefs connected to it. Youth television that can be found on British television channels today are not *for* the youth so much as it is *about* the youth themselves (Woods, 2016, p. 8). Woods (2016) pulls out a

characteristic trait of the British youth television as being all about the “authenticity”. Within this television construct of “authenticity” found not just in British youth television but also in television aimed at the US youth audience the focus on the young people’s voices and their perspectives through adolescence are central ideas (Woods, 2016. p. 9). This “realist paradigm”, with its use of direct language and representation, that is the support beam of British youth television is key for its creation of authenticity and its way of presenting itself as true to the youths’ selves (Woods, 2016. p. 9-10). For the sake of keeping this thesis free from confusion surround terms such as ‘youth’ and ‘teen’ I will be sticking to the term teen as I feel it fits my thesis more in the sense that I’m discussing and analysing teenagers and teen television.

3.3 Teen television as genre

In the book *Teen Tv: Genre, consumption, and identity* (2004, p. 2) theorists Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson explains that during the simultaneous boom of babies and economics in the 1950s the development of the term “teenager”, with its emerging new cultural identity, was in tandem with televisions rise as a domestic medium for media consumption within households. Miranda J. Banks (2004, p. 20) remarks that genre within the field of television is not a static system, which means that a television series can often shift from genre to genre within a season or even within just an episode. However, where television shows targeted for teens can shift between different genres in the way the storyline shifts the overall “teen” genre is the main one. The ways in which teen television has gotten foothold as its own genre and gained popularity is in alignment with television networks’ ability to target the teen television programs specifically to their teen audiences with narrative and themes that are relevant and exciting (Banks, 2004, p. 20). Not only is the overall coming of age theme a common denominator, but themes and topics related to teens experience and questions around identity, gender, self, race, and community is featured heavily in teen television (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 1).

The narratives found in teen television are explicitly made by adults, even though they are created and marketed for teens, thus making them teen television by adult but for teens (Meyer & Woods, 2013, pp. 439). As discussed by Meyer and Woods (2013, pp. 438) this makes teen television difficult to brand as being explicitly for “teens” as the demographic watching teen television can cover both pre-teens, teens, and adult. This way of marketing a

television series as being for teens whilst being watched by other age demographics lets them make characters everyone can identify with (Meyer & Woods, 2013, pp. 438). Ross & Stein (2008, p. 5) also echo this sentiment that even though teen television is marketed and targeted towards a teen audience does not mean it does not draw in an older audience. Sometimes a teen television series also branches out and successfully draws in an older audience by addressing narrative and topics fitting this audience as well (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 5). Sometimes a television series marketed as an adult television series can raise themes and topics related to teens and issues revolving their teen characters, just as teen television does the same with its adult characters and their issues and storylines (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 5).

A narrative where the characters are teens yet can act on the verge of adulthood makes for an attractive narrative. The timeframe the audience attracted to this television narrative find themselves in that teen television markets itself for Meyer and Woods call emerging adulthood (Meyer & Woods, 2013, pp. 439). Not only is it fitting as this group of individuals can relate to the crossing over from teen to adults because of the similarity in age, but also for their understanding and relativity to the construction of identity and self-awareness that are common topics within teen television (Meyer & Woods, 2013, pp. 439). This timeframe of emerging adulthood, or adolescence, for teens when crossing over from one sense of identity to the next is where not only when teens begin to develop characteristics fitting with an adult but also when sexual development is most prominent (Ross & Stein, 2008, p. 5). All of this again makes for interesting teen television with a wide scope of storylines and topics to draw from. For both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* these understandings that teen television can cater to different demographics, especially in regard to age, can clearly be seen in the way that they both follow storyline centre around the teen characters and the adult characters. Both television series feature parental figures to the teen characters and even though the teen characters are the main focus we do get to dive into the parents and discover what their struggles and issues are. Again, this makes *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* not just cater to a younger demographic, but it means they can also make the older generations watching feel like they can relate and thus find it an interesting watch.

With establishing that teen television is created by adults for teens the way in which narratives discussion on topics unfold might have an ulterior motive from the adult perspective. As Davis and Dickinson (2004, p. 3) puts it, the ways in which topics are discussed on a teen show can have as motive to inform and educate the teens whilst also being

a form of entertainment. Sex, drugs, navigating through a coming-of-age time and family ties are all topics one usually finds in almost all teen television. It is the way in which the shows go about presenting and discussing these topics to the teens that makes or breaks a show being and feeling relatable to the average teen (Davis & Dickinson, 2004, p. 3). With teen television being created by adults the fine line between coming off as preaching about topics towards the teens and being real enough to the point where teens feel like the television shows are theirs is important for a shows ability to be successful (Davis & Dickinson, 2004, p. 3). The effects that teen television possesses when it comes to shaping teens and young adults' role within the greater society is also what makes teen television liable in connection to how teens explore their boundaries and freedom (Davis & Dickinson, 2004, p. 10). How teens and young adults act in response to responsibility given to them and the appropriate social interaction needed with the world outside is formed by the media, and subsequently the teen television shows they watch (Davis & Dickinson, 2004, p. 10). This again ties in with the fact that teen shows are usually made by adults, and therefore the accountability associated with how teens and young adults' actions and opinions are formed based on what they watch are put on the adults. Here again the importance of not alienating the teen televisions teen audience is key in forming them into the standard citizen that follows the norm.

The representation of teen characters on teen television is also a factor to be considered when talking about teen television impact on teen audiences own identity construction. Having characters that the teen audience can identify themselves with is important and some characters can be seen as role models. Therefore, creating characters that differ from each other both in sexuality, identity, gender, and personality is important so that teens can learn that everyone is different and alike at the same time. Characters on teen television series can easily fall into the "good" and "bad" category character wise all depending on whether or not the character brings out and represents something positive or negative (Davis, 2004, p. 134). When it comes to queer characters their representation is usually deemed positive, and often linked to being seen as role models for the teen audience watching (Davis, 2004, p. 134). This role model badge often assigned to queer teen characters can be seen as a result of the characters being the only source of information and education about queerness and homosexuality that a teen audience gets, because of the lack of education provided by school and other educational institutions in America and Britain (Davis, 2004, p. 134). On the other hand, this can be a factor for why adults do not agree with the representation of queer characters and their sexuality on television as it educates their teens on homosexuality and in

“worst” cases promote it (Davis, 2004, p. 135). All in all, having such different characters, whether it be difference in identity, sexuality, gender, or personality will push a teen television series out to more audiences as everyone will have the ability to find a character they can relate to on a certain level.

3.4 *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* as teen television

Both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are considered teen television. This is based on the themes and storylines we follow throughout the series’ as well as the audience demographic they are targeted at. The series’ deal with themes such as the exploring and defining of sexuality and sexual practises, gender and identity development, drugs, addiction, romance, and the importance of friendship during a time where teens evolve into young adults.

An immediate notable difference between how the two different television series, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, portrays being a teen, the search for identity and development and understanding of sexuality and gender are the tone of the worlds in which the narrative takes place. Whereas *Sex Education* can seem to take a bright and more light-hearted approach to the topics raised *Euphoria* takes a more raw, realistic, and sometimes cold approach. The theme of emerging into adulthood for teens is overall the same but the execution of how the characters go through this phase of development is different. The characters in *Sex Education* navigate through the ups and down of friendships, romantic relationships, sexuality and sexual behaviour, and the search for their identity. Just like *Sex Education*, the characters in *Euphoria* also explore these themes, however the topics such as substance abuse, sexual harassment, physical abuse, body shaming and pornography is also brought up in a bleaker, yet raw and realistic way.

4 Analysis

In this chapter of the thesis I will be discussing and analysing both the setting and mainly the characters of *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. I will first analyze the setting in order to make better sense of how and why the characters are the way they are in terms of their identity, sexuality, and gender. I will then analyze the different characters costume and discuss what the costumes tell us about the characters. Lastly, I will analyze the identity, sexuality, and gender of the teen characters as each aspect of them is displayed through the use of Pearson's character analysis model. My main elements from Pearson's character analysis model that I will focus on is the physical appearance, such as their costumes, their interaction with other characters, and the psychological traits and behaviour patterns they display as that is what is most relevant in relation to my research question.

4.1 Setting

Setting is one of the four categories of mise-en-scène as it is presented by Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction* (2013). It tells us something about where we are and what the environment around us is. A setting or set can either be filmed on a real location somewhere outdoors or it can be a built set piece on a studio lot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 115). An already existing location allows for more authenticity to the setting whilst purpose-built settings can provide more control when it comes to what a filmmaker wants to include (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p.115). That is not to say that today's filmmakers cannot replicate authenticity in built up sets, seeing as all the modern technology of today are capable of almost anything (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 115). Mixing location sets, studio-built sets and digitally made sets are quite common today as it allows for more freedom and control for a creator or filmmaker whilst keeping the authenticity of real locations (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 117). I have chosen to include a small section on the settings on both *Sex Education* and *Euphoria* as I believe that the setting of both series is important to establish in order to for example better understand the way the costumes of the characters are chosen. How their teenage lives, with behaviour and mindset, are displayed can also be better understood by understanding the surrounding environment. I will now follow up with short descriptions of the settings and the different locations where the storylines take place.

4.1.1 Sex Education

The events unfolding in *Sex Education*, the plot, is centred around the fictional village of Moordale in England in present time. Many of the scenes are set to the main characters high school, their homes, and other significant parts of the Moordale village such as workplaces. The series was filmed on location for almost all of its scenes, in different parts of both Wales and England (IMDb, n.d.). This way of filming on real, already existing locations gives of a feeling of realness and authenticity to the scenes that differ from the feeling it would have given if it was filmed inside a studio. Seeing as *Sex Education* heavily features the Moordale Secondary school, and the village surrounding it, filming in real villages, even though Moordale is fictional, can help create relatability to the characters' lives and surroundings. With the series' focus on themes such as sexuality and finding one's identity as a teenager the setting of a high school such as Moordale is a crucial part of the storylines shown on the screen. This setting is both in real life for teenagers and for the characters in the series where they spend a majority of their time, so it is understandably a factor in the shaping of their identity, sexuality and overall person in such a coming-of-age time in their lives.



Figure 1: Moordale Secondary school

The setting of *Sex Education* can also be a topic of confusion. We know it is set to a fictional village, Moordale, and that is it meant to be in the modern era, but the everything in-between that can be a bit hazier. As mentioned previously, the series is set to present day and the modern era, and this comes to show with for example the technology used by the characters in

the series such as iPhones and computers. However, the atmosphere and aesthetic give of a 1980s vibe because of costumes used by the characters, which I will go more into further on in the thesis. Another interesting aspect of the series is its mixing of American and British culture and overall look of it. This was a deliberate choice from the series creator Laurie Nunn, and director and executive producer Ben Taylor, when coming up with the place and time for the series. In an interview with British GQ they explain that the creation of a contemporary and even nostalgic feel to the setting was what made a hybrid between the American and the British (Pometsey, 2020). It is also made to not feel as if it is rooted into one particular style, place, or time to make it more relatable to whoever might be watching the series (Vaughan, 2019).

Each set on *Sex Education*, or place of importance for the story, has a distinguished look so we automatically know where we are and who we are with when the series cuts to a new scene. The different set locations such as the characters houses also has a way of matching the inhabitant's personalities and identities as well as in the way the houses are designed, the colours used and the interior.

Moordale Secondary School is the main setting through the series and the one that is featured most heavily. From the outside the school looks like an old university building with large grounds surrounding it for the students to hang out. The inside style of the school is a mix of retro and contemporary style with its panelled walls and colour scheme. The executive producer of the series Ben Taylor said the corridors of the school gave of a 1970s and 1980s vibe that fit well with the aesthetic they wanted for series, and also with the costumes (Pometsey, 2020). A very noticeable feature of Moordale Secondary are the prominent yellow lockers seen on the walls of the corridors. These lockers look like they are taken straight out of an American 1980s high school drama television series and deliberately so. Creator Nunn and executive producer Taylor were both in unison that rows of lockers, like in America, would be perfect for the settings aesthetic (Pometsey, 2020). In relations to my thesis this is an interesting choice by the producer considering the same aesthetic linked to earlier decades such as the 60's, 80's and 90's can be seen in the costumes worn by the characters of *Sex Education*, which I will analyze later in this thesis.

Another heavily featured set location for the series is Otis Millburn's house, which he lives in with his mother and sex therapist Jean Milburn. The house is a large, classic red and white

Scandinavian style house situated on top a hill overlooking a river. The interior of the house radiates with vibes from the 1970s with its pattern wallpaper and hues of green, yellow, and orange. Scattered around in the house are all different kinds of genital representation which is representative of Jean Milburn herself. Jean, not only being the owner of the house but a sex and couples' therapist, uses her house as her office and therefore spends most of her time there working and living.



Figure 2: Milburn house

The Groff house is another set location which style very much coincide with the characters living there. The residents are headmaster of Moordale Secondary School Michael Groff, his wife Maureen Groff, their son Adam Groff, and Madam the family dog. Their house radiates more of a conservative style with the interior looking as if it is from the 1950s. The colour palette of the walls and furniture are mostly on the brown, beige, and slightly yellow side with prominent features such as brick stoned walls and teak furniture. The strict and bland look of the house with its interior is very representative of Michael Groff and Maureen Groff. This can also be a representation of Adam as well in the sense that this is the attitude his parents are trying to shift onto him.

4.1.2 Euphoria

For *Euphoria* the setting is also primarily set to high school and the main characters houses. It is never explicitly mentioned what town the story is taking place in, nor the name of the high

school the characters attend. It is implied that it is somewhere in the suburbs on the outskirts of a large town seeing as Rue mentions early on in series 1 episode 1 that Jules “moved from the city to the suburbs”. However precisely where the suburbs are located is a continuous mystery throughout the series. This way of not giving the audience a specific, named place for the events and storylines we get to follow allows for and creates a sense that everything that happens in *Euphoria* could take place in any city or suburb where teenagers reside. As an article from Popsugar explains, the events unfolding on screen are universal and therefore a specific location is not necessary for young people to be able to relate or feel like they have experienced at some point (Flynn, 2019).

A generic, unspecified setting with a storyline featuring universal themes experienced by teens alike can then be seen as a good choice when wanting to reach a broader audience. The Popsugar article also notes, by some detective work, that the environment where the series is shot features palm trees and an outdoor scenery reminiscent of Los Angeles and suburbs around the vicinity (Flynn, 2019). Considering that *Euphoria* was largely shot in Southern California, both on location in Torrance and Sherman Oaks, and in Sony’s filming studio in Culver City, makes it possible that the storyline also is set to a similar place (Popbuzz, 2019). The use of the more generic and universal look and setting for *Euphoria* is in relation to my thesis interesting, at least when considering that it allows for a wider group of audience to find relatability. A more universal setting is also a good foundation for allowing a bigger variety of characters to emerge. The character ensemble of *Euphoria* features characters with all different identities, sexualities, and gender, and so it is thus an important factor to look at in regard to my thesis.

The high school is also a setting that is often featured in *Euphoria*. Considering that the characters we get to follow along are high schoolers, having the school as a setting, just like in *Sex Education*, where the characters often venture every day is to be expected. This setting is also a place where we get to see many of the characters gathered. Also, just like in *Sex Education* many of the scenes in *Euphoria* take place at the characters homes. The scenes can range from a casual talking scene with only a few characters to bigger party scenes starring almost every main character, including large numbers of extras. For example, Rue’s home is a crucial setting for her storyline. Not just in the way that it drives her story forwards but also in the ways that it gives us a picture of Rues life before and her backstory. Rue’s home, where she lives with her mother and younger sister, is a typical suburban house. In the scenes that

we see the inside of Rue's home it is most of the time linked to her taking drugs or arguing with her mother. The good times seen are in relation to her sister Gia or her deceased father.



Figure 3: Rue's home exterior

There is no limit to what a setting such as a character's home or a high school can help provide in terms of giving a framework for the storylines and events that unfold on screen. Any setting in a series can be a good foundation when it comes to the building of the characters that exist there.

4.2 Costumes

Not unlike setting, the costumes and makeup chosen for a series is also a deliberate choice by creators. Costumes are not just costumes for the sake of being costumes, but can have different specific functions attached to them (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). Costumes can play a vital part in the characterization of a character, their sense of self, attitude, and relationships with others, as it is usually what we notice first (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). Costumes as a way of characterization is clever as it can give us lots of information at once without having to verbally explain it. Costumes can not only be used to characterize different characters, but also be a way to express their emotions through what colours, textures and patterns are used (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). The use of colour in costumes in relation to setting is also a good way of showing who the main characters are and who deserves our

attention on the screen (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). If we look back at Pearson's model for character analysis, she lists physical appearance as an element that makes up a character (2007, p. 43). In this section of the thesis I will take a look at the costumes the characters wear as the physical appearance element that makes up who the characters are and the characters identity.

Another use of costumes that can also be seen as complimentary to the setting of a film or series is the way in which the costumes give us a reference as to where we are and the timeframe of the setting which the characters and plot finds itself in (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). For example, a stereotypical period drama dress immediately tells you what period of time the narrative plot is set in, and a pirate costume lets you know that the movie or series is set to a pirate environment and story.

With *Sex Education* and *Euphoria* being teen drama series centred around teenagers in high school it is common that their costumes and make-up correlates not only to that particular phase in their life but also to the environment around them. Here I feel the costumes are directly linked to where the characters live and the setting of which the series is set, referring to the village of Moordale in England for *Sex Education* and in a suburb outside Los Angeles in the United States for *Euphoria*, but also who the characters are and their personalities. The costumes and make-up are also very individual to each character and helps create their personality and make the characters come alive. The characters costumes can give insight into who they are and helps distinguish between them by giving each of them their own characteristics. An interesting element in both series when it comes to costumes is their characters way of dressing differently according to how they feel mentally and emotionally, meaning that whenever something in their storyline has happened, whether that be something positive or negative, we as an audience can easily pick up on this just by looking at how differently they look compared to their usual costume choice.

A common denominator for all the costumes seen in the *Sex Education* series is their bright colour palette and the retro vibes they give off. This can be seen through the patters used on particular items of clothing or the colour scheme of the outfits. The fit and style of the costumes also gives of that retro vibe that is not very associated with the modern standards of today, but more of the styles and colours on clothing seen forty to twenty years ago. Whether

that be from Maeve's grungy style and love for clothing in the colour black, to Erics flamboyant choices of colour and love of everything patterned.

For *Euphoria* the costumes are a good mix between neutral colours such as black, brown, and grey whilst also featuring plenty of costumes with colours and patterns that make characters stand out in a crowd. Each costume in *Euphoria*, just like *Sex Education*, helps tell the story of a character in the sense that costumes let their personality and attitude shine through. The costumes in the series range from Rue's casual and neutral oversized hoodie and shorts look to Jules' more colourful look with pink, mesh crop tops and pleated skirts, to Kats black leather skirts and chocker necklaces. For *Euphoria* the characters costumes also play a vital part in telling their stories and giving an understanding of who they are as characters, what emotions they have and what statements they want to make known, not just to their counterparts in the series but also to us as viewers watching. Some character from *Euphoria* where their costumes really play a part in giving of a sense of who they are, just to use a few as examples, are Jules Vaughn, Katherine Hernández (Kat), Rue Bennett and Nate Jacobs. I have chosen these characters as examples because their choice in costumes really tells the story of who they are, how they feel in that exact moment and ultimately how they want to be perceived by their fellow peers. These characters costumes are also unique, specifically Jules and Kat, in the sense that they stand out. Rue and Nates costume, although they don't particularly stand out like other characters costumes, really give an insight into their character and in Nates case his costumes show of his stereotypical jock stereotype.

4.2.1 Maeve Wiley

One of the characters with a very distinguished style when it comes to their costume is Maeve Wiley. When Maeve is introduced and first shown in series 1, episode 1 she is wearing a black leather jacket, a black denim skirt, a burgundy shirt and fishnet stockings with black leather boots. The ends of her hair have been coloured a light pink to contrast her blond locks. Her makeup is very light except for the use of very dark eyeliner that becomes a very prominent feature on her face. This costume is feminine yet contains a hint of masculinity with the leather jacket and black boots. This mixing of the feminine and the masculine is a recurring theme for Maeve's costumes throughout series 1, which I will bring some examples of.

Apart from her staple leather jacket Maeve can often be seen wearing a grey blazer. The blazer, which can be viewed as a more masculine piece of clothing with its high shoulders, is often combined with feminine garments such as a dress and often only used by Maeve for special occasions such as parties or when meeting the parents of her boyfriend Jackson for the first time. During Maeve's first meeting with Jackson's parents she can be seen wearing the grey blazer on top of a floral wrap dress. When at their house Jackson states that she looks different, to which Maeve annoyingly responds that she made an effort in the choice of outfit. This signals that Maeve is not truly comfortable in the floral dress and would rather, given the opportunity, wear something she feels aligns more with who she is. However, seeing as she is meeting Jackson's parents for the first time she wants to make a good impression and, like she says later on in the episode to Otis, she was only putting on a show because they would never let Jackson, their golden boy, date someone like her. Maeve does not think Jackson's parents would approve if they knew she lived in a trailer and took care of herself with no parental supervision.

It was not only Maeve that felt weird when she put on the floral dress under the blazer to visit Jackson's house. Even Otis exclaims that he thinks she looks weird when he first notices Maeve wearing the floral dress. Otis can see that Maeve is not dressed like herself and so she is not being herself. This is also pointed out by Otis when Maeve notes that she had to pretend to be someone else. He tells her that if she does not open herself up she is never going to know whether her and Jackson would fit together and Jackson's parents would approve of her. For Maeve her clothes are an extension of who she is and her identity, and so changing that up to try and pretend to be someone else is not how she wants to live. Maeve opting to wear a floral dress ties in with Butler's theory on genders having attributes being considered either feminine or masculine (1990, pp. 23). By choosing a floral dress, which is more feminine than her regular grungy clothing, Maeve presents herself as a female with feminine qualities in hopes of coming across as more amiable and a good choice in the eyes of Jackson's parents.



Figure 4: Maeve in a blazer and floral dress s1e5

In series 1, episode 7 the school dance takes place. Maeve is out shopping with her brother for dresses to the dance but everything she tries on is over her set price limit. Her brother manages to win over the other shoppers in the store in an effort to get Maeve the dress that she wants. He tells a over exaggerated version of their lives to gain sympathy from the shoppers and to get them to spare some money to buy Maeve the dress. Her brother is successful, and Maeve gets to walk home with the dress she really likes, although she is not pleased with her brother manipulative actions in order to get the dress. Here Maeve's choice of dress for the school dance is also a case where the feminine attributes linked to the female gender is visible in the characters costume choice (Butler, 1990, pp. 23). The dress is quite the feminine dress with off the shoulder features, lace borders and a bow in the middle. It fits Maeve's style of wanting to be feminine but still keeping the edgy and cool look by having her hair lightly coloured and stacking necklaces and chockers. The dress is in all black which suits her already existing wardrobe of costumes that are mainly in black or similar earth colour. By having the dressing leaning more towards the feminine Maeve presents herself as the feminine, female counterpart to her date Jackson, who dresses in a suit which would then be considered fit for the male gender in terms of masculinity.



Figure 5: Maeve in her school dance dress s1e7

Maeve's style can be identified as grungy and dark in opposition to other characters in the series. Her costume can be seen as an extension of her character's personality in the way that she keeps up a "tough girl" front that on the outside can be perceived by the other characters as dark, edgy, mean and at times harsh. For Maeve this style of clothing is very consistent throughout the series except for on special occasions such as a school dance where she puts on a more traditionally feminine clothing such as the dress she chooses to wear. Her traditional feminine style of clothing can overall be linked to the theory of the feminine style attributes linked to the female gender as explained by Butler (1990, pp. 191). Maeve choosing to incorporate the feminine style into her costumes is her way of performing gender, as Butler (1990, pp. 191) and Solbrække and Aarseth (2009, p. 70) theorize. This construction of the feminine female by Maeve is entirely in her own hands but moulded by the societal norms around her that exist in the creation of what is considered the standard feminine female. However, the costumes chosen by Maeve can be seen as a representation of her wish to sometimes not obey by the rules set by society around her, and her willingness to get ahead in life on her own terms.



Figure 6: Maeve Wiley in her staple leather jacket and boots s1e1

4.2.2 Eric Effiong

Another character whose style tells a lot about their personality and characteristics is Eric Effiong. Eric's costumes are usually full of patterns and more colourful than for example Maeve. When we first meet Eric, in series 1 Episode 1, he can be seen wearing a denim-coloured bomber jacket and beige, square patterned trousers. As this is the viewers first meeting with Eric the first costume he can be seen in does not give away much about his character right away. However, as the series progress, we get more costume choices made by Eric that stands out in a crowd and lets us know that he can be viewed as a charismatic person with a bold fashion sense that is rooted into his identity and self-realization of who he wants to be.



Figure 7: Erics outfit when he is seen for the first time

In a scene from series 1 episode 5 Eric is dressed up in drag as Hedwig from the movie Hedwig and the angry Inch, which is a tradition that he and Otis have every year for Erics birthday. This recurring tradition of dressing up in a drag costume, although not the highlight of Otis' life, is a big deal for Eric as he gets to do what he likes the most, putting on makeup and dressing fabulously. Due to different circumstances Otis does not show up to his scheduled meet up with Eric and later on that evening Eric, in his costume, gets attacked and called discriminating names by a stranger whilst walking home alone. This event takes a toll on Eric and the next time we see him his usually colourful costumes are switched with one of more neutral and muted colours to represent his current emotional state. The neutral-coloured costumes for Eric continue for a few more episodes along with his low self-confidence until series 1 episode 7.



Figure 8: Eric Effiong dressed as Hedwig in s1e5

Eric's Hedwig costume can be considered a feminine costume in the sense that he wears a dress, full makeup, a wig, and lots of jewellery. The costume is a drag costume seeing as it represents the opposite gender of Eric's original one, and thus one can say that Eric is performing the opposite gender. Wearing a dress and full make up is a feminine attribute linked to the female gender, and so this way of performing gender, albeit the opposite one for Eric, links back to the societal norms set by society in relation to each gender as Solbrække and Aarseth discuss (2009, p. 70).

In series 1 episode 7, on his way home from the grocery store after not wanting to go to the school dance, Eric is stopped by a man in a car looking for directions to a wedding. The man in the car is wearing an outfit similar to what Eric would wear, a leopard print jacket with glitter eyeliner, blue nail polish and golden strass earrings. Seeing this man who Eric most likely wants to be himself gives him the confidence to take back who he is and who he wants to be. When returning home, he puts on an outfit and glitter makeup before heading to the dance to meet his friends and we see the old Eric return. Eric's outfit for the dance is a vivid, multi-coloured suit with an elaborate green and orange geometric pattern mixed with a green headpiece that stands out in a crowd. The suit with its traditional bearings is Eric's way of representing his African heritage. Mixing it with the high heels he is wearing it creates the perfect balance between his Ghanaian heritage and his own identity, which ultimately shows of who Eric truly wants to be. The green headpiece references back to his African background

alongside the use of patterns and bright colours in the suit itself. The geometric pattern seen across the whole suit is also a recurring pattern that can be seen in other costumes worn by Eric throughout the series, such as in our first encounter with the character in series 1 episode 1 when Eric wore the square patterned trousers. The overall style of Eric's costumes, when combining the patterns and the colours, is similar to that of the 1980s and can thus be a reference to that era of fashion. It is throughout the series where Eric's costumes become bolder and more colourful that we see that his fashion style is an extension of himself, his identity, his sexuality and how he wants to be perceived.



Figure 9: Eric in his suit for the school dance s1e7

4.2.3 Otis Milburn

On a completely other part of the scale regarding costumes we find Otis Milburn. Throughout the series the costumes worn by Otis can give of the sense of him being a grey mouse. He is not very out there and is not wanting to be the centre of attention. The first meeting with Otis, when he is in his full regular costume, is when he is leaving for school in the morning with his best friend Eric. Otis is seen wearing his signature beige, red and blue colour blocking jacket and a pair of rust brown trousers. This jacket, shown in figure 10, is a constant when it comes to Otis' costumes throughout the series as it can be seen in every episode to some degree. One might think that having characters wearing the same costumes over and over can tend to become boring to look at but considering that *Sex Education* is a teen show about teens and their life it is not uncommon to have them repeat costume. This is after all what individuals in

the real life do as well, as wearing new outfits everyday would be costly. For a character such as Otis, repeating costumes would also be considered normal because of the lack of fashion and style interest he has. The comfort and practicality of the costume weighs heavier.



Figure 10: Otis and Eric s1e2

As mentioned earlier the costumes worn by Otis are not particularly costumes that draw attention or stand out. The colour scheme of the costumes leans towards neutral colours such as black, brown, beige, and grey with some pops of colour along the way, such as with his signature jacket. When it comes to the use of patterns on clothes a recurring pattern often seen on Otis' sweaters and t-shirts are horizontal stripes. The style with the combination of the horizontal stripes and the neutral colours can be considered to correspond with a style seen in the 1970s. This is also fitting considering that the style of the interior of the Milburn house gives of a 1970s vibe as mentioned earlier when talking about setting.



Figure 11: Otis in his striped t-shirt s1e1

In series 1 episode 5 we see Otis go all out when dressed in drag as Hedwig for the traditional screening of Hedwig for Eric's birthday. Just like Eric's costume it is a denim skirt paired with a denim jacket and a blonde wig. This costume is far out of Otis' comfort zone but, seeing as this is something he and Eric do together every year, it is a show of character. It lets us know that Otis is not afraid to dress up in drag or other costumes far from what he usually wears if it makes his friends happy. Just like Eric, Otis performs the opposite gender when dressing in drag, if we look at the ways the feminine and masculine style and traits are linked to each gender (Butler, 1990, pp. 191., Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 70)



Figure 12: Otis dressed as Hedwig s1e5

One interesting factor when looking at the costumes chosen for the characters and linking it to where and when the story of the series takes place it does not exactly match up. As mentioned, many of the costumes and outfits worn by the different characters is not representative of what we think of when thinking of outfits worn in the present day. Seeing as *Sex Education* is meant to be set in the present day the costumes seem to be from another time completely. From Otis' retro jacket to Eric's mix of colours and patterns it all seems to be taken out from an 80s teenage drama series, and not a modern-day British teen drama. Laurie Nunn, the series creator, wanted this feeling of mismatch between when and where it is set, and the costumes and colours chosen to be present in the series as its overall aesthetic (Vaughan, 2019). This aesthetic is an homage to all the American teen dramas that were popular in the 80s, such as *The Breakfast Club* and *Sixteen Candles*, and that are still loved today by viewers and fans of teen drama series and movies according to Nunn (Vaughan, 2019). This is important to notice for my thesis considering, again, that in my analysis of the characters costume this homage to the earlier decades and teen movies are clearly visible in terms of the costumes colours, patterns, and overall look.

4.2.4 Jules Vaughn

The first appearance we have of Jules is as she is biking along the road and Rue spots her for the first time whilst driving in her mother's car on her way back from rehab. Jules is wearing a yellow, checkered, short skirt with a yellow and red crop top. She has paired the outfit with

her standard black boots. A prominent feature in Jules' outfits are her trusty small backpacks. The backpack Jules is seen wearing the first time Rue spots her is a mixture of red, pink and burgundy. With Jules being the new girl in town people notice her immediately. Fez, Rue's friend and drug dealer, describes Jules as dressing all "Sailor Moon and shit", which refers to her affinity for wearing short, pleated skirts and crop tops, and is a reference to the Japanese manga *Sailor Moon*. By this observation Fez thought Jules would be a good fit for Rue and, as we see through the progression of the series and their relationship, he is not wrong.



Figure 13: Jules, left, in her staple costume s1e2

Jules' outfits throughout the series can be described as very colourful and bright with lots of patterns and different textures that makes the costumes come off as playful. Just as Fez described Jules as looking like she comes straight out of *Sailor Moon* it is not unthinkable, when looking at the style of her costume, that anime series are where Jules draws her fashion style from. Another interesting take on the costumes Jules wear is that they change over time. In line with Jules discovering her true identity she discovers how she wants to dress. She does not want to dress to draw in the attention of men, but she dresses for herself and to make herself feel confident.

Jules' costumes lean heavily on what is considered feminine in terms of style, patterns, and colours. Here again the theory on individuals performing gender with feminine and masculine

traits linked to them, as discussed by Butler (1990, pp. 191), and Solbrække and Aarseth (2009, p. 70), is clearly visible in the costume choices. By having Jules wear the light pastel-coloured skirts, pastel makeup, and high heels she fits into what society considers to be traits of the female gender in terms of clothing style. This is also Jules' intention, as she dresses in a way she knows is viewed as feminine by society in order for her, as transgendered, to feel more like a real woman. Even in costumes where her look leans more to the dark and grungy style there are always feminine aspects to find. The theory on preforming gender in relation to Jules is also something I will discuss more in depth in the chapter on identity.

4.2.5 Katherine Hernández

When we first get introduced to Kat in series 1 episode 1 her costume can be considered quite plain in the way that it does not stand out or attract any attention. Her first outfit, which she wears to a party, is a black skirt paired with a flower printed shirt and a pearl necklace. The outfit, even though her skirt is short, can be considered a lot more modest and toned down than the outfits worn by her friends. As Kat's confidence and understanding of who she is as a young woman and who she wants to be evolves throughout series 1 so does her costumes and outfit choices. She becomes bolder in the use of colours, patterns and textures as well as how revealing the outfits are. After embarking on her journey to taking control of her sexuality and not being ashamed of her body, Kat's wardrobe choices go from wanting to hide her body so that other people won't find out that she is fat to wanting to show her curves off to the public. The change in costume for Kat is a result of her discovering her sexuality through becoming a cam girl on the internet and making money from men wanting to watch her through the computer screen and paying well for it.



Figure 14: Kat in her old clothes before costume change s1e2

It is in series 1 episode 3 that Kat makes the costume transition for the first time. After getting some money from her online skype session she visits a store to buy new outfits. This cuts to a montage of Kat where she gets dressed up, puts on a makeup look with a bold lipstick and poses in front of her bathroom mirror. As she leaves her house that morning, to go to school in her new outfit, we can see her mother looking surprised at her daughters change in outfit. As Kat walks down the high school corridors we get a full shot of her outfit. Her oversized resort shirts and denim skirts has been replaced with fishnet stockings, a lace-up bustier matched with a plaid mini skirt and a leather choker around her neck. Her drastic change even has the other students turning around in the corridors to look at her. Kats walk down the corridors has noticeably more confidence in it than previously, and it is clearly enhanced by the confidence she gets from wearing her new statement outfit. When sitting down at her desk in class a fellow student, Ethan, notices her outfits and tells her she looks different. Kat shrugs and confidently, yet with a tone of indifference, tells him she's changed.



Figure 15: Kat in her new outfit s1e3

During the Halloween party in series 1 episode 6 Kat can be seen wearing a revealing nun costume based on Thana from the movie Ms. 45. It is a nun costume but not in the traditional sense. It is more revealing with a plunging neckline, heavy necklaces and reaches Kat around the thighs. Kat pre body confidence would never wear a costume such as this one, not just because of the fact that it is on the more revealing and edgy side, but also because of the fact that a nun in general is not something that people might consider to be fitting as a sexy Halloween costume idea. Kat post body confidence alludes a confidence and an attitude that lets people know that she does not care what they think about her body or the outfits she's wearing. So, a provoking outfit such as the nun is perfect to portray the mindset and attitudes Kat is currently inhabiting. Ethan comes up to Kat at the Halloween party and ask her if she is dressed as a slutty nun. Kat responds with the costume being from a movie but yes, essentially she is.



Figure 16: Kat in Halloween costume s1e6

The outfits seen on Kat throughout the series can be characterised as feminine yet edgy, with her staple pieces such as short skirts and cropped tops. When we first met Kat in series 1 episode 1 the outfits were feminine with a more muted and soft touch that would not bring much attention to her. As she evolved the outfits remained feminine but became more edgy and demanding more attention. This is clear in the way she combines her skirts and tops with leather chockers, lace up details and statement boots. The colour scheme of the outfits also tends to lean towards darker colours such as black. The use of the colour black in her outfits also fits in well with the edgy style she is going for and the often-dramatic makeup looks. Her edgy style is made even more prevalent by her choice of makeup and her newfound love for carrying around a vape pen as an accessory.

4.2.6 Rue Bennett

Our first introduction to Rue and her costumes is in the very first episode of *Euphoria*, series 1 episode 1. Rue can be seen talking drugs in the bathroom of her home. She is wearing blue, cropped sweatshirt and beige, bermuda styled shorts. A keyword when describing the overall style of Rue and her costumes is androgynous, meaning that her costumes inhabit both the feminine and the masculine in the way that they look. Her casual attire, which can be categorized as streetwear, consists of baggy clothes such as bermuda sweat shorts, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and sweatpants. From time to time she can be seen in jeans or overalls, but they

are still dressed in a casual way that oozes of having taken no effort or thought into when being chosen by Rue. Another interesting point to make when looking at Rues costumes are that they look vintage, or at least well worn. Rue's character is not a character that seem to pay much attention to buying the newest outfits or the most expensive, so having the costumes look vintage makes the correlation between character identity and costume even clearer. Besides special occasions, such as a school dance or a party, Rue also rarely wears any makeup and keeps her hair looking rather messy and unkempt. This also goes in line with her chill, streetwear fashion sense. In series 1 episode 8 Jules even points out to Rue that she dresses like actor Seth Rogen, although in a cute way, and that is crushes Jules' soul to see it. Rue objects but gives in when she does realize that she only actually wears hoodies and sweatpants, like Jules said.



Figure 17: Rue, right, in her casual streetwear s1e2

During special events such as a school dance, a party, or a Halloween event Rues costumes changes from the casual to the more fashionable and thought out. In series 1 episode 8 Jules and Rues get ready for the school dance. Jules is trying to get Rue to wear something out of her comfort zone and puts her in a feminine red, sparkling top. Rue decides to wear it to the dance, but pairs it with pants and a blazer, which reverts her costume back to being more masculine. it's a small step out of the comfort zone for Rue whilst still being able to let her own identity shine through in the masculine pieces. During another special occasion, at the

Halloween party in series 1 episode 6, Rue can be seen wearing a black tuxedo with her hair up. Even though she usually displays a mix of the feminine and the masculine the tuxedo gives off more of the masculine vibe. In relation to Jules' Halloween costume, which is a reference to Rome and Juliet with her angel costume, it could be possible that Rue is dressed as the other half of that duo even though it is not explicitly stated as being such.



Figure 18: Rue dresses in tuxedo for Halloween s1e6

A costume often worn by Rue is her late dad's burgundy hoodie. The hoodie holds sentimental value to Rue as it is one of the few things she has left of her dad, and that he himself wore quite often. For Rue the hoodie can sometimes be viewed as a safety blanket when she is going through rough patches in her life, whether that is in her romantic struggles related to Jules, or during her struggles with substance abuse and repeating relapse into it.



Figure 19: Rue in her dad's burgundy hoodie s1e3

Even though Rue is a female, her costume choices lean more towards the masculine and the androgynous. Butler's theory on preforming gender is also relevant when looking at Rue's costume style. Butler states that an individual's choice of style is also a vital part of preforming gender (1990, p. 191). Rue does not seem to be preforming a specific gender, even though her costume choices are more masculine and feminine. This means that she could be considered to be breaking the binary gender norms proposed by Butler (1990, p. 190), costume wise, seeing as she does not dress to fit into either one purposefully.

4.2.7 Nate Jacobs and Adam Groff

Nate Jacobs and Adam Groff are two characters that are very similar when it comes to costumes. Both Nate and Adam wear costumes that can be classified as regular manly clothing. None of their outfits give off any feminine traits. Their costumes are for example completely different from a character such as Eric and his dressing with mixing the feminine and the masculine. As I will get into later in this thesis under the section about sexuality and identity both Nate and Adam cling to the idea that the manly and the masculine traits are superior, and so their costumes are not an exception. How they dress also gives off the sense of not having too much effort put into it, just like Rue's costume choices.

Nate can usually be seen wearing the stereotypical jock outfit consisting of sweatpants or jeans mixed with a t-shirt or a flannel shirt, and a jacket. He is often also shown in his football outfit when the scene shows a game or during football practise. His costume choices portray the all-American style teen aesthetic that can be found in almost any teen television series or movie. Thus, the costumes Nate wear fits into this archetype and it can be easily spotted by us as viewers that this is the character type that he falls into. The costumes colours are basic neutrals mixed in with some soft hues of blue and red occasionally. By having Nate wear stereotypical manly clothing, this can be seen as a way of him performing his male gender, as explained by Butler (1990, p. 191), by wearing costumes that align with what is perceived as clothing fit for males especially.



Figure 20: Nate in his casual costume s1e2

Nate can also often be seen shirtless in many scenes. This decision to have the stereotypical jock character with anger issues, who happens to be good looking, could be deliberate by the creators to draw in attention from both female and male viewers. From looking at other teen television and films this could be considered a trope as the attractive male of a television series, or a film, often have shirtless scenes to show off their good looks to the audience. Nate in *Euphoria* is not an exception to this television trope. He can be seen shirtless in scenes where his attitude oozes of confidence and toxic masculinity, and in scenes where he hangs out with his friends, where they all are shirtless to show off their physique. Being shirtless can

also be another way for Nate to show that he fits in with the masculine male stereotype, in terms of performing his gender in the way that he wants others to see him.



Figure 21: Nate in a shirtless scene s1e1

Just like Nate Jacobs in *Euphoria* Adam Groff's costumes in *Sex Education* also consists of pieces that can be considered casual and comfortable. Adam usually wears light washed jeans, a t-shirt, a sweatshirt, and his signature brown leather jacket on top. The colour scheme of the costumes is usually limited to neutral tones aside from the occasional coloured t-shirt. Adam's costume can be considered very generic for a teen male character and does not, unlike other character, tell us a lot about his identity or sexuality. If anything, if we put his costume in comparisons to some of Eric's more flamboyant choices it would be easy to assume he was a heterosexual male. Just like Nate's costumes Adam's costumes also can be considered the stereotypical male costume that gives off the manly and masculine vibe. Dressing in a leather jacket or plain hoodies, which can be viewed as masculine in their style, is Adam's way of performing the male gender. By looking at Butler's theory on performing gender (1990, p. 191), Adam's style of costume is his way of showing the people around him where he fits in when it comes to gender by showing his masculine choice of costumes. This way of performing the male gender in relation to his costume choices is also important for Adam seeing as he is trying to convince himself and others around him that he is a masculine

heterosexual male, which is a topic I will go further into later on in the chapter about sexuality.



Figure 22: Adam with his signature brown leather jacket

4.3 Identity

For many of the characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* the struggles with finding their place, both in life and amongst friends, is a constant storyline that we get to follow. The search for their identity or reinforcement of their identity can be witnessed in every character's storyline and can be linked back to teen television series heavy reliance on trying to mimic a real-life teenagers struggle to establish themselves. For this section Pearson's model for character analysis is also a good guiding point. Pearson (2007, p. 43) notes that psychological traits, habitual behaviour and interactions with other characters are also elements that creates a character. The identity the characters inhabit or strive towards having is displayed through how they behave towards other, how they think, how they view society and rules set around them, and their struggles with life events and relationships and so forth. I have chosen a few characters from both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* whose identity or struggles with their identity is prominent in the series, whether that be struggles with being true to oneself like Eric, having a toxic mindset like Nate, or struggling with substance abuse as a coping mechanism such as Rue. I would argue that all the characters I have chosen as objects of analysis fits in with Wood's (2016, p. 9) theory that British and American teen

television now leans heavily on creating characters that feel authentic and real to the audience watching, in order for the audience to feel some relatability towards the characters and the life they live. As theorist Davis (2004, p. 134) also points out, having teen characters with different identities and sexualities helps the targeted audience feel even more like they can relate, and the big cast ensembles of *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* have enough variation in them to do just that.

4.3.1 Eric Effiong

Eric is presented as an openly gay teen in the teen television series *Sex Education*, and with that his storyline puts focus on his struggle to be fully comfortable with his sexuality and the challenges he faces as a gay teen. Eric is a character who is fully aware of his sexuality and knows who and what he is attracted to. However, the peace Eric has made with his identity takes a hit after the harassing incident he experiences by the bus stop in series 1 episode 5, which I discussed under Eric's costume section. Eric's identity is closely connected to his sexuality, which is shown through the sometimes flashy yet fancy costume choices he makes and the manners of which he holds himself by not being afraid to show to the world that he is gay. After the bus stop incident Eric's demeanour changes and the boy that once was unashamedly out there and vocal in his opinion about the world is diminished to a more silent, grey mouse that does not want to make a fuss about himself. This more muted version of Eric continues for a few episodes up until series 1 episode 7.

As mentioned in the costume section on Eric it is in episode 7 that Eric comes across a man in a car dressed in fabulous, patterned clothes, glitter eye makeup and blue painted nails. This leads Eric to pull out his preferred choice of clothing for the school dance. Clothes that fit who he is and who he wants to be. As Eric is about to leave the house his father stops him and tells him he will drive him to the dance. This gesture from the father can be considered just a regular, polite action, but after what happened to Eric at the bus stop in episode 5 this can also be considered a safe way, from the father's perspective, to escort his son to the dance because of fear of harassment again. Once they arrive at the school Eric's father tries to make Eric reconsider his outfit in fear of what others might think or say about him. He explains to Eric that when they moved to England they had to accommodate a lot to fit in amongst everyone else. Eric's father did this so that his children could grow up to not have to change for anyone, and to be proud and strong of who they are. However, he tells Eric that he is too different and

that is scared on his behalf. Eric responds to his father by saying to him that his fear does not help him, but it instead makes him weak. Eric is who he is and believes it is better to be true to oneself than live a life pretending to be someone else. Eric's father then slowly starts to understand what his son is saying and professes that he thinks Eric is brave for standing his ground, no matter if he gets hurt or not. This moment with his father seems to be of great importance to Eric and his own understanding of his identity. After having struggled with trying to keep his true identity, in all its fashionable and extravagant glory, away from his father's judging, yet worried, opinions of his son's identity and sexuality it is a turning point not just for Eric himself but for the father-son relationship. When his father recognizes the strengths Eric inhabits for him to still being true to himself after being pushed down by others many times, and he acknowledges it in person to Eric, it is a great bonding moment for them and shows character development from them both.

Eric's character could be considered to break with Butler's theory on the intelligible genders as a source to determine identity. Butler's theory (1990, p. 23) explain that intelligible genders have coherence between their sexual practises, gender, and desire, and under the discourse of heterosexuality. Eric identifies as a homosexual man, which already here breaks with Butler's heterosexual aspect of the intelligible genders. Being a homosexual man, who dresses very flamboyant at times, Eric does not follow the male qualities that the heterosexual discourse considers to be the societal norm in order to follow the intelligible genders. Just as Butler proposed (1990, p. 23), a person that does not conform to the societal norms of coherence will then be considered to have an identity of incoherence. Eric's identity as a homosexual man is then incoherent because of his sexual practises, desires, and his way of performing his gender.

4.3.2 Rue Bennett

Identity in relation to the character Rue Bennett can be linked to her sexuality, her friendships, the clothes she wears and her recurring abuse of narcotics. Rue is not just high schooler Rue, but she is also drug addict Rue who with trial and error, tries to navigate her way through her addiction. Rue's search for who she is and where she belongs fit in with Meyer & Wood's (2013, p. 438) research claiming that teen television characters are often fitted with storylines revolving sexuality and identity searches. The ways in which Rue goes about when traversing through the phase in life of being a teen on the brink of becoming a young adult can also be considered very authentic and real in its representation. Just as Woods

(2016, p. 9) puts it, the raw and direct ways in which teen television series depict teen characters struggles in their search for themselves is what makes it authentic, and Rue as a character is a prime example of the raw and direct display of an identity and sexuality search in a teen. Referring to Pearson's character analysis model (2007, p. 43) the elements of habitual behaviour and psychological traits are two elements I believe is fitting of Rues character identity analysis. In this section I will discuss how Rue's struggles with narcotics makes up a big part of who she is, her identity.

Ever since Rue was a little girl she struggled with mental disorders. Afflictions such as compulsive disorder, anxiety and possible bipolar disorder was something Rue got treated for with medicine from a very young age. As Rue put it herself in the very first episode of series 1; "the world moved fast and my brain moved slow", meaning she felt like she could not keep up with everything around her and thus feeling out of place. Her constant struggle of trying to outrun her own anxieties makes for an exhausting life, which lead her to finding an outlet through narcotics. Rue sometimes lie to her own mother in an effort to steal her medicine so that she can live her life somewhat normal, considering getting help or good advice from anyone is deemed, by Rue, impossible.

For Rue the intake of narcotics is shown as an outlet or escape from her reality and life. Her willingness to risk her own life, safety, and cause the people around her pain just for a few seconds of feeling nothing amidst the chaos floating inside her is what keeps her going back to narcotics each time. For Rue the struggles connected to her relationship with Jules is also a catalyst for turning towards drugs. Her seemingly unrequited feelings towards Jules and her own inability to voice them makes her seek out the quick and easy euphoria that the narcotics give her for just a brief moment. From start to finish of series 1 this habitual turn to drugs when things don't turn out the way Rue wants, in this example in regard to her relationship with Jules, is a regular occurrence.

In series 1, episode 3, Rue decides to help Jules with taking more classy nude photos to send a guy online, which is a scene also discussed under the section Rues sexuality. During this scene Rue gets a call from her mother where she mentions she has a Narcotics Anonymous, NA, meeting later that evening. This prompts Jules, who's been listening at the edge of the bed, to excitedly point out that Rue has been clean for two weeks at that point. Jules throw herself at Rue, showers her with kisses and tells her how proud she is of Rue. As a contrast to

Jules excited demeanour Rue looks sombre whilst narrator Rue confesses that she has never met anyone like Jules in her entire life. Rue quickly gets up and mutters that she needs to get a glass of water. Downstairs in the kitchen her glass overflows with water as she notices several containers of prescription pills on the countertop. Next the scene cuts to Rue rushing back to Jules and tells her she must go. As Rue gets out the front door of Jules' house, we see her pull out a pill from her pocket that she has supposedly stolen from the containers she previously noticed on the countertop. Her telling Jules abruptly that she needed to go was then just an excuse to escape from Jules and take the drugs she found. This is just a way for Rue to escape from the awkwardness she experienced when taking photos of Jules, and the conversations that followed, and so leaving to take the drugs would help her alleviate the awkwardness she felt of not being able to speak freely about what she truly feels. Getting out of the situation and once again falling back on the drugs to keep it together is again Rue's solution when it gets too much for her.

From Jules' house Rue cycles straight to her NA meeting whilst on a drug high. At the meeting she gets a chip to commemorate her being sixty days clean, which Rue and us as viewers know is just a lie. She gets to give a speech and Rue tells the people at the meeting that she owes it to the people that she loves to change her ways and become better. Her speech is in the direct opposite of how she lives her life as she constantly lets her mother and sister down by still doing drugs behind their backs. Rue might be of the belief that her constant relapse to drugs does not have a negative impact on the people around her but, after a conversation with a man named Ali outside of the meeting, we can really see on her face how she knows that it does hurt them. Ali calls Rue out on her lies of being clean and tells her that in the end her way of living ruins the people around her and their ability to trust in other people again. Even though Rue's verbal communication to Ali is steadfast in retaining the lie of being clean we can clearly see her psychical demeanour change and her face contorts into sadness. She knows deep down that her lifestyle of drug use is damaging on the people close to her but her need for self-destruction, masked as a coping mechanism to escape reality, is higher on her list of priorities. Her egocentric ways will in the end not just be the downfall of Rue but could also be what breaks apart the people she loves and that love her back.

Rue can also be seen as being very protective over the people that she cares about. Whether that be her family or Jules. Even though one can argue that Rue does not take very good care of herself in many instances, the need she has to protect her people, even though that also

does not come to show in the way she wants, is very strong. An instance of this, in regard to Jules, is in series 1 episode 3. This takes place after Jules has told Rue about her getting to know “Tyler”, the new online guy Jules has been communicating with. The evening before Rue has spent texting Jules continuously to get a hold of her because she is bored, but there is no response from Jules. This leads to Rue taking a pill and falling asleep, only to have Jules text back hours later in the middle of the night. The next day at school Jules tells Rue excitingly that she spent all last evening talking to “Tyler” and that they have decided to meet up by the lake after the carnival that coming weekend. This triggers Rue’s protectiveness, and she tells Jules that meeting a stranger at night, by a lake in the middle of nowhere, is the opposite of being safe and just outright insane. Jules gets defensive and explains that she does not have the privilege of meeting people out and about like Rue does because she is trans, and it’s not as simple for her. The conversation ends with Jules walking off upset at Rue for not being supportive, and Rue being left behind looking upset and concerned. Even though Rue understands Jules point of view when she stated that it’s not easy for her to meet new people out with an audience, she still believes that it’s a stupid idea for her to go alone. This protective behaviour over Jules can very easily stem from the fact that they are best friends, but it may also be fuelled by Rues own romantical feelings for Jules and not wanting her to meet this “Tyler” guy at all. This behaviour fits in with Woods (2016, p. 9) theory that characters on teen television are presented to be as authentic as possible. Rue’s behaviour can be considered a common, authentic reaction as teen individuals may often speak only half the truth in relation to how they feel in fear of rejection.

This protective behaviour is also recognizable if we go back to how Rue reacts when thinking about how her drug abuse affects her mother and sister. After Rues conversation with Ali at the NA meeting, which is discussed previously in this text, she goes straight home to check up on the welfare of her sister. She wants to protect her sister from become broken like she herself is and to let her live a normal a life as possible without having to be weighed down by Rue’s problems. Rue feels guilty for having it be her sister that found her when she overdosed, and that as her big sister she is the one that is supposed to take care of her little sister Gia and not the other way around.

Following up on the breakdown of Rue, in series 1 episode 3, leading to the first kiss between her and Jules we again see how drugs become a coping mechanism for Rue. After the failed kiss Rue heads straight over to her dealer’s house, Fez, and tells him she need something after

the horrible day she has had. Fez, one of the characters that truly knows Rue, can visibly see that she is having a break down and is not emotionally stable at that moment and so he refuses to give her drugs. He tells her that he is not going to let her kill herself by overdosing again. Whilst standing outside Fez's door Rue is showing clear signs of being a drug addict that needs another hit just to stabilize her own reality, and to keep her mental and physical wellbeing in check. She starts banging on the door and screaming for Fez to open the door whilst shouting abuse at him to get him to open up. This is a way for Rue to try and make him feel bad for her and as a result open the door. This again shows how far Rue is willing to go in search for drugs when she easily tries to manipulate her own friends for her personal gain. Fez however know the tactics Rue is pulling on him and does not budge. As they are standing on each side of the door, Rue screaming on one side and Fez listening on the other, it truly hits us viewers how deeply Rue's addiction sits. It is an emotional scene as Rue blames her drug addiction on Fez, and Fez deep down knows that him selling drugs to Rue, and other kids, is what caused her to go behave such a way. However, he stands his ground by not letting Rue in as a way to try and save his friend from another, possibly fatal, overdose.



Figure 23: Rue visits Fez asking for drugs s1e3

In the very last moment of the finale of series 1 episode 8, after Rue decides to stay behind as Jules leave town, we see Rue start to break down again. Not only has the person she loves left but Rue has lost her own way as the train leaves the station and out of sight. Upon returning

home we see Rue sitting on her bed with a line of cocaine on her lap. Staring right into camera before taking the line we know that Rue is about to relapse. Her reasons for staying afloat in life and keep a stable life disappeared when Jules did. After we see her take the line the scene erupts into a visual showcase of Rues fall back into relapse. As she stumbles across her house singing, and out into the streets, she is wearing her father's burgundy hoodie once again and flashbacks to moments between Rue and her father. It comes across as symbolic that Rue's downfall again is still somewhat under the protective feeling of her father still being there with her as her mother, Rue feels, does not understand like he did. In the streets Rue can be seen singing whilst being thrown around by a choir also dressed in burgundy. As the song ends Rue collapses on top of a mass made up by the choir and the parting words of "till then". The symbolic representation of the choir could be her internal demons coming back to drag her down as she turns back to narcotics, and how substantial and difficult the road back is going to be once she decides to claw her way back out from the narcotics. This habitual behaviour Rue exhibits in relation to her drug abuse can be considered one of the elements that Pearson describe as being a part of what makes up a character (2007, p. 43). For the psychological traits as mentioned in Pearson's analysis (2007, p. 43) I would consider Rues emotional need for narcotics as her support system and manipulation into getting drugs from Fez to be the main factor. Both the habitual behaviour and psychological traits, in Rue's case, are closely linked.

4.3.3 Nate Jacobs

Nate at first glance can be considered the stereotypical jock one would find at any high school. However, underneath the stereotypical jock trope Nates story reveals that he is much more. In *Euphoria* Nates struggles linked to his identity has to do with anger issues, toxic masculinity, an appetite for using violence and verbal abuse to get what he wants and keep a high social status, and a view on the world that makes other individuals, especially men, seem inferior to him and even dangerous in relation to his girlfriend Maddy. Looking back at Pearson's character analysis model (2007, p. 43) many of the elements that make up a character can be found in Nate as a character. These include psychological traits and habitual behaviour, his backstory, and the environment he surrounds himself with.

In series 1 episode 1 it is revealed that Nate has just broken up with his girlfriend Maddy.

During a car scene Nate and McKay discuss the party they are hosting at McKay that same evening. Nate is boasting about all the girls they will be hooking up with that evening at what he claims will be the greatest party of the summer. However, Nate gets very cocky and puts on an act of indifference when McKay starts asking if Maddy will be coming to his party that night. Nate dismisses this saying that Maddy was the one that broke up with him and thus he does not care what she does and that she could, in his words, “go fuck herself”. This makes McKay seemingly stressed and he proclaims that Maddy is crazy and that he does not want her to show up and burn his house down because of the breakup between her and Nate. Just as Nate is about to answer they drive past Jules who is riding her bike and minding her own business. Nate makes a statement when noticing Jules saying “this is exactly what I’m talking about” which makes McKay tell him not to do anything stupid. Nate shrugs at McKay’s comment and drives closer to Jules. As Jules notices the two boys in the car Nate leans over and starts shouting obscenities at her, including wondering if she would like to have sexual intercourse with him. Seeing as Nate’s offer is not framed in a pleasant way Jules gives them the middle finger before talking a tumble onto someone’s lawn. As they drive away Nate can be seen laughing whilst McKay does not find the situation funny in the least.

Already here we get a sense of who Nate is as a person, both in relation to how he acts around his friends and how he treats girls. He reassures McKay that the party is going to be amazing, to McKay’s scepticism, and it all seems like a plot for Nate to go to a party, get drunk and have sex with females that is not his ex-girlfriend Maddy. Nate’s initial reaction to seeing Jules on her bike in her short skirt and deciding to shout sexual profanity at her really helps set the view of how he is a person. His sexual harassment of Jules in that first scene is not the last time we see Nate’s toxic masculinity and misogynistic views come to light and directed towards other characters. However, it is the first time we get to see this behaviour and thought process in relation to their identity from the character. One of Nate’s biggest identity issues is his masculinity beliefs. Masculinity refers to the traits and qualities linked to a man, and how these traits can be used to understand a man’s position by looking at the practices surrounding masculinity (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 128). Nate’s idea of masculinity is that he is the alpha male that gets to behave however he wants towards others, and women especially such as Jules, and this behaviour gets reinforced by other males around him that behave the same way. Being one of the top players on the football team, having the prettiest girlfriend, and looking the best are only some of the aspects of masculinity that Nate strives towards, however his

toxic masculinity behaviour seen in his interaction with those he deems to be less than him is the one that overshadows all of them.

As mentioned at the beginning Nate fits the stereotypical trope of the jock in a teen series. He is one of the most popular guys at his school and his subsequently dating one of the popular girls as well, Maddy. He seemingly has a good life with a family, especially his father, who deems Nate to be the perfect child considering he is the star quarterback on the school's football team and successful amongst his friend group. However, Nate's relationship with his father and the bond they seemingly have as Nate is being moulded into the dream son by his father is built on resentment and anger. When Nate was young, around 11 years of age, he discovered his dad's private collection of videotapes. The tapes were of a sexual nature that depicted his father in compromising positions with trans women and young men. This revelation of who his own father really is behind the scenes created the anger issues, toxic masculinity, and misogynistic ways that Nate carries with him. It also seems to have created a distaste for male sexuality considering Nate is often seen being over-protective of his girlfriend Maddy, and being harassing to characters that don't follow the gendered norms, for example Jules, which according to Kelly (2009, p. 480) is a common trait in the teen male sexuality and identity search. This fear and distaste for the male sexuality displayed by Nate is something I will take a closer look at in the sections about sexuality and the masculine gender role in *Euphoria*.

Later in episode 1 of series 1, at McKay's party, we see Nate getting overly drunk and angry when seeing Maddy flirting and hooking up with another guy. Throughout the night they both have been hooking up with other people in a bid to make the other person jealous. Every move they make on another person is deliberately done so that the other person can see. Maddy decides to go swimming in the pool with the guy she is hooking up with and, as they walk past Nate and his hook-up, we can clearly see Nate never taking his eyes off Maddy. When in the pool she tells the guy that she is only doing it to make her ex-boyfriend jealous and asks him if he wants to have sex with her right there in the pool. Later in the episode we see Nate inside, clearly angry, taking shots as one of his friends can be seen whispering something in his ear and which makes Nate storm out to the pool. Around the pool people have gathered to videotape Maddy and the other guy hooking up. Nate watches them hook up and call out to Maddy saying she is acting really classy and that she is a whore. Maddy, visibly happy with the reaction she has gotten out of Nate, tells him to suck her dick and

laughs. Nate storms back inside the house and starts breaking things in the kitchen. This is an incident where Nate's constant need to be the alpha male is visible. As Lorentzen (2009, p. 126 – 128) explained, masculinity is not a singular form in terms of the traits and qualities linked to being a man. However, for Nate there are set rules for what he deems to be masculine and not. Being an alpha male with all the masculine traits that follow that people around him look up to, and not always in a positive light, is one of them. So, by having Maddy test his alpha role and questioning his masculinity by making out with another guy at the party puts Nate in a position where he comes across as less of the masculine man that he strives to be for not being able to keep a girlfriend.

At this point is where he encounters Jules for the second time since driving past her earlier that day. How Nate reacts to seeing Maddy trying to get him jealous gives a good insight into how their relationship is and how Nate lashes out when things are outside of his control. Nates continuous gazes at Maddy throughout the evening is telling of his need to control what she does, and to show her that she does not control him and what he does. These action of making the other person jealous or calling out profanities at each other, from both sides, reveals that their relationship is very toxic. Nates issues with anger also comes to light as we see him start to smash objects around the kitchen after getting shouted at by Maddy. His loss of control in the situation makes him take his frustration out on the objects around him. This show of toxic masculinity displayed by Nate is a common occurrence, and it also comes to the front when he engages with other people. Nates toxic masculinity fits in well, again, with Kelly's (2009, p. 480) theory on the strong presences of traditional masculinity in teen male characters. Nates anger is a way for him to show that he the peak of masculinity and at the top of the social hierarchy amongst his male peers.



Figure 24: Nate and Jules during the party s1e1

Nates encounter with Jules is also another way of showing his anger issues and toxic masculinity. Whilst throwing objects around and screaming at the people in the kitchen to get out he is visibly upset. Jules is currently lingering in the background having a drink as she has just arrived at the party from her hook up with Nates dad, unbeknownst to everyone. After having seemingly calmed down slightly turns to Jules and asks her what she is looking at and who she is. When Jules fails to give an answer, in Nates eyes, he calls out to the people watching around them if anyone know who Jules is. Not wanting to cause any trouble Jules states that she is not there to start anything. This prompts Nate to get up in her face. Nate continues to tell Jules that he knows what she is that and that no one that looks like her is minding their own business. At this point we can see Jules struggling to keep her composure as she is wanting to get out of the situation. Nates keep pushing her and calling her degrading names such as bitch and an attention seeking whore. Jules at some point clearly reaches her breaking point because when Nate physically threatens to harm her, if someone does not speak up, she picks up a knife and points it at Nate. Nate realises he pushed too far and backs down saying he was joking.

Nate shouting to the watching audience around them to get conformation on who Jules is again lets us know that he needs to be in control. His actions by pushing Jules to the edge like he did seemed like a way to let the new girl and everyone else know that he is in charge. It is

a display of toxic masculinity where he asserts his dominance over those not meeting his believed standards, and over girls that he sees as sluts and attention-seekers. Not only his show of aggression towards Jules a sign of the toxic masculinity, but it is also a sign that the lengths Nate will go to in order to humiliate another human being is on the verge of being psychotic. Nates own understanding and belief into what he himself considers to be masculine fits in with Lorentzen's theory that masculinity is based on each individuals own definition of it (2009, p. 128). This means that Nates masculinity, which can be considered a toxic one because of his negative attitude towards woman and others, can vary from another male individuals view of masculinity. Within Nates own close knit group of male friends, and the teen culture he finds himself in, this form of masculinity seems to be the ruling one. This also aligns with Lorentzen's theory where he states that masculinity also varies between cultures and an individual's lifespan (2009, p. 128).

Nates comment saying that he knows what she is also give us a clue that his feeling towards people with different genders and sexual preferences are based on hatred and disgust. Nates tough act in front of Jules and the rest kept going as long as he had the upper hand, but as soon as Jules fought back Nate backed down and downplayed it all to being a joke. He screams out that she is a psycho. Not just as a matter of fact but possibly also in a bid to still keep the surrounding audience in the kitchen on board with the fact that he still had all the control until Jules decided to turn crazy.

During the prom in series 1 episode 8 Maddy agrees to dance with Nate despite claiming that she despises him. On the dancefloor Maddy tells Nate that he is abusive, psychopathic and that she hates the way that he makes her feel when they are together. She finally admits to him that their relationship is toxic and that they shouldn't be together anymore. Nate tells her that he knows, and they continue to dance in silence. The expression on Nates face conveys emotion that really lets the audience know that he seems sincere in his understanding of how toxic their relationship is. This can seem like a turning point for Nate as he finally understanding how his toxic masculinity behaviour and words have affected not just his girlfriend and friends around him, but how it has had a negative effect on himself.

4.4 Sexuality

In both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* there is no shying away from discussing the topic of sexuality. If we look back at Pearson's character model this analysis of the characters sexualities falls under what Pearson would consider psychological traits and behaviour patterns and their interaction with other characters. The characters sexualities in both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are displayed through their actions, attitudes and ways of thinking, their relations and behaviour towards each other, and their own sense of who they are. In this chapter I will discuss how both series go about discussing and depicting sexual practises, both in terms of positive experiences and the negative. I will also discuss how they present the characters development, struggles and understanding of their sexual identity linked to their attractions and desires for other individuals.

4.4.1 Sexual practices

Throughout the series *Sex Education* the discussions and actions around sexual practises amongst the teens are visibly shown and talked about, and can thus be considered a main narrative. Already in episode 1 we are informed by Eric that almost everyone in his and Otis' class has had sexual intercourse over the summer break except for Otis. Another character also in the pursuit of losing their virginity is Lily and after learning that Otis is also still a virgin proposes, in episode 3, that they could help each other out by having sex which would be a win-win situation for them both. Otis respectfully declines but later agrees to Lily's offer. The sexual encounter ends badly as Otis ends up having a panic attack and Lily leaves without the two having done the deed.

Sexual intercourse is a prominent topic in the series and visited by every character introduced. Adam, in episode 1, is seen pretending to reach climax and ejaculate during sex with his girlfriend Aimee. Aimee quickly realizes he is faking it and questions it with the phrase "Where's the spunk, Adam?" whilst holding up the condom. Adam can be seen visibly uncomfortable with Aimee's questioning. Later in the episode Adam is found by Otis and Maeve after having taken three Viagra pills. This leads to Adam opening up about his sexual insecurities asking questions about him not being good enough in bed, if he is doing something wrong or simply the horror of being afraid his dad is going to walk in the door whilst Adam is having sex and his dad then witnessing his "jizz" face. With the help of Otis, who "diagnoses" Adam with performance anxiety, Adam realises that he puts too much

pressure on himself based on what he believes others expect from him and just wishes he could be a normal teen.



Figure 25: Amiee holding up a condom s1e1

In *Sex Education* there is no shying away from the depiction of any sexual practises, whether this is masturbation, oral sex, or penetrative sex, both vaginal and anal. Otis throughout series 1 is having trouble masturbating and is caught lying about it by his mother. Although Otis never explicitly says that his failure of masturbation is a problem his constant pretending of being able to masturbate tells a different story. As a teen one does not want to seem unnatural within sexual practices when it seems like the majority of other teens are doing them. This echoes back to the discussion in episode 1 where it was revealed that the majority of students had lost their virginity over the summer holidays except for some. Following Otis' masturbation storyline it is interesting to see the resolution to it. During series 1 Otis befriends new girl Ola whom he eventually falls in love with. In episode 8, the last episode of series 1, we see Otis and Ola finally share their first kiss. Kissing Ola stirs up arousing feelings in him which ultimately leads to him being able to masturbate, which in turn wraps up his quest for masturbation storyline that has been following him the whole series.

Another instance where sexual practises are discussed in *Sex Education*, but in a negative tone, is regarding the character Maeve. When Maeve is introduced in series 1 episode 1 there are rumours circulating the school that she once bit a guy in the scrotum when

performing oral sex on him. This result in her getting the nickname “cock biter” by the students at her school. By getting this nickname Maeve is considered a slut by her fellow peers. During series 1 episode 5 Maeve reveals to Otis that the rumour about her that started the nickname is false. The guy that started the rumour tried to kiss her during a birthday party, which Maeve rejected, and in retaliation for the rejection he started the rumour to make her look bad. Maeve tells Otis that rumours about people’s sexuality and sexual practices, like the one she got, sticks and that no one deserves to be shamed in such a way. Whereas some might find the rumours funny, for Maeve it was the opposite. As a result, she was automatically cast out by her peers and their groups as they did not want to be compared to someone that promiscuous. Instead of fighting the rumours Maeve played on in to make herself seem tough, even though the rumours hurt her as she knew they were not true. This mentality that one is either a prude for not being sexually active or a slut for being sexually active is a theme that is often brought up in teen television, both in *Sex Education* and *Euphoria*. The spreading of rumours linked to someone’s sexual behaviour is not uncommon even in the real world. In *Euphoria* a character that gets to experience this is Kat, which I will discuss later under the section about Kat.

Sexual practises are also discussed in both series as the characters themselves navigate through them and learning as they go along. In *Euphoria*, just like *Sex Education*, the depiction of sexual practices and discussions around them are a part of different characters storylines.

One instance in series 1 episode 1 Nate and his friends discuss Cassie and have an overall talk of the sexual practises linked to girls being either considered sluts or prudes. During Nate and his friends’ “pre-game” Nate states that Cassie is a whore, which McKay denies by saying that Cassie is “not that type of girl”. Nate then pulls up what him and his friends label the “slut pages” and shows McKay nude photographs and videos of Cassie having sex with another guy. Rue’s narration over the scene implies that the photos and videos of Cassie have been leaked and possibly shared among the guys at her school. McKay looks confused and slightly disappointed as the photos and videos of Cassie is not who she presented herself as to him. Nate tells McKay to sleep with Cassie and then dump her as he believes she is a whore. The discussion scene cuts to later on in the evening when Cassie and McKay are seen meeting up at the party. They small talk for a while until McKay tells Cassie that she is the most beautiful girl he has ever scene. Cut to a short while later and we see McKay and Cassie

hooking up in McKay's bedroom. They kiss, pieces of clothing come off and McKay is then seen getting up to fetch a condom from his bedside table. Upon returning he forcefully pushes Cassie down on the bed, puts his hands around her neck and kisses her. Cassie, who was nervously waiting on the bed only second before is taken aback and yells out for McKay to stop. McKay, not understanding what he did wrong, tells Cassie that he thought she like that type of behaviour. Cassie tells him she wasn't able to breathe and asks why he would think she would like it. McKay, probably realizing that Nates comment earlier had an impact on his actions, apologizes to Cassie and promises that he would never hurt her. Realising that McKay is truly sorry and made a mistake Cassie requests him not to do it again unless he has her consent.

Rue's narration over the scene presents facts saying that almost every person watches pornography. On screen small clips from pornography flash as Rue explains that this is what the twenty most popular porn videos, on a website like Porn Hub, would feature to a large degree. The images flashing show girls crying out as they get slapped, choked, and called degrading words such as slut. Rue's narration over McKay and Cassie's scene shows that this type of behaviour towards women, in sexual situations, has become normalized. What guys see and learn by watching porn, and seeing how porn treats women, they transfer over into real life. The discussions around consent and boundaries when it comes to sexual practises between two people in real life now more than ever become important as for some people the lines can get blurred. One might watch someone getting slapped in a porn video and think that that is normal and something a girl or woman will like. How could they not, the woman in the porn video was begging for more. The heavy influence that porn has on young people and their attitudes towards pushing boundaries sexually can be a dangerous practise if they don't learn that consent from their partner when it comes to wanting to try practises seen in porn is key. The normalization of female submission and abuse seen in pornography is a reality and thus making Cassie's experiences with it, as Rue puts it, "not out of left fucking field".

4.2.2 Sexuality in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*

Topics about sexuality such as questioning whether one is heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual is also brought up in both *Sex Education* and *Euphoria*. Both television series include characters that can be found on the spectrum that is sexuality. The characters own

battle with understanding their sexuality and sometimes making peace with it is a recurring subject matter that unfolds on screen. Seeing as the characters are teenagers these storylines and events linked to their sexuality takes up much of the space in regard to *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* being television shows presenting teens and their life as they navigate through it. In *Sex Education* the characters Ola, Eric and Adam are just a few that I have picked out amongst the many characters found in the series because they at some point explore their sexuality and all its surrounding joys and teenage torment. For the characters in *Euphoria*, that I have chosen to focus on, both Jules, Rue, Kat, and Nate can be seen exploring their sexuality and trying to figure out who and what they are attracted to, both romantically and for bodily pleasure.

In *Sex Education* series 2 episode 5 Otis is asked for help by a girl struggling with the fact that everyone around her seems to only be thinking about sex and having sex. After not really getting the right answers that she was looking for by Otis she turns to Jean. She explains to Jean that when thinking about sex she doesn't feel anything and thus wondering if she might be broken. Jean assures her that sex does not make a person whole and asks her if she knows what asexuality is. The girl explains that she doesn't feel any connection to the sex parts of a relationship but wants to fall in love someday. Jean comforts her by saying that some asexual people want the romantic parts of a relationship but not the sexual practises, whilst other don't want any, and so how can anyone be broken or unnormal by not wanting to have sex in their lives. This related back to Purcell, Swann & Herbert (2003, p. 320) detailing that an individual's sexual orientation and behaviour do not have to be correlating. They can be two separate aspects of their sexuality, and as the girl in Jean's office learns it is a perfectly normal approach to sexuality.

4.4.2 Ola Nyman

Another example of exploring sexualities and sexual behaviour is from series 2 episode 5. Episode 5 starts off with Ola dreaming about her and Otis lying in bed kissing. Otis in the dream then turns into Lily. Ola asks Lily where Otis went, prompting Lily to say she might have killed him. This leads Ola to waking up to her alarm blaring on the nightstand.

Later that same day Ola is working her usual shift at the store with Adam. They discuss what having dreams about kissing people of the same sex means and Ola decides to take a quiz to

determine her sexuality. According to the quiz she is considered a pansexual and Ola, looking intrigued by the quiz results, exclaims that it makes sense to her. After having another dream about kissing Lily Ola and Otis have sit down to discuss their feelings. With Otis professing his love for Ola, Ola does the opposite and breaks up with Otis. She heads over to Lily's house and kisses her just like in her dreams, unfortunately not with the end result she was hoping for as Lily shuts the door in her face. A few episodes later, in series to episode 7, of Lily avoiding Ola they get a chance to talk just the two of them as they are walking home. Ola apologizes for kissing her and Lily accepts saying they can still be friends. However, just as Ola walks away Lily has a change of heart, kisses Ola and says she wants to be more than friends as Ola smells much better than what any of the boys do, like vanilla and car fresheners. Ola's storyline with her relationship with Otis, her attraction to Lily and her exploration of the field of sexuality is nothing but a representation of what it can be like for teens at that age.

Ola's exploration of her sexuality and coming to terms with who she wants shows the fluidity sexuality can have. It's not easy knowing where one fits in within the broad spectre of sexuality, especially as a teen, so exploring one's sexuality lets you play the field and figure out exactly what you like and don't like, and what you are attracted to both sexually and romantically. Ola and Lily's characters goes against the heterosexual norm that is usually the most represented within teen television when teen characters are discovering their sexual identities (Eng, 2009, p. 143). The search for their sexual identities by Ola and Lily is however not an uncommon storyline to follow for queer or homosexual character according to Davis (2004, p. 130) and Kelly (2009, p.). Ola and Lily's sexuality storylines are just two of many 'coming out' storylines that are found in the queer character repertoire.

4.4.3 Eric Effiong

Eric is a character that breaks with the dominant heterosexuality norm, as presented by Eng (2009, p. 143), and the standard binary gender norms in society, as argued by Butler (1990, p. 24), by being homosexual. As mentioned earlier, Eric is the only openly homosexual character at Moordale Secondary school. Even though he is a gay character he does not overly play on this, and the storyline does not primarily focus on it. In a sense Eric's storyline is more focused on his identity as an individual wanting to be his true self, however his sexuality is a prominent factor in his identity.

Eric came out to his parents as homosexual when he was 13. For Eric, having to come out and present himself as being gay fits in with the theory that heterosexuality is the dominant norm in society. As explained by Eng (2009, 143), children are from they are born predetermined to automatically be heterosexual unless they come out, as Eric did, and claim to be otherwise. Even though Eric family is very religious they embrace the fact that Eric is gay, but his father is concerned that Eric's over the top costume choices and ostentatious behaviour will eventually get him hurt. As discussed under the section about costumes Eric does at one point get assaulted by a group of men for wearing a Hedwig costume for his birthday.

When it comes to sexual behaviour and relationships Eric does not have much practise. Except masturbation, we don't see Eric in many consensual sexual acts involving other characters. However, the sexual acts and practises he does involve himself in is linked to the character Adam. Seeing as Adam considers himself heterosexual and plays on the traditional masculinity norm, the sexual practises between the two are often initiated by Adam after he has assaulted or thrown abuse at Eric first. I will go more into Adam and his sexuality later in the thesis. For Eric's sexuality, storyline wise, it is about finding his place in his surrounding environment and eventually finding another person to share it with as a partner.

4.4.4 Adam Groff

Adam is another character in *Sex Education* whose sexuality is being thoroughly explored. On the outside Adam is seemingly a heterosexual male. He engages in sexual behaviour and relationships with females, which creates an image that he is confident in his sexual identity as a straight man. As mentioned earlier, throughout series 1 of *Sex Education*, Adam can be observed being very vocal about not being a fan of homosexuality and directs this verbal, and physical abuse, towards Eric who identifies as gay. For Adam, this show of distaste and anger towards the idea of homosexuality is ultimately just a front he puts up for his peers to see. It is subsequently also a front put up by himself, so he does not have to deal with his actual sexual attraction towards men and his underlying feelings for Eric. As series 1 progresses we get to witness Adam's struggles with keeping up this heterosexual front whilst battling his true feelings. His struggles transpire through a constant back and forth, from nice to bullying, treatment of Eric, which can be witnessed through multiple events. I will look at some of these

occasions in the next section to explain Adams internal struggles with coming to terms with his sexual identity, and finally his feelings for Eric.

When we are first introduced to Adam in series 1, episode 1 we see him as being a bully to Eric, an openly gay teen. In the start of series 1 he is dating a female, Aimee, but they break up over Adam's struggle with his sexual insecurities. These struggles consist of not being able to climax during his sexual acts with Aimee and for pulling down his pants in the school cafeteria to show the size of his penis, which Aimee felt ruined her social image at school. As series 1 goes on it is apparent that Adams bullying of Eric has some underlying conflicted emotions connected to it. This fits into the theory, as discussed by Eng (2009, p. 143), that teen male sexuality builds on the traditional masculinity norms. Adam dates Aimee and engages in sexual activity with her to prove to his school peers that he is what can be considered peak masculinity by having a pretty girlfriend and a big penis. Adams homophobic behaviour and abuse directed at Eric is as also what Eng (2009, p. 143) argues to be a part of the traditional masculinity norm that teen males feel pressured into following to assert their male status and sexual identity. Because of Adam following this traditional masculinity and the idea that being heterosexual is the norm for masculinity he pushes his sexual feelings for Eric away, which is what leads to his abuse. Adam is scared that once he admits to himself that he no longer is a heterosexual male that he might lose his status and masculinity.

After both Adam and Eric get put into detention together in the last episode for series one, episode 8, the struggles between the two hit a boiling point. They start a physical fight with each other which then turns into kissing. Adam then proceeds to give Eric oral sex. After the sexual encounter Adam threatens Eric saying he will end him if he ever tells anyone what just happened between them, showing that Adam still has conflicting emotions around his own sexuality and attraction towards Eric. Later in the episode, during a class session, Adam gets seated next to Eric after being late. Eric kindly offers Adam a pen which he accepts without saying anything. They share a look and whilst paying attention to what the teacher is saying Adam places his hand next to Eric's and, slowly and uncertainly, touches his finger to Eric's. The episode, and series, ends with Eric watching Adam get into the car to leave for military school. They exchange glances before Adam, looking defeated, leaves. This end to Series 1 with Adam's storyline gives us an idea that Adam finally realizes and understands that he no longer identifies as a heterosexual male, but rather bisexual with attraction to and a want to engage in sexual behaviour with both men and women. However, as much as Adam has come

to term with this he still struggles to act as such out in the real world because he is ashamed. He does not tell anyone that he is as a matter-of-fact bisexual, but rather continues to uphold the front of being a heterosexual man. Not only is this a way to not escalate the bad relationship he already has with his father, seeing as his father most likely would not approve, but rather to gain favour with his father by complying to his strict rules on what a household and man should be.

4.4.5 Jules Vaughn

Jules' sexuality and sexual identity in *Euphoria* can be viewed as slightly confusing. Her sexual behaviour and sexual attraction do not necessarily match each other. This is demonstrated through Jules' sexual practises with individuals she is not seemingly sexually drawn towards or have feelings for. An example being Jules' involvement with older men through dating apps. As discussed previously in the text Jules can be seen meeting up with and having sexual intercourse with random older men. However, throughout series 1 we also get to witness Jules and her romantic feelings being pointed towards women, and specifically Rue. When navigating herself through her sexuality in series 1 Jules can be understood to have compulsory heterosexuality in the beginning. As she herself puts it, being transgender and not sure of her sexuality, she "feels like if she conquers men, she conquers femininity". It is not until she befriends Rue and develops feeling for her that she comes to an understanding of her own sexuality and that she defines herself as a lesbian.

Jules' compulsory heterosexuality makes her act out in the sense that she has sexual intercourse with men in an act to assert her own femininity and womanhood as a transgendered person. During the first episode, series 1 episode 1, we see Jules linking up with a man on her preferred dating app and they agree to meet up at a motel, which can be seen in figure 26. The man is quite a lot older than Jules and right at the end of the episode it is revealed that the man is Nates dad, Cal Jacobs. Jules lies about her age saying she is twenty-two in order to not get into trouble. The two of them have sex rather rough and during the act Jules seem to emotionally distance herself. Her eyes seem lifeless as she lays motionless throughout the intercourse. This way of Jules not being the one to take lead and rather be dominated by the older man can relate back to her need for validation as a female. By having him do as he pleases with her it lets her take control over her own femininity in the sense that males are seen as naturally more dominant than woman, and thus this action only

back up Jules' search for validation and recognition as a woman. Having the man also be the dominant one in the sexual acts also fits into the theory of the traditional masculinity norm as well (Eng, 2009, 143). Cal taking on the dominant role during the sexual act gives him the reassurance of his masculinity and power he has over Jules in that situation only fuels this. The dominance and power Cal feels over being in charge will only add to his own idea of what is considered masculine, and can in worst case scenario, as it happens with Nate, turn into physical abuse when wanting to assert their status and masculinity.



Figure 26: Jules and Cal meet up at a motel s1e1

Another reason for the ways in which Jules react during the sexual acts she partakes in with Nates dad in the motel room is that it gives evidence to the hypotheses that Jules, in that instance and repeated behaviour, have a sexual behaviour and sexual attraction that not necessarily act together. The sexual behaviour is more of a way for her to take control of herself, and less of being emotionally or physically attracted to a person she has sexual intercourse with. This is why Jules having compulsory heterosexuality is believed, and why she also falls victim to the predetermined norm that the male and female genders are heterosexual (Butler, 1990, p. 24; Eng, 2009, p.143). However, as the friendship between Jules and Rue develop, she gradually moves away from the compulsory heterosexuality and lets herself be attracted to and engaging in sexual behaviour with people she genuinely wants to be with.

Later in series 1, in episode 2, Jules can be seen matching with a new guy on a dating app, and this time he is the same age as Jules. This differs from her previous matches which were mostly older guys that she met up with to seek validation for her femininity. This new match creates another interesting string of events as it turns out that the guy from the dating app is Nate. For Jules this new person, who is the same age as her and thus lives through the same teen experiences, shifts her perspective of only meeting up with men for validation and turns into her slowly seeming to catch feelings for him in way that make her sexual behaviour align with her sexual attraction. However, her hopes are cut short when it turns out that Nate is seemingly only talking with Jules online and having her send partial nude photos in an effort to blackmail her into staying quiet about his dad's, Cal, sexual behaviour. Even though their encounter ends with Nate trying to blackmail Jules there is still some attraction between the two, even though Nate would never publicly admit it and Jules does not want to deal with Nate after the blackmailing behaviour.

Jules' relationship with Rue is different as it starts with them being friends. Even though they are close there does not seem to be any sexual or romantic attraction at first from Jules' side towards Rue, even though Rue is, unbeknownst to Jules, secretly crushing on her. As Jules and Rue's friendship continues throughout series 1 Jules engages in hook-ups and romantic flings with other women, which leaves her relationship with Rue more complicated. This complication is also fuelled by Nate's blackmailing scheme and Rue's ongoing drug abuse. After Jules' meeting with Tyler, which turned out to be Nate, in series 1 episode 4 she is left feeling crushed and heads over to Rue's house. After explaining that the meet up did not go the way she expected, and that she feels quite down about it, Jules kisses Rue. From here on out the romantic aspect of Jules and Rue's relationship varies quite a lot. As series 1 comes to an end, their relationship is still up in the clouds as Jules departs on the train leaving Rue stranded behind.

4.4.6 Rue Bennett

Throughout *Euphoria* we get to witness the blossoming friendships Rue creates and a budding romance with the new girl, Jules. Rue's feelings for Jules is the main factor to look at when talking about her sexuality and her romantic feelings. Even though it is never explicitly stated

what sexuality Rue identifies with in the series, her feelings and actions towards Jules combined with her longing looks, give us a clear indication that no matter what her sexuality might be she is completely infatuated with her. Whether Rues feelings for Jules are strictly romantically, sexually, or just a crush is an interesting discussion to have as Rue during the whole of series 1 is very good at keeping her feeling to herself and not cracking.

In series 1 episode 3 Jules has started exchanging nude photographs with the mystery man she has been communicating with. During a conversation between Rue and Jules in the school cafeteria Jules explains that she needs to take more partial nudes that seem professional and classy, and that she need Rues help to take them. In the voice-over narration of the scene we hear Rue tell herself to be cool about it, but her body language says otherwise. She clearly does not seem very comfortable helping Rue to take nude photos that she will then send to someone else. However, being the good friend that she is to Jules she states that taking those photos will be easy and that she will gladly help. This is just one instance where Rue suppresses her feeling for Jules in order to maintain and keep their friendship intact. This suppression of voicing what she really feels for Jules also comes to show when it's time for the photoshoot. During the photoshoot Rue is visibly uncomfortable when Jules asks if she looks hot enough that Rue would have sex with her. Rue stumbles over her words and tells her that she would, to which Jules smile. When Jules asks whether she should show more skin or what her thoughts about the photos are Rues constant answer is that she does not know and that it is "whatever". The phrase "whatever" is frequently used by Rue and often when she does not want to say what she really means or feels. The phrase combined with her very telling body language gives us a clear pointer for when she genuinely does not care about something or if she hides her true opinions.

In the aftermath of the conversation between Rue and Jules in series 1 episode 3, concerning Jules' willingness to meet a stranger by a lake alone at night, Rues true feelings for Jules start coming more to the surface. After spending the rest of the day after the conversation feeling anxious and overwhelmed Rue travels over to Jules house. When she gets in front of Jules she breaks down and explains that she only wants Jules to be safe because she is the best that has ever happened to her, so Jules can't fault her for only wanting to protect her. Rues physical demeanour is very fidgety and submissive in the sense that her hands are constantly moving as she is talking, and she is looking down at the floor rather than directly at Jules. Again, Rue does not want to ruin her friendship with Jules, so she tells her the truth about how imagining

Jules getting hurt makes her feel, but not the whole truth. It is not until Jules approaches her, takes her in her arms, and tell her that she is not mad at Rue and does not hate her that Rue's mood lightens. Jules tells Rue that she gets her need to protect Jules and that she loves her. This prompts Rue to tell Jules that she loves her back and Rue takes the opportunity to kiss Jules. However, Jules does not react in a way that we can assume is what Rue would want and so Rue backs away as she mutters about being sorry and runs out of the house. This sudden display of emotion by Rue towards Jules is a big step as we have never really seen her express any romantic feelings or gestures before, even though her thoughts, facial expressions and verbal communication has been leaning towards it. Judging by the astonished look on Jules' face after the kiss she has not picked up on Rue's behaviour being anything other than a close friendship.



Figure 27: Jules and Rue make up s1e3

Rue and Jules' relationship go through many ups and downs throughout series 1. Rue battles her drug abuse and Jules her blackmailing threats from Nate, which all take a toll on the relationship. At one point, in series 1 episode 7, Jules can be seen leaving town for a bit and meets up with a new woman, Anna. This breaks Rue's heart, and their romantic relationships go through even more strain because of this. In the last episode of series 1, episode 8, Jules and Rue attend the Winter formal at school together. After Rue has an emotional talk with Nate, where he tells her that Jules won't remember her in five years and that she is wasting

her time, Jules finds her on the steps in front of the school and Rue is visibly upset. Rue asks Jules if she is in love with the new girl in her life, Anna, to which Jules reply that she is. Then, Rue asks if Jules is in love with her. Jules answers yes, which prompt Rue to ask if she wishes she was different. Rue wonders if things between them had been different, or their relationship had been different, if Rue had not had the struggles with drug abuse. Jules shakes her head in disagreement and the two girls share a kiss. Rue propose they pack a bag and leave the town together to get away from everything. Jules thinks it's a crazy idea, but they end up at the train station. As the train pulls away only Jules is on it as Rue is left standing on the platform after having second thoughts, seen in figure 28. Just as Jules leave, she declares her love for Rue who is left standing alone.



Figure 28: Rue alone at the train station s1e8

As Rue walks home alone heartbroken a montage of all the ups and downs in her life starts rolling. Her father dying, her mother yelling at her, moments of her kissing Jules, stealing pills from her sick father and her sister Gia finding her after the drug overdose. The only happy moments seen are the ones with Jules, meaning that Jules and her love is the only constant good in Rue's life that she can hold on to. When Jules leave Rue is left with nothing but the bad parts. Jules' love for Rue, and Rue loving her back, is what keeps her floating in the town she would rather burn to the ground than stay in.

4.4.7 Nate Jacobs

Nates sexuality is closely linked to his own identity, family issues and his ingrained toxic masculinity. Just like the anger issues he struggles with, that I will discuss more under the section about gender, Nates sexual identity started forming after the discovery of his father sex tapes. This discovery was the catalyst for Nates pressure into following what Eng (2009, p. 143) and Kelly (2009, p. 480) call the heterosexuality norm. Nates discovery of his father's sexual orientation and behaviour was also, alongside the heterosexual norm following, the start of his distaste for male sexuality in general.

Nates distaste for male sexuality can be visibly seen in series 1, episode 2. Whenever he is in the locker room after football practise with his teammates, he always tries to maintain eye contact so as to not accidentally see their genitalia, as seen in figure 29. He hates the casual attitude they have towards being nude in front of each other. These tendencies can be connected to his own sexual insecurities and homophobic attitude. As Kelly (2009, p. 480) explained, the homophobic attitude was often a result of the teen males search for his own sexual identity and the overshadowing pressure to follow the traditional masculinity norm in a bid to maintain social status amongst their peers and potential romantic interests. This is very fitting for a character such as Nate whose sexuality stems precisely from his firm upholding of traditional masculinity, albeit a toxic one.

Nates homophobic attitude, and thus his own sexual insecurity, is also visible in his encounters with Jules, who is transgendered. He physically and verbally harasses Jules, and other people like her, that don't follow what he considers to be the heterosexual norm of society. His homophobic mindset can however be considered hypocritical as it is later revealed that he has a small infatuation with Jules and can be seen to be in possession of multiple dick picks on his phone. His sexual insecurity is also noticed by his on and off girlfriend Maddy in the series.



Figure 29: Nate in the locker room s1e2

In one scene in series 1 episode 8 we see Nate and Maddy trying to have sex. Nate is clearly not being able to get an erection but tries to dismiss it by saying he has a lot on his mind when Maddy starts asking questions as to why. They bicker back and forth about why they aren't able to have sex, with Nate blaming Maddy for never being able to stop talking. Another reason as to why Nate feels he can't maintain an erection is because of the rumours about him having photographs of other guys' penises on his mobile phone. Maddy tells him it's not just rumours but facts seeing as she was the one who discovered the photos and told everyone. This angers Nate and he acts out by putting his hands on Maddy's face, slapping her and screaming at her to keep talking shit. His actions upset Maddy, but she tries to reason with him by saying that sexuality is a spectrum and that she does not care that he is into guys. Nate, still holding on to his own truth that the pictures on his phone were taken out of context, tells Maddy that sexuality as a spectrum is 'bullshit' and storms out.

When looking at Nate's sexuality, and the storyline of it following through series 1, it is clear that it is a long road ahead for Nate in order to fully understand and come to terms with it. Nate needs to figure out who he is sexually attracted to and how to connect both his sexual orientation with his sexual behaviour in order to fully figure out his sexual identity. Also, in order to fully embrace his sexual identity he needs to leave his existing idea of what masculinity is, and leave behind his beliefs that heterosexuality is the norm.

4.4.8 Katherine Hernández

For Kat the storyline and topic surrounding sexuality in the series can be linked to her self-confidence, search for identity and body image. We get to follow her going from being a young woman wanting to hide herself and her body to fully embracing her own sexuality and her body. When Kat was eleven, she and her family went on a trip to Jamaica where she got stung by a jellyfish. This led to her consuming lots of virgin Pina Coladas as a consolation, as seen in figure 30, and ultimately gaining twenty pounds when she returned home. Her boyfriend at the time, Daniel, decided to break up with her when he saw she had gained weight. This took a toll on Kat's self-esteem, and she became more closed off. Around the time when Kat was about to start high school she started writing smut fanfiction about One Direction and gained a lot of followers and popularity on the internet. However, her internet fame didn't not help her feel more comfortable in real life amongst her peers at school.



Figure 30: Kat on the family holiday drinking virgin Pina Coladas s1e3

Kat and the discovery and unfolding of her own sexuality and identity starts when she decides she no longer wants to be a virgin. In series 1 episode 2 a leaked sex video from the party thrown by McKay in episode 1 is being shared amongst the students at Kats school. Based on the appearance of the girl in the video everyone watching it assumed it was Kat. Kat on the other hand, freaking out about the video getting out, denied it being her in the video although

everyone knew it was her. When getting called to the principal's office after the video gains the attention of the teachers Kat calls out the principal for assuming that the video is of her based on the fact that the girl in the video is fat. Kat takes offense to this saying that it is body shaming her, and that it is degrading that her principal and classmates would assume it was her based on the body type of the girl in the video. This leads to the principal putting a stop to the cruel rumours surrounding Kat and the video, and it quickly blows over. Kat decides to have a talk with the guy who she made the sex video with, and she explains to him that the video can be considered child pornography seeing as they are both underage. She makes him promise to delete the video, tell everyone that the girl in the video is in fact a completely different girl and to agree to buy Kat all the makeup her heart desires. Kat, thinking that the video is gone forever realizes that it has been reuploaded many times to pornographic websites and gained a lot of views. Looking at the comments under the video she realizes people genuinely like the video and would pay money to see her doing cam videos and other revealing videos. This leads Kat to make her own page on a pornographic website in order to earn money when she understands that other people find her body appealing and attractive. She consciously chooses not to reveal her identity in the videos by wearing a mask.

For Kat, looking at the comments under her sex video leaked online seem to have a positive effect on the way she views her body. She seemingly becomes more confident and takes ownership of her sexuality. This is shown by having Kat make more videos of herself, posting them online and in return making profit. Not only does she realise that it is a lucrative market in being a cam girl, but also that some people are willing to pay extra to have their own kinks and fantasies fulfilled. During her adventure online she gains a regular customer she frequently has skype sessions with. At first Kat is very reluctant, but once the man explains he will pay good money, and up-front, Kat gives in. During the first skype session with the stranger online Kat realizes that the man gets turned on by being talked down to and belittled. This takes Kat by surprise, and she starts laughing awkwardly to make the situation less awkward and genuinely asks the man if this is all a joke. Once the man tells her that that is exactly what she wants and that he will do whatever Kat wants she agrees to continue the agreement. The next scene shows Kat getting transferred a hundred dollars after the man didn't follow the rules they set, and Kat seems to find this both astonishing and beneficial. After receiving the money, she goes out and buys a new wardrobe to go with her newfound confidence. While it started with Kat panicking because of the video being leaked, she turned the situation into something manageable by taking advantage of the fact that she could make

money of showing of her body and in the process as a bonus she learned to appreciate her own body. Not just is Kat's discovery and exploration of her sexuality a direct result of the leaked tape, but also her confidence in her own self-image and her identity linked back to it.

Kat Hernandez is also a character whose sexual practises evolve throughout the series. When we first meet Kat it is revealed that she is a virgin, however she lies about it saying she has been with more guys than she can count. During a party at McKay's, in series 1 episode 1, Kat is seen sitting with a group of guys discussing oral sex and pornography. One of the guys ask Kat if she would suck his penis if he was to show it to her right there. This leads to the guys pointing out that girls do not actually know how to perform oral sex on a guy, as they feel they are too gentle and almost scared of it. Kat is visibly trying to seem cool and makes a remark that girls in porn are not scared and gentle. The guys ask Kat if she watches porn, who asks back "doesn't everyone?", to which the guys respond to by saying that only sluts watch porn and not prudes. One of the guys asks Kat how much of a slut she is and proceed to ask her to take her top off as proof of her not being a prude. Kat, having decided that her junior year would be different in terms of sexual practices and losing her prudish ways, takes her top off. Her action prompts one of the guys to make a comment saying that fat girls give the best oral sex which, again, makes Kat try to keep a cool composure but is seen to be visibly uncomfortable.

This scene, just like Cassie's scene with McKay where he steps over the line in regard to sexual behaviour as mentioned earlier, also shows the normalization that the sexual violence seen in pornography has in the real-world encounters between men and women. The two guys talking to Kat seemingly believes that women only fit into two categories when it comes to sexuality and sexual behaviour, sluts or prudes. Also, judging by their explanation of the two categories and their matter-of-fact attitudes towards it implies that no matter what category a woman falls into they are judged negatively by the guys regardless. They don't want a woman who is a prude, but they also don't want a woman that has had sexual encounters with other men as that makes them sluts. Kat realizes that no matter what she does she can't win, but only do what she herself feels like is right. This attitude towards woman and placing them into categories can also be found in *Sex Education*, and specifically linked to the character Maeve which I have discussed earlier under the section about sexual practises.

As talked about previously in this thesis Kat lets her identity and self-confidence shine through her costume choices. This can also be the case for her sexuality. As she embarks on her sexual awakening journey her clothing style also changes in accordance with it. This is firstly shown when she decides to take her clothes off during McKay's party in series 1 episode 1, as mentioned earlier, to prove that she is not a prude to the other guys in the room. This is a big step for Kat in the direction of changing her sexual reputation and her sexual status from virgin to sexually active.

4.5 Gender

4.5.1 The masculine gender role

Adam and Nate, from *Sex Education* and *Euphoria*, both struggling with anger issues and emotional instability. For both these two characters the notion of masculinity and the idea that the man is the strongest both mentally and physically is very much prevalent. Showing any emotion is a sign of weakness and for both Adam and Nate the pressure, from their fathers, to always stay on top is a driving force in both good and bad ways when it comes to the boys and their ability to succeed in life. For both Adam and Nate, and their fathers respectively, anger issues are a reoccurring theme throughout, and it often comes to show either during conflict or when events happen that makes them question themselves. Throughout both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* the theme of anger as a male gender stereotype plays an important role in the storylines for both boys and explains to us viewers why they are and act the way that they do. Referencing back to Pearson's character model this analysis of the masculine gender role ingrained in Adam and Nate fits under the elements of psychological traits, habitual behaviour, and interactions with other characters. I will now bring out some examples of these anger issues as a male gender stereotype that is often linked to the idea of being manly or as a masculine attribute that is not necessarily looked upon as a negative attribute but more of as a way of asserting dominance and keeping a high status amongst other males.

In *Sex Education* Adam is quickly established as being the school bully that uses physical and psychological ways of tormenting his victims. He shoves them around, steals their things and threatens to come back again if they don't follow his rules or because he simply does not like them. For Adam this display of dominance is fuelled by his strict upbringing and rules set by

his father, headmaster Michael Groff. Michael Groff operates with strict house rules and lives under what one might consider a traditional household style in terms of gender roles and responsibilities that follow. In a later section I will take a closer look at this traditional household, with its traditional gender role norms, that exist within the Groff family and other households in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. It becomes apparent already in series 1, episode 1 that Adam lives with strict rules set by his father. He has a curfew set for when he must be home at night, and if he is late his father takes his phone as a punishment. This is shown in series 1, episode 1 when Adam gets home five minutes too late. Adams whole demeanour changes when he steps inside the family home, from being the school bully to a son living under scrutiny by a strict father and trying not to be the trigger that starts another family fight.

Adam's dominant attitude where he portrays himself as not just being a physically strong male, as seen when he pushes others around, but also as being mentally strong and taking his anger out on other people he sees as weaker than himself. By looking at the relationship Adam has with his father Michael it is clear that he mimics his older father's views on how a man is supposed to be seen. Adam's father portrays the male gender as physically and mentally superior to that of a woman, in Michael's case his wife, and him himself like Adam also harbours an attitude filled with anger issues and strong, ingrained believes that the anger is a sign of being manly. This again makes it not surprising that Adam also views the anger he expels out to others as a positive feature of what it means to be a manly man.

Some of the same tendencies towards male dominance and the masculine gender role fuelled by aggression and a faltering father to son relationship can be seen by Nate in *Euphoria*. Ever since Nate was a little boy his father raised him to never let other people bring him down. His father, Cal, saw Nate as a strong and determined boy with a willpower that could lead him far. Cal taught Nate to never let the people who would try to tear him down an opening to do it, and that he would have to be his own supporter. When Nate was eleven he also stumbled across his father own recorded collection of himself in sexual intercourse with younger man and trans-woman. This event, in connections to his father preaching about being a boy who has to pave his own way amongst a sea of weaker individuals wanting him to fail, eventually lead to Nate, at the age of 12, to start a strict workout and diet schedule. As he grew older all of these ingrained lessons of being a strong male and having seen the truth about who his father is lead Nate to develop anger issues and a toxic masculinity behaviour. The anger issues and toxic masculinity is also linked to Nates sexuality as all his experienced events and

life lessons clouded his view on sex and sexuality, which I have discussed previously under the section about Nates sexuality.

Nates anger issues is often seen coming to the surface when he interacts with his girlfriend Maddy or with his father. With Maddy his anger issues are directly linked to his opinion of other males as dangerous that see Maddy as a prey and that he sees himself as the protector. Being protective over Maddy is, in Nates eyes, a trait linked to him being a masculine male and Maddy being the weak female. Nate, as it is revealed in series 1 episode 2, believes the world is full of men that wants to hurt Maddy by shouting sexual harassment at her, drug her at a party or even kidnap her. If a guy ever tried to hurt Maddy Nate tells her that he would kill them, which Maddy encourages by saying that he is the sweetest guy for wanting to protect her.

Interestingly Nate can be considered a hypocrite in his beliefs that men are only out to harass or hurt Maddy, seeing as he himself displays the same toxic male behaviour towards other females. This is shown, as I have discussed previously under the section about Nates identity, in the way he behaves towards Jules especially. Just as he notices men shouting sexual abuse towards Maddy, and being appalled by it, he himself shouts sexual abuse against Jules when he first lay eyes on her when driving with McKay. When other men display this type of toxic behaviour towards Maddy Nate considers it dangerous and see these men as predators and weaker individuals in society. When Nate himself display the same attitudes and act the same he considers it a part of being at the top of the masculine male chain. According to Nates toxic masculinity view this is acceptable behaviour if one wants to be seen as the alpha. This again ties back to Lorentzen's theory that masculinity is not a fixed form across the board, but rather different from person to person and from culture to culture (2009, p. 128). The ways in which Nate perceives masculinity can be different from another person's perspective on what traits and attitudes they consider to be masculine. The anger Nate inhabits towards his father and other males all stems from his revelation of his father other curricular activities with young men and trans individuals. Nate's distaste towards this and his father's lifestyle gets built up, and in the end explodes in a fit of rage and a scuffle between the two. Interestingly both Nate and his father Cal can be considered to be harbouring the same views on masculinity. Again, masculinity can differ from person to person as explained by Lorentzen (2009, p. 128), but based on Nates upbringing by his father it is clear that Cal's masculinity view rubbed off on Nate whilst growing up.

4.5.2 Traditional gender roles

As theorist Parsons argued (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66), the gender role divides between male and female had its basis in the societal norm and expectations placed on the male and female genders. This would for example mean that the female was expected to stay at home and be the caregiver in terms of love and motherly affection, whilst the male would go work and provide financial stability for the family. Parental characters of *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* I would argue both follow and go against these traditional gender roles that are created by the gender norms of society around them. I will now go through a few examples, such as Jean Milburn, and Michael and Maureen Groff. I will also use Maeve as an example of following traditional gender roles, even though she is not a parental figure. I would point out that these traditional gender roles, as presented by Parsons (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66), do not necessarily live on in the modern-day society today where equality of the genders have become more prominent, but for this analysis I will look at the characters from Parsons theoretical viewpoint.

A character whose gender role I would argue goes against the normative gender roles in society, as argued by Parsons (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66), is Jean Milburn, the mother of Otis in *Sex Education*. After Jean finds out that her husband Remi, Otis' father, has cheated on her with one of his clients they divorce, and Remi moves to America. This event left Jean to raise Otis on her own as a single mother independently working to keep the family stable financially and emotionally for the two of them. Jean's character as a single mother both being the caretaker of the family and also the person creating income makes her go against the gender norms linked to male and female roles within a traditional household. Whereas the traditional normative household gender roles have both the male and female role to create one whole, Jean must take up the responsibilities of both gender roles. However, if we look at Jean's ability to both be the caretaker and financial provider in light of more modern standards it is not necessarily divided into her taking on two separate gender roles. A female, in a world of gender equality, is not locked into a traditional societal gender norm of just being a mother and emotional stability for her children, but rather a female with the same opportunities for working and wanting to earn money. Jean is not bound to her home and life

as a housewife, but if we look at it from the traditional gender viewpoint she is now taking up both roles.

A family in *Sex Education* where the gender roles are very different to the Milburn family is the Groffs. Adams family follows the normative gender roles and stereotypes that is set to resemble a traditional household. Adam's father, Michael, is shown as being the provider of the family whilst the mom, Maureen, takes care of the house and is shown as the caretaker. Michael's attitude towards gender roles could be considered to be very fitting with Parson's theory on the gender roles in society and within the household. As the provider of the family Michael leaves for work in the morning to secure the income and returns home in the afternoon to dinner made by Maureen before settling in to grade school papers. Like mentioned previously in the thesis Michael is a strict head of the family with rules such as curfews and strong opinions on where the money he earns for the family is spent.

Maureen Groff's characters play on the traditional gender norm of the dutiful wife that cooks dinner for the family, cleans the house and keeps the peace in the Groff house. When Maureen is first introduced she plays the dutiful housewife role very well, but as time goes on we see that she is not happy in her life and marriage to Michael. She is bored and wants to break away from the strict life that Michael leads in a search to feel young again. After Maureen decides she wants a divorce she slowly starts to break away from the traditional gender role as the female caretaker which she has lived by for many years. For Michael there does not seem to be that big of a change in his viewpoint on how things should be. He clearly wants his wife back but is seemingly not willing to break away, like Maureen, from the traditional values he places on the roles within a household. By these observations the Groffs are a good example of Parson's traditional gender role within a family household.

Maeve Wiley is also another character who is thrust into the traditional gender role of being the caretaker. When her mother Erin, who has been arrested for drug dealing prior and living away with Maeve's younger sister, returns after being clean for over a year Maeve reluctantly lets them live with her in the caravan. Erin tells Maeve that she wants the family back together again and that she is looking for a new job to take care of her daughters. However, it is later revealed that Erin has gone back to using drugs. This leads Maeve to become the caretaker of her little sister when her mother is no longer capable, and Maeve does not want her little sister to be around a drug abusing mother. In relation to the traditional gender roles

linked to a household and its expected positions, as Parsons argued (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66), Maeve's mother could never be considered to have fulfilled the traditional gender role of the caregiving mother. Erin never took on the role of being either an emotional or financial support to Maeve growing up. Maeve however, when she starts to take care of her little sister, somewhat fulfils the role of caregiver that is expected by a motherly figure. She tries to offer this to her little sister in an effort to keep stability seeing as her mother fails to do so.

4.5.3 Gender identity

Jules is a character whose exploration of her gender identity, in relation to her sexuality, is a large part of her storyline around self-exploration in series 1 of *Euphoria*. As a transgender who identify as female Jules is understood to struggle with understanding who she is, who she fits in with and who she is sexually attracted to and has romantic feelings for. As mentioned earlier Jules can be seen using dating apps to find and hook up with men. This is, as discussed previously under the section about sexuality, a way for Jules to get validation as a woman. This is seen as important for her in her search of figuring out who she is and her identity.

When Jules was young, around seven or eight, she realized that the gender she was born into was not the gender she identified as. This led her to dealing with depression, self-harm, and gender dysphoria. As a result, her mother had her admitted into a psychiatric ward when she was only eleven years old. Eventually her mother left Jules and her dad because she could no longer deal with the stress surrounding her daughter. Her dad quit his job so that he could be closer to and spend more time with Jules after she got out from the psychiatric hospital, and at age thirteen Jules started her transition into becoming a woman. From that point is when Jules' hook-ups with men, almost always white, cisgender, straight and in a relationship, and her obsession with conquering her own femininity and womanhood started.

As a transgender character on *Euphoria* Jules can be considered, in accordance with Butler's (1990, p. 191) theory on gender identity, to be breaking the norms set by society as she does not conform with the binary genders of being and acting either biologically female or male. Being transgender Jules was born as a man, but she identifies as a female and thus she models herself after what is perceived as feminine in her behaviour and her costumes. Her costumes are feminine in the sense that they highly consist of mini skirt, dresses, crop tops and

sweaters. All in various pastel colours and shades. The feminine aspect of Jules is one of the more prominent one in *Euphoria* and draws our attention in and lets us know that Jules really embraces her identity as a woman.

This also ties back to Butler's theory surrounding gender performativity (1990, p.191). Seeing as Jules identifies as a different gender than she was born into she performs the gender she identifies with, which is female. Jules performing her female gender identity is strongly connected to her compulsory heterosexuality, which I have also discussed previously when discussing Jules' sexuality, as she feels she must engage in sexual behaviour with men in order to fully live and prove that she is a female. The heterosexuality norm is so internalized in Jules when trying to prove her womanhood that she does not realize that she is in fact lesbian. By repeatedly performing this female trait, as Jules sees it, by having sex with men she is performing what she believes is what it takes to fully be a woman. Jules' true gender identity is not discovered by herself until she meets Rue and understands that she can still be a woman without having to have sexual intercourse with men.

5 Conclusion

In my last section of the thesis, the conclusion, I will firstly go through a brief summary of what my thesis was about and what analysis I have done. I will then proceed to go through what my research discoveries have been based on my analysis of the chosen research objects, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. Lastly, I will briefly go through the limitations linked to my thesis and its research, and what academic contribution my thesis may have including further possible research.

5.1 Summary

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I presented my research question:

How do Euphoria and Sex Education represent teen identity?

Following this I presented and explained my chosen method of analysis for the thesis, character analysis. The character analysis I used were based on Roberta Pearson's model of character analysis that included six different elements that make up a character. Seeing as my character analysis of the characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* were based on the costumes they wore, their behaviour in relation to each other and the attitudes they held when it came to their identity, sexuality, and gender I referenced to the elements of physical appearance and traits, psychological traits and habitual behaviour, and interactions with other characters in Pearson's character model. My chosen characters for the character analysis I quite consistent through all three chosen areas of representation. The characters were all chosen because of the clear representation they exhibit in regard to their identity, sexuality, and gender.

In my theory chapter I presented theories from a multitude of relevant theorists that I linked to each of my chosen area of representation seen in and displayed by the characters, their identity, sexuality, and gender.

My analysis chapter, that followed my presentation on theory, focused on the three areas of representation: identity, sexuality, and gender. Firstly, I started off with a brief overview and analysis of the setting of both *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*. This was to make it easier to

understand where the characters' lives and storyline took place, which then made it easier to understand the context of how their identity, sexuality, and gender came to be displayed.

At the very start of writing my thesis I had originally only planned on writing about teen television's representation of identity, sexuality, and gender in the British teen television series *Sex Education*, but ultimately decided to include the American series *Euphoria* to give more variety in the representation amongst the teen characters and their representation of identity, sexuality, and gender.

5.2 Teen representation on teen television

In both teen television series, *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, it is clear by my analysis that the representation of identity, sexuality, and gender can be found in different ways in all the characters I have chosen to analyze. By using Pearson's character model as a baseline for my analysis of the characters it allowed me to look at the ways in which the characters' identity was presented.

5.2.1 Costumes that display teen identities

Analysing the characters' costumes gave an interesting look already into their identity, sexuality, and gender that they identified with. Pearson's element of physical appearance and traits linked to the appearance could be seen here, along with theories from Butler and Solbrække and Aarseth which helped explain why the characters might have chosen to dress the way they have.

Maeve Wiley, Jules Vaughn, and Katherine Hernández costume choices gave insight into what type of individual they want to be perceived as. For Maeve her costumes give of the illusion that she is the tough girl with the masculine style because of her affinity for leather pieces, chunky boots, fishnet stockings and dyed hair. When she chooses to wear costumes that lean more towards the feminine is when she wears dresses, for the school dance or when meeting a love interest's parents. Maeve's costume, when she goes for the more feminine is fitting with her wanting to be perceived as the feminine female gender. She performs the role of the feminine female with all the traits and attributes linked to it, in tandem with the theories by Butler (1990, pp. 191) and Solbrække and Aarseth (2009, p. 70). Jules Vaughn is also a character whose costume choices can be linked to Butler, and Solbrække and Aarseth's ideas

on performing gender. For Jules the costume choices she made was however more for her, as a transgendered woman, to feel more like a feminine, authentic woman by wearing skirt skirts and pastel colours. Her costume choices are thus a direct link to her understanding of her own gender and identity. Katherine Hernández and her costumes also leaned towards the feminine, but with an overall touch of a dominance that can be found in the masculine traits.

Otis Milburn and Rue Bennetts costumes were more on the casual, seemingly not thought-out side of the scale. Whereas Otis' costumes are more a demonstration of him as a grey mouse that does not take up much attention, for Rue it is more a statement of her drugged-up chill head space. Rue's costume would be considered breaking Butler (1990, pp. 191) and Solbrække and Aarseth's (2009, p. 70) theories on preforming gender, in contrast to for example Rue, considering that she mixes her costumes up by wearing clothing that are associated with being both feminine and masculine, although it is dominantly masculine. Eric Effiong's costumes is another extension of his identity and sexuality. He gets excited when he gets to dress in drag and wear elaborate makeup as that is what he feels comfortable with, but when the way he dresses gets attacked he buckles under the pressure to stay true to oneself.

The costumes of the characters Nate Jacobs and Adam Groff followed the perceived masculine style of clothing set by societal norms for heterosexual men. I viewed both characters costumes in light of Butler's theory (1990, pp. 191) on preforming gender considering Nate and Adams continuous effort to make themselves perceived as masculine male individuals by their peers. Their ways of preforming the male gender through their masculine costume choices linked back to their own view on their identity and sexuality, and their insecurities surrounding the two aspects.

5.2.2 Identity by teen characters

For my analysis of how identity came to be presented in the chosen characters Eric Effiong, Rue Bennett, and Nate Jacobs I found that Pearson's elements of habitual behaviour, psychological traits, and interaction with people around them were very clear indicators to analyze when it came to understanding the characters own understanding of and how to deal with their identity.

In my analysis of Eric Effiong I found that he would be considered breaking the societal norms set for the intelligible genders, as proposed by Butler (1990, p. 23). Being a homosexual character Eric's identity strongly focused on being able to live his life without fear of being judged and performing his gender the way he wants, and by such he would be breaking the binary gender norms and their set norms for what traits and behaviour fit with each designated gender. Rue Bennett's identity is overly represented in her habitual behaviour and attitude towards her drug abuse. Her drug abuse is also a part of her psychological traits as she uses her habit of doing drugs to cope with her issues in life regarding her love life, family life and self-image. Rue believes that her drug habit is her emotional and mental support system because society around her has failed to help her.

Nate Jacobs identity, just like Rue, orbited around his habitual behaviour of toxic masculinity in his attitude and interaction with other females and what he deemed lesser male individuals. Nate's distaste for male sexuality and strong presence of toxic masculinity proved by the way he struggles with anger issues and being overprotective can be considered a psychological trait linked to his identity search, which theorist Kelly (2009, p. 480) explains is common amongst teen males. The habitual behaviour and psychological traits displayed by Nate through the anger issues and toxic masculinity is a result of the environment and people around him, such as his father Cal.

To sum up, the theme of identity in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* is represented through the characters' psychological traits, habitual behaviour, and interactions with other characters.

5.2.3 Sexuality as teen identity

For my analysis of how sexuality came to be presented in the chosen characters Eric Effiong, Adam Groff, Jules Vaughn, Nate Jacobs, Rue Bennett, and Katherine Hernández I found Pearson's elements of psychological traits, behaviour patterns, and how they interact with others to be the key aspects of understanding their sexual identity and sexual practises. The ways of which both the television series use the storylines of the characters to show the representation of sexuality, sexual practises, and the sexual identities of the characters include both negative and positive events for them. Both series also do not shy away from showing different sexual orientations and practises, which makes the series' show authenticity in its teen identity representations as this is something one would find in teens' real life as well.

Exploring sexuality in different ways and with different individuals is recurring for the teen characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, for example as I have discussed in relation to the sexuality storylines revolving Adam Groff, Jules Vaughn, Ola Nyman, and Rue Bennett.

Eric Effiong's sexual identity is very clearly established in the television series as homosexuality, meaning he is attracted to the same sex. After analysing his representation of sexual identity it is clear that he as a character breaks with the heterosexual norm that is dominant in society, as theorized by Eng (2009, p. 143). Eric's development of his sexual identity hit its peak when he came out to his parents as a teen, and by doing so he would, by Butler's gender theory (1990, p. 24), be categorized as an individual breaking the binary gender norms found in his surrounding society.

The character Adam Groff builds his sexual identity around the predetermined idea that heterosexuality is the norm for teen male, which fits in with Eng's (2009, p. 143) theory on sexuality in teen males on television. For Adam this is all based on the fact that he is insecure about his sexuality, and the fear of not being seen as traditionally masculine and manly if he is not heterosexual drives him to develop anger issues and to exhibit homophobic behaviour towards other characters, specifically Eric. Nate Jacobs is also a character whose sexual identity is followed by sexual insecurities which fuels anger issues and homophobic behaviour, just like Adam. For Nate his sexuality is fronted as being heterosexual in order to comply with his, and his father's, view that traditional masculinity and heterosexuality is the key to being at the top of the social hierarchy. As discussed previously this view on sexuality that Nate believes in, and his struggles and insecurities linked to it that he hides away from others, all stem from the strained relationship with his father. This divide between them began after Nate realized that his father secretly does not follow the heterosexual norm that he preaches and fronts to the public. For Nate this led him to secretly, just like his father, explore his sexuality and attraction to other genders.

Jules Vaughn is another character whose sexual identity follows the norm of heterosexuality as the predetermined norm, which is in alignment with the theories proposed by Eng (2009, p.143) and Butler (, 1990, p. 24). For Jules this idea of heterosexuality as the norm in regard to her sexuality is based on her wanting to have her sexuality in alignment with her performing her gender. As a transgender woman her identification as a heterosexual is based on her desire to feel and be perceived as what she believes to be a real woman, and it can thus

be considered compulsory heterosexuality. Her compulsory heterosexuality is displayed not only through the way she believes it to be, but through her sexual practises and engagement with other individuals. It is not until she meets Rue and lets her true feeling shine that she realizes her true sexual identity as a lesbian.

Rue Bennett, much like Jules, grew up on believing that heterosexuality was the standard norm in society when it came to sexual orientation for the binary genders. Her sexual identity starts to truly develop once she meets Jules, and they start their friendship. However, for Rue it is more important to keep their friendship stable than for her to reveal her true feelings for Jules, in case she is rejected and their friendship breaks because of it. Rue's sexual identity is more based around her own ability to be true to who she is and show she feels, which in the end links back to her struggles with her own self. Katherine Hernández and her sexuality is also heavily influenced by her own self-identity. For Katherine her sexuality is more about feeling empowered as a woman rather than establishing a concrete sexual orientation. Katherine sexuality journey is also largely focused on the topics of body positivity and the exploration of making money through sexual videos online. The body positivity and sexual empowerment that Katherine gain through her online endeavours is her rebellion against the hostile standards held against women in society around her, where women are labelled as being either sluts or prudes.

To sum up, sexuality as a teen identity represented by the characters in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education* are displayed through their psychological traits, behaviour patterns, their interaction with other characters, and the environment that surrounds them.

5.2.4 Gender as teen identity

For my analysis of how gender came to be presented in the chosen character Jules Vaughn I found that the ways in which she performs her gender can be seen in connection with her sexuality and self-exploration. We can find similarities of Jules' gender identity in Butler's theory on gender performativity. As analysed Jules understood at an early age that her biological sex did not match the gender she identified as, which led Jules to start dressing and behaving more feminine. This is according to Butler (1990, p. 24)) considered to be breaking the standard binary norms set for the male and female gender, with their feminine and masculine attributes. Jules' feminine traits are seen through the way she dresses, which I

analysed under the section about costumes. Just as I summarized under the concluding sections on the identity and sexuality themes Jules suffers from compulsory heterosexuality linked to her being transgendered. Seeing as she identifies as the female gender her sexual behaviour and sexual attraction is focused on the opposite sex, men. Jules heterosexuality is internalized within her by society, and it is not until she meets Rue that she understands that she is in fact not heterosexual, but lesbian.

Gender identity in the form of traditional gender roles as theorized by Parsons (Solbrække & Aarseth, 2009, p. 66) is also visible in *Euphoria* and *Sex Education*, but as I analysed this is more evident in the parental characters. Jean Milburn, Otis' mother, can be understood as breaking the traditional gender roles of the financially providing father and emotionally providing mother. Jean, as a single mother, manages both at the same time. On the other end of the gender role spectrum we found the Groff family. Here the traditional gender roles were clearly established by having headmaster Michael Groff be the financial provider and his wife Maureen the traditional housewife that cooks and tidies the family home.

The traditional gender roles, especially in the case of the male gender, was also a point of analysis in this thesis. The masculine gender role and its traits was visible in characters such as Adam and Nate through Pearson's elements of psychological traits, habitual behaviour, and interactions with other characters. For Adam and Nate this became evident through their anger issues, which could be traced back to family issues and predetermined ideas of the traditional gender roles in a household as presented by their fathers, and the homophobic attitudes they displayed in their interaction with others. Their homophobic behaviour patterns were however a reaction to their own sexual insecurities, and the internalized traditional masculinity they exhibited can be traced back to heterosexuality as the standards norm when regarding traditional male gender roles in society.

5.3 Limitations and academic contribution

As I mentioned early in my introduction chapter this thesis was originally only supposed to be an analysis of the teen identities displayed by the characters in *Sex Education*. However, as the thesis progressed, I realized that including data from another teen television series might benefit the thesis as it gives a wider spectrum of teen identities. I added in character analysis of the characters in *Euphoria* as well but looking back on the thesis now I see that I have put

more focus on the characters from *Euphoria* than from *Sex Education*. This has not been a deliberate choice for the thesis, but I personally have found the characters in *Euphoria* to represent a much more interesting variation of teen identities than *Sex Education*. This might have limited my thesis in a way that has not allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the characters in *Sex Education*. For further research a more in-depth character analysis of the character ensemble in *Sex Education* might prove to be beneficial for further contribution to the field of teen television and character identities.

As contribution to the field the thesis is limited in the sense that my observations presented are only a small representation of teen identities found. I also picked out characters that I personally found to be interesting, and that I believed could help me answer my research question, and so further research could be done by looking into more of the characters that I have not chosen to put focus on. This thesis is also not the first thesis to research teens on television, and their identities, however I believe my research observations to be of contribution to the growing field of teen television studies.

Considering this thesis focused on character analysis through Pearson's character model, further research into the field could possibly be through a more stylistic approach. For example, one can incorporate cinematography and mise-en-scène and look at how the camera work and angles, lighting, colour scheme, framing, and composition is used to further explore the teen characters on screen and their identities.

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