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### "Euphoria" and the Spectrum of Gender and Sexuality

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# *euphoria* and the spectrum of gender and sexuality

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## introduction

*Euphoria* brings 21st century ideas on gender and sexuality to the mainstream, bringing generation z ideals to what's considered high-brow television. It argues that women's ideas on their own gender and sexuality should not center around men and male approval, but rather their own ideas on their gender identity and their sexuality. Womanhood isn't biological and not necessarily completely performative on a sociological level, but rather is what ever it is you want to be. Female sexuality is also presented as something one actively participates and enjoys or also something that is not particularly important, and anything in between.

## *euphoria*: a summary

*Euphoria* is a television show on HBO, with the first season airing in 2019 and subsequent special episodes airing in December 2020 and January 2021. It follows a group of teenagers as they navigate their adolescence in the dark and cynical 21st century. Our main character is Rue Bennett (played by Zendaya), who is beginning a new year at school after having suffered a drug overdose and spent the summer in rehab. She meets new girl, Jules, and they form a strong bond as they grapple with addiction, gender identity, manipulation, and emotional issues.

## what is womanhood?

*Euphoria* adopts a modified form of Judith Butler's gender performativity theory. It argues that yes, gender is performative (with some level of identity basis) but the performance isn't reliant on society's gender standards, but rather the individual's idea of their own gender.

- Jules original philosophy on her gender was that if she "conquered" men, she could "conquer" femininity (S1E7)
  - This is seemingly why she engages in a lot of violent, aggressive hookups with cisgender men.
- Jules considers going off her puberty blockers because she's tired of centering her gender and sexuality around the ideals of men (S1.5E2)
  - "Yeah, and it, like, stops my voice from dropping...The kind of shit that men wouldn't find desirable...And then femininity would always be...Like, unreachable."

Jules decides she's not going to perform the version of womanhood that men and society wants from her. Rather, she is going to perform her own version of womanhood, one that's like the ocean: "strong as f\*ck. And feminine as f\*ck". (S1.5E2)

## fluidity of female sexuality

*Euphoria* allows for characters to each have individualized experiences with sex, but with one point found in all of them: women need to start prioritizing their own pleasure.

- Kat adopts sexual liberation and a confident fashion style after a vsex tape of her leaks online. Her hookups are with men who are more attracted to her than vice versa. She doesn't mind hurting their feelings when they don't satisfy her, if anything the encounter just gives her more confidence. (S1E4)
- Cassie struggles with finding real emotional connections with men, as they often pressure her into sexual situations and then leak the footage of their hookups, when they break up to hurt her. And yet she falls in love with all of these boys anyway (S1E7).
- Maddy is suffering in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend Nate Jacobs. She watches porn to mimic their tactics and lies about only having slept with him, just to make him happy (S1E5). She thinks they love each other even after all the awful things he's done.
- Lexi doesn't have sex that we see, but she seems to struggle with being lonely or inexperienced. She ends up deciding to find someone to hookup with and pursue it herself, not waiting to be approached. (S1E8)
- Jules associated her own gender with satisfying cisgender men. She'd endure violent hookups to make her feel more like a woman. Only after her experiences in S1 and with "Tyler" does she decide to not center her gender and sexuality around men. (S1.5E2)

## conclusion

*Euphoria's* themes on gender and sexuality aren't new to academics, but to mainstream audiences, this is a game changer. A popular, critically acclaimed show centering around women and showing the importance of not centering their life on men is extremely important to achieving the equality and happiness that women deserve.

## sources

- *Euphoria*. Created by Sam Levinson. HBO Entertainment. 2019-Present.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40,

