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Teenagers and Youth Cultures in American Television: Reception Analysis of *Glee* and *Euphoria*

ABSTRACT

The article examines contemporary depictions of youth and teenagers in post-millennial American television and their reception by critics and viewers. Traditionally, television tackled challenges and problems young people have to face in a two-fold and simplistic way, focusing on either radically pejorative situations and behaviors (crime, drugs, sex) or on superficially cheerful scenarios (entertainment, gossip, having fun) (Buckingham, 2021; Hebdige, 1988). The author analyzes the reviews of two television shows, *Glee* and *Euphoria*, which – although representing different genres and narrating different experiences – are acclaimed for offering more complex and authentic representations of teenagers by addressing issues that are often marginalized, tabooized, or even absent in contemporary American television discourses.

KEYWORDS

teenagers; television series; reception; youth; quality television; *Glee*; *Euphoria*

1. Introduction

Drawing from youth studies and contemporary critiques of the representation of youth within television studies, in this article I examine critics' reception of two American shows: *Glee* (2009–2015) and *Euphoria* (2019–2022). These series – although broadcast in two different decades in the post-millennial era and representing different genres – are acclaimed by audiences for complex and authentic depictions of teenagers and changing the discourse on youth through detabooization of certain problems and "youthification" of the narrative (Hagedoorn et al., 2021; Sundet, 2021). I have chosen these particular American teen dramas as they exemplify two different tendencies in how youth cultures are televised: a more optimistic vision (*Glee*) and a more gloomy one (*Euphoria*). Their protagonist is collective, revealing shared experiences and common identities[1]. Both shows tackle

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[1]   That is why other TV series, such as *13 Reasons Why* (2017–2020), are not examined in this paper, although they provide an in-depth insight into contemporary teen problems, e.g., mental health conditions or bullying.

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– although in a completely different manner – important social and emotional challenges adolescents face nowadays: forming an identity, facing intimacy and romantic relationships, discovering sexuality, understanding difficult everyday relations with friends, parents, and teachers, and violent behaviors (e.g., bullying) (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017, p. 95). While *Glee* has been praised for its focus on minority groups and normalizing queer identities, *Euphoria*'s unmoralizing approach to sexual relationships and complicated depiction of substance abuse were appreciated both by viewers and critics. Although focusing on youth, they both refer to important American contexts: identity politics, political correctness, rape culture, and the opioid crisis.

2. Ways of representing youth in the media: "youth-as-fun" vs. "youth-as-trouble"

Youth has been the term evoking ambiguous feelings, and its characteristics are shaped by our own personal experiences, memories, and projections from childhood and adolescence. David Buckingham defines it as an unstable and vague stage between "innocent" childhood and "mature" adulthood – difficult to understand and tame, frightening and fascinating at the same time. Consequently, "Youth are often represented as a problem to be solved, an inchoate force in need of discipline and control. And yet equally, they are often used as a vehicle for adult fantasies of energy, creativity, and freedom" (Buckingham, 2019, p. 3). Therefore, youth (both boyhood and girlhood) – a transgression, a passage between childhood and adulthood – is perceived both as empowerment and liberation, and as ambivalent and dangerous (Kenny, 2023, p. 161). Thus understood, youth inscribes itself in – what Dick Hebdige (1988) calls – "the politics of discomfit" (p. 18), which associates teenagerhood with feelings of strangeness, uneasiness, mysteriousness, and confusion.

Following the same logic, television has traditionally depicted teenagers and young adults in a twofold way – either as "youth-as-fun" or "youth-as-trouble", which Hebdige analyzes in his book *Hiding in the Light: Youth Surveillance and Display* (1988). This dichotomous way of representing was examined by scholars of British cultural studies, who studied press releases, films, television news, and photography.

On the one hand, young people are shown as a dangerous social group, juvenile offenders often involved in some kind of illegal activity, skipping school, and behaving irrationally, which makes parents and teachers completely powerless and incapable of communicating with them and controlling them (Taylor & Willis, 2006). In television series, youth subcultures and teenagers are also linked to crime and violence, getting involved in dangerous situations, drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behaviors (e.g., initiating sexual practices too early or without consent), and disregard for social rules, which serves as a justification for their

surveillance and controlling measures undertaken by adults and law enforcement (Buckingham, 2019; Hebdige, 1988).

On the other hand, teenagers crave fun, leisure, and entertainment; thus, they are often represented as hedonistic, liberated, crazy and careless, fashionable and trendy, spontaneous, and unpredictable (Taylor & Willis, 2006). Young people are fascinated with consumption goods (buying clothes and beauty products) and partying (including drinking alcohol and experimenting with drugs). They put friends and their social environment above parents, family, and school. The latter is rather a place for socializing, showing up, pretending to be someone else, and aspiring to be popular and accepted. Importantly, the images in this context concentrate on "the body – on appearance, posture, dress" (Hebdige, 1988, p. 31), and the obsession with one's look is taken up by many television series, including *Glee* and *Euphoria*. Not only is visual and sexual attractiveness of key importance, but also coming to terms with one's gender and sexual identity, which is the topic *Glee* and *Euphoria* problematize[2].

This dichotomous discourse between a vulnerable/lost and autonomous/empowered teenager reflects the simplistic perception of young people based on generalizations and binary oppositions that do not correspond to reality but are social constructs "influenced by historical, social, and economic factors" (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017, p. 27). As David Buckingham (2021) contends, "The idea of youth has a considerable symbolic potency. It is typically associated with notions of energy, idealism, and physical beauty; yet it is also frequently represented as both trouble and troubling" (p. 23).

Until the 2000s, there were few interdisciplinary studies on youth and media, the majority of which focused on television's negative influence on teenagers, for example, the impact of onscreen violence and aggression on young people's behavior and attitudes (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017, p. 4). Scholars affiliated with British cultural studies started to investigate various ways of representing youth, taking into consideration racial, ethnic, and class aspects, e.g., young Black men in television news (Hall et al., 1978), youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979), and gender and youth cultures (McRobbie, 1991). They paved the way to more complex investigations, going beyond perceiving teenagers as pathological or problematic.

Especially in the new millennium, together with the emergence of "quality television", these stereotypical representations of adolescents have gradually started to change. Some narratives find a way to transgress the above-mentioned dualistic portrayal by showing "youth-as-trouble-as-fun", while others give voice

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[2]   The analysis of other shows, such as the British TV series *Sex Education* (2019–2023), can be found in: Vázquez-Rodríguez et al. (2021). More on "heterosexual script" in primetime television in: Kim et al. (2007).

to teenagers themselves and focus on their shifting identities, search for sexual pleasure, (toxic) intimate relationships, the lack of understanding from adults/parents, the role of social media in young people's lives, as well as consequences of drug addiction. Depicting teenagers through "youth-as-trouble-as-fun" debunks and contests the myth of "innocent" adolescence and unfettered play related to it by showing, for example, the loneliness, lostness, alienation, abandonment, and insecurity they experience on an everyday basis. Furthermore, it allows us to reflect upon the repercussions of unleashed fun, unprotected sex, and unlimited substance abuse: teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, addictions, etc.[3].

The new quality of these shows relies, firstly, on a youth-centered perspective: "marginalizing teachers and parents and avoiding obvious moral lessons" as well as problematizing "risky aspects of teenage life – sex, drugs, violence, and the wild pursuit of pleasure – as largely taken-for-granted, everyday realities" (Buckingham, 2019, p. 2). Second, as both *Glee* and *Euphoria* illustrate in the American context, television series offer issue-based stories (p. 7), focusing on authentic and particular problems: emotional doubts and stress in finding gender and sexual identity, peer pressure and influence, various kinds of violence (from bullying and cyberviolence through sexual violence to domestic abuse), mental illness and consequences thereof, alcohol and drug addictions, uncertainty and unpredictability of romantic and sexual relationships, uneasy bonds with adults (parents, teachers, and mentors) and conflicting attitudes towards them: between evading them and seeking their attention and acceptance.

These three elements – youth-centeredness, issue-based stories, and avoiding "didactic moralizing" (Buckingham, 2019, p. 7) – made the images of youth more credible, realistic, and authentically reflective of their complex experiences and everyday difficult struggles, doubts, and uncertainties inscribed in adolescence.

In the remaining parts of the article, I will focus on how *Glee* and *Euphoria* are received by critics and what novel ways of portraying teenagers, beyond "youth-as-fun-as-trouble," they include in their narratives. To this end, I choose two different topics – queer representation (*Glee*) and substance abuse (*Euphoria*) – to talk about diverse impacts these shows have on audiences.

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[3]   In this paper, I focus on how these novel ways of representing teenagers are reflected in American television shows (on two examples). I have chosen *Glee* and *Euphoria* as they narrate two topics important from the perspective of American youth cultures, i.e., queer identities and drug addiction. I am aware that some non-American productions, such as the British teen drama *Skins* (2007–2013) or the Norwegian series *Skam* (2015–2017), revolutionized images of youth and paved the way for *Glee* and *Euphoria*. The British *Sex Education* has also not been selected for my analysis, although I recognize its role in the detabooization of teenage sex and intimate relationships. More on other youth-centered television productions in: Rosinska (2024).

3. *Glee*: queering American suburbs

Glee is a six-season FOX television series combining different genres – musical, comedy, and melodrama with kitschy and campy elements – taking place in a fictional William McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio. Its main protagonists belong to a club called the New Directions, led by a Spanish teacher, Will Schuester (Mr. Schue). The common denominator for the glee club's members – which proves to be attractive for viewers – is that they are in a position of exclusion for various reasons: sexual identity, disability, interests, family issues, ethnicity, non-white and non-heteronormative identities, etc. (Dubrofsky, 2013). Most members of the glee club are marked as different, unpopular at school, unaccepted by peers, socially mismatched and marginalized, and often lonely and miserable misfits. Yet, they are undeniably talented "losers", always standing in opposition to the popular majority and harassed by their peers and some teachers (Coach Sue Silvester) (De Lira & Cabral Ferreira, 2022). However, the club is also of interest to so-called school "stars": football players and cheerleaders, who – frustrated, uncomfortable in their roles, struggling with many problems – seek meaning, relief, and a sense of belonging outside their normative spaces. Regardless of their motivation to be part of the glee club, its members find ways to express their sentiments and conflicting desires and share difficult emotions (anger, shame, sadness) through music, singing, and dancing to often complicated choreography. As *Glee* co-creator, Brad Falchuk (*We're All Gleeks…*, 2009), summarizes it, "Every teenager feels a wanting, a desire for something more, to be heard, to be seen. […] I think the show is working for people of all ages, though, because that feeling never really goes away".

Audiences appreciated *Glee*'s musical and theatrical means of expression, which provide agency and subjectivity to otherwise silenced and invisible protagonists, offering some comfort and remedy to the audience for many ills teenagers have to confront (Shade et al., 2015, pp. 4–5). Singing and dancing are shown as glamourous, visually attractive, fancy, and colorful, creating the world of fantasy built on otherness, strangeness, and exclusion that compensates for the everyday hardships of the members of the glee club, who are rejected and discriminated against regularly: "Oppression is made commonplace and normalized, part of the everyday experience of any teenager's life, with the suggestion that overcoming […] oppression is akin to overcoming one's awkward teen years and learning to celebrate one's uniqueness" (Dubrofsky, 2013, p. 98). *Glee* breaks from traditional heteronormative or assimilationist television discourse on queerness and "uses its LGBT characters and narratives to focus instead on evolving issues of identity, community, desire, and homophobia" (Sarkissian, 2014, p. 154).

The glee club is a community – sometimes supportive, sometimes conflicted – providing space where the notions of equality, acceptance, and respect are constantly redefined and negotiated as well as offering new possibilities for

exchanging experiences, collaboratively working together, and learning to appreciate differences and other people's flaws or deficiencies. As Jacobs (2014) contends, such understanding of the glee-community links

> the various kinds of "what's really inside" in chains of equivalence and substitution: for *Glee*'s "different" kids, gayness is disability is racial difference is shyness is social awkwardness is poverty. The objective is less to appreciate the particular challenges accompanying these details of identity and experience than to create a compelling blend, a harmony in which individual tones sound together and constitute a kind of difference that is shared, the same. (p. 328)

Glee club, which often provides an escape from various family problems, makes room for something that families fail to deliver: empowerment, a sense of belonging and indispensability, and unconditional acceptance according to the rule: "We are different together, each of us is a weirdo, but we are strange together".

Critics particularly appreciate *Glee*'s queer characters and the way they develop throughout the show: "Where *Glee* does a great deal of productive cultural work is in queering that traditional narrative temporality through its visibly abundant, regular queer characters and their high-profile story arcs that emphasize the irresolute and enduring nature of queer youth experiences" (Sarkissian, 2014, p. 153–154). By oing so, it includes a wide variety of audiences to take pleasure from watching the show: "Queer viewers are explicitly invited to identify with queer characters and be validated by these characters' experiences, just as straight viewers are invited to recognize models for correct and incorrect treatment of young gays and lesbians" (Jacobs, 2014, p. 320). *Glee* shows different queer characters (Kurt Hummel, Santana Lopez, Brittany Pierce, and Blaine Anderson), their diverse processes of coming to terms with their sexual identity, different approaches to the idea of coming out, and varying family reactions and support they get from their parents and friends. Thereby, it questions "one-sided discourse of the helpless gay teen victim" (Dhaenens, 2013, p. 19). The variety of experiences that *Glee* reflects upon is one of the most appreciated by viewers aspects of the show:

> On the one hand, the series consolidates the image of gay teens as victims and represents the viability of being a homonormative teen. On the other hand, it challenges the power of heteronormativity by exposing how it governs the life of both gay and straight teens and by paying attention to the queer aspects of gay teenage life. Even though *Glee* pushes certain homonormative aspirations and omits a structural discussion of heteronormativity in the regulation of homophobia, it resists the idea that growing up gay can only happen through a process of struggle and success or through homonormative assimilation. (Dhaenens, 2013, p. 18)

However, there is also some criticism about queer characters, especially of how bisexual and sexually fluid protagonists (for instance, Santana Lopez) are depicted and of the so-called "imperative of the coming out ritual in order to live one's authentic and true self" (Miller, 2014, p. 31). The main problem here is that,

according to some critics, sexuality is understood in *Glee* as a social construct and a fixed characteristic, which leaves no space for not-knowing, for exploration, or for celebrating the continuum of undefined and fluid sexual identities. As Miller (2014) explains, "little room is left for the true development of bisexual characters, those questioning their orientation, or those who subscribe to a queer sexual fluidity that resists essentialism" (p. 24). Throughout the narrative, bisexual characters or those who do not want to put fixed labels on their identity are encouraged to come out, to reveal their "true self" to the world, and to define their orientation – it is implied that this is the only way to be happy and empowered, to have strength facing homophobia and bullying, and to publicly embrace the queer experience. The problem is that sometimes coming out is not possible due to various complex circumstances, nor is it desired: "This is not to suggest that there is not power in visibility, or to romanticize shame, but to argue that what is missing in such narratives is […] an account of the broader social structures, which limit such 'choices'" (McNicolas Smith, 2020, p. 127).

These critiques are, in my opinion, legitimate, as *Glee* indeed insists on celebrating fixed identities of being either gay/lesbian or straight, choosing a safer, blander, a bit moralistic, conservative, uncontroversial path to reflect upon the experiences of queer people and focusing on the coming-out narratives leading to same-sex marriages in the final season. Despite those limitations, however, I agree with some reviews emphasizing that "*Glee* is explicitly invested in the tolerance project that constitutes a central strand of contemporary LGBTQ+ rights" (McNicolas Smith, 2020, p. 122) and it "prioritizes an ethics of compassion" over problematizing the limits of inclusion (p. 142). It has also been appraised and used by educators to sensitize about the experiences of LGBTQAI+ communities: "*Glee* has important implications for teachers and LGBT and non-LGBT youths. […] *Glee* has the power to dismantle hurtful, discriminatory practices and language, replacing them with accepting, inclusive dialogue and actions" (Falter, 2014, pp. 295–296).

These educational and positive aspects of youth cultures, as well as a narrative space given to queer identities in *Glee*, are valued by critics and viewers, as they offer a fairytale-like story with happy endings and optimistic scenarios for its diverse characters. *Euphoria* provides a much more realistic, graphic, and edgy representation of "youth-as-trouble-as-fun" with all its ugly details and far-reaching consequences. Unlike *Glee*, it leaves the audience hopeless and confused about the contemporary challenges and traumas that youth are confronted with every day.

4. *Euphoria*: demythologizing youth and drug abuse

Euphoria is a two-season HBO MAX teen drama adapted from an Israeli series that follows the logic of the "youth-centered" narratives (with the main character, Rue Bennett, as an inner voice) through adopting a "teenage gaze" (Cole, 2023,

p. 73), but its target audience is also adults, for whom watching this show can be a very challenging experience (Gersz, 2019)[4]. Similar to *Glee*, *Euphoria* tells a story of American high schoolers set in California; however, unlike *Glee*, it is very dark and disturbing, as it does not use humor, satire, and irony to ease or bring some relief to the audience. It received ambiguous reviews about graphic scenes of sex and nudity, drug abuse, and sexual violence, which are used to illustrate various problems the protagonists have to face: drug addiction and overdose, the opioid crisis, drug dealing and accessibility, mental health issues, excessive violence (bullying, sexual abuse, psychological harassment, etc.), getting into intimate and sexual relationships (Noor Qolbi et al., 2022), pornography, toxic masculinity (Kućmierz, 2019), body shaming and harsh beauty standards, family crises, and complete disengagement from and neglect of teenagers by their parents and other caretakers.

The show depicts these problems and trauma connected therewith, not offering easy and superficial solutions and avoiding moralizing. As one of the reviewers contends, "Substance use and other extreme content in *Euphoria* is portrayed as a harsh reality, rather than a pleasant experience" (Medina, 2023, p. 2). Another adds, "*Euphoria* basically concludes that being a teenager is like living in hell. Each protagonist experiences some sort of trauma. […] The creators manage to find the existential element in the horror of becoming adolescent that we all share" (Kućmierz, 2019)[5].

The show is also acclaimed for its portrayal of trans and bisexual people (Masanet et al., 2022), which *Glee* lacks, according to some critics. As Paige Macintosh (2022) points out, "*Euphoria* ultimately grounds its representation of youth culture in gender-queer practices that reframe trans identity as an authentic celebration of self that remains congruent with Gen Z culture and essential to a developing Gen Z aesthetic" (p. 15).

Unlike in *Glee*, where the club members rework their problems through singing, dancing, and artistically expressing their feelings, which is empowering and healing, *Euphoria*'s characters constantly struggle with their emotions and experience the world extremely and deeply, always caught between authenticity and fakery. What all of them have in common is an ultimate, profound loneliness and solitude. The latter are deeply hidden as young people are excessively present in the fake realm of social media, they party wildly (taking all sorts of drugs, drinking, and having sex) as if there is no tomorrow, and they have an all-or-nothing attitude toward romantic relationships and friendships.

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[4]   I am using some reviews (e.g., Gersz, Kućmierz) from popular and journalistic sources (Internet platforms and blogs) to show how *Euphoria* was received by the audience.
[5]   All translations from Polish into English are mine.

The series' creator, Barry Levinson, is interested in youth's subjective, complicated state of mind and their – often exaggerated, conflicted, unstable, volumed-up, and intense – emotions: "*Euphoria*'s protagonists feel everything more" (Kućmierz, 2019). *Euphoria* shows that "in the lives of teenagers the conversion from exultation to cruelty, from carelessness to aggression might be short and abrupt" (Jedliński, 2022).

According to many critics, the strongest element of *Euphoria* is its complex and sincere take on drug-taking and substance use (Medina, 2023) and their devastating consequences to one of the main protagonists, her family, and those surrounding her (Jedliński, 2022). Levinson, an ex-addict himself, made Rue's addiction the central plot of the show, creating, especially in season 2, an extremely truthful, graphic, and detailed representation of getting high; failed rehab; Rue's clever ways – lying, cheating, breaking the law, and manipulating her friends – to get access to drugs; withdrawal syndrome with all of its ugly, bodily, and psychotic elements; sobering up and collapsing anew; aggression (physical, verbal, and emotional) toward the close ones; and suicidal thoughts as well as taking drugs as the process of slow and painful "dying".

The show explains the reasons for Rue's addiction (mental health issues – ADHD, depression, anxiety disorder, and bipolar disease – as well as losing her father to cancer at a young age) and provides an uncensored story of her long and traumatic path to a fragile recovery:

> The series effectively depicts that drug addiction is everywhere and does not have *per se* a recognizable face. In other words, it is a disease that does not discriminate across race, class, or gender. *Euphoria* assertively humanizes the struggles with addiction and opposes previous narratives in which addiction can be overcome through support from families, sponsors, friends, etc., as it depicts, more often than not, occasions of failure and defeat. This realistic tone states that drug addicts can be manipulators and drug abuse can wreck someone's closest relationships. […] Thus, it shows that addiction is not an easy fix or something that can be overcome overnight and that even the most determined recovering addicts can easily fall back into a vicious cycle of drug use. (Lopera-Mármol & Jiménez-Morales, 2023, pp. 76–77)

Written through a teenage gaze, offering "a spectacularization of youth" (Cole, 2023, p. 78), and avoiding didacticism and preaching, "*Euphoria* uses explicitly visual ways to depict addiction as complete obedience to a force that is both unseen and larger than oneself" (Cole, 2023, p. 75). Such images of substance abuse, especially in season 1, were criticized for over-aestheticizing, glamorizing, and even glorifying drug-taking (Gersz, 2022; Medina, 2023). Drug trips are often represented in a visually attractive way – their beauty is non-obvious and ephemeral, "narcotic, magnetic, frantic" (Gersz 2019). While high, Rue is ultimately happy, calm, and blissfully oblivious; her hallucinations are like music videos – hypnotic, visionary, colorful, full of glitter, neon shine, and surreal

lighting – or like crazy parties when youth listen to rhythmic music, dance, and seemingly forget about the world, the sadness, and the loss. Music and dancing serve a completely different purpose than in *Glee*; it is not about being seen and included, it is about forgetting and escaping. Drugs are the titular euphoria shared by Rue and many of her college friends.

However, season 2 breaks up with this illusory and tempting image of drug taking by depicting it in "a naturalistic and devastating way, which is rather rare in popular culture" (Gersz, 2022), detabooizing it, and showing the horrific consequences of substance abuse. In episodes 5 and 6[6], we are eyewitnesses to "Rue's hitting rock bottom, and watching her breakdown and demise is extremely painful for the viewer" (Jedliński, 2022). The reading of these scenes is straightforward: drugs are hell.

Some critics appreciated what the show does to the viewer: "Entertainment like *Euphoria* can engender a complex and nuanced understanding of drug addiction and engender sympathy for those caught up in addiction" (Gierzynski et al., 2024, p. 207). The audience also sympathizes with Rue's relatives (her mom, Leslie, and younger sister, Gia) and friends (Jules and Ali), who care for her deeply but are completely helpless and left alone to deal with her addiction and overdose. It is obvious that drugs "gradually ruin lives not only of victims, but also of their codependent families" (Jedliński, 2022).

5. Conclusions

After reading numerous reviews and analyzing particular plots of the two shows, I believe that both *Glee* and *Euphoria* – in completely different ways, using different conventions, artistic styles, and perspectives, and appealing to various aspects of youth cultures and teenage experiences – move away from stereotypical, simplified, and schematic modes of representing adolescence and adult-becoming based on the dichotomous logic of "youth-as-fun" and "youth-as-trouble" described in subsection 2.

As was underlined by many critics cited in this article, *Glee* was appreciated for including queer minorities in the school community and affirming their identities through artistic expression. Music, performance, and dance provide the protagonists with an opportunity to escape from the harsh teenage reality and come out as their true selves. On the other hand, a favorable reception of *Euphoria*'s take on drug addiction indicates that it is attractive to various audiences, both young and adult, to watch an authentic and uncensored picture of substance abuse. What was particularly appealing to viewers was, in my opinion, linking drug-taking to "an adolescent sense of being lost, uncertainty of tomorrow, and desperate

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[6] S02E05 "Stand Still Like the Hummingbird" and S02E06 "A Thousand Little Trees of Blood" (2022).

struggle for acceptance and love" (Jedliński, 2022) and making it an existential crisis caused by various personal, social, and psychological factors.

Both *Glee* and *Euphoria*, broadcast in different decades of the 21st century, attracted a lot of attention and built a significant fandom for their ambiguity and multilayeredness, as well as their attempt to depict youth in a complex and sophisticated way, beyond the dichotomous opposition of fun and trouble. They inscribe themselves in a recent trend meaning "that certain segments of the American television landscape have become progressively more sexually explicit, more violent, or even more queer" (Owens, 2019, p. 5). Including such plots, oftentimes marginalized or silenced in the past in youth-centered productions, contributed to the popularity of both shows.

They require, however, different kinds of engagement from viewers and impact them in different ways. *Glee* invites, for example, to contest the use of stereotypes and fixed identities:

> Race, gender, sexuality, and disability are mobilized in *Glee* as sites of difference and struggle. However, *Glee*'s complex evocation of stereotypes works in ways that simultaneously challenge and reproduce. […] *Glee* repeats the problematic "post" sensibility in multiple ways, reproducing, even as it posits itself as transforming, continued inequalities. (McNicolas Smith, 2020, p. 130)

Euphoria, on the other hand, creates "empathy and love for Rue's character over the two seasons […] as well as demonstrates the darker sides of drug addiction" (Gierzynski et al., 2024, p. 194). *Glee* offers hope and concrete solutions to youth's problems, whereas *Euphoria* leaves the viewer with Rue's fragile and uncertain recovery and a rather limited promise for overcoming the hardships of adolescence.

Finally, critics point to the wider influence of these shows on audiences. The "*Glee* effect" consists in shaping young viewers' attitudes toward marginalized groups, especially LGBTQAI+ identities, and fostering their understanding and acceptance of inclusive social practices (Shade, 2015). The "*Euphoria* effect", investigated, for example, by Gierzynski et al. (2024), reveals a correlation between exposure to the show's depictions of drug abuse and attitudes on drug policies in the US. Evidently, fictional stories about teenagers and youth cultures have various kinds of impacts on spectators that should be further analyzed, taking into consideration their psychological, social, and political contexts.

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