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**Sapphic on a Spectrum:  
Analysis of the  
Genderqueer Sapphic  
Representation in  
Current Anglophone  
Film and TV**

Magisterská Diplomová Práce

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## Anotace

Tato diplomová práce si bere za cíl osvětlit současnou televizní reprezentaci intersekcionalní identity nebinárních sapphických osob a jejichž stereotypní a tropové zobrazení, které se často objevuje v mainstreamové reprezentaci těchto nenormativních identit. Práce poskytuje přezkoumání reprezentace postav, které spadají mimo binární a cisgender nálepku a soustředí se na trans(gender) postavy v sapphickém kontextu. Za pomoci všepřítomného konceptu intersekcionality tato téze přezkoumá křižovatku mezi feministickými, lesbickými a trans studii a zasadí do ní komparativní analýzu a rozbor dvou televizních seriálů – Na Pohodu a Euforie, ve kterých se nachází nebinární sapphická postava v signifikantní potažmo hlavní roli. Analýza stahuje pozornost k tropům a stereotypům používané jak autorem, který je součástí předem zmiňované intersekcionalní okrajové komunity, tak autorem, který není jejíž součástí a navrhuje, že tropy použité autorem nepatřící k této marginalizované skupině jsou mnohem krutější ke svým postavám a mnohdy nejsou vyvracovány. Nadále práce naznačuje, že v obou případech tropy a stereotypy částečně pochází z stereotypu užívané při reprezentaci jiných marginalizovaných skupin, zejména queer žen, ale také pochází z nové formy stereotypizace založené na gendrové nekonformitě.

## Abstract

This present thesis aims to shed light on the current TV representation of the intersectional identity of non-binary sapphic and the stereotypes and tropes that often come with the mainstream portrayal of such non-normative identities. The thesis provides a deep dive into the representation of outside-the-binary and trans (gender) characters in a sapphic context. Working with the ever-present concept of intersectionality the crossing between feminism, lesbianism, and trans studies is the theoretical basis for the comparative analysis and dissection of the tv shows *Feel Good*, and *Euphoria*, where a sapphic non-binary/gender-non-conforming/genderqueer/trans character is placed in a leading role. It draws attention to the tropes used by both an author who is part of the intersectional margin as well as an author who is not and suggest that the tropes used by the author outside the intersection are far harsher toward the characters and are rarely not subverted. Furthermore, it is suggested that in both cases, the tropes and stereotypes are partially sourced in the stereotypical depiction of other marginalized groups such as queer women, and partially come from a new form of stereotyping based on non-conformist gender identity.



## Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis titled **Sapphic on a Spectrum: Analysis of the Genderqueer Sapphic Representation in Current Anglophone Film and TV** that I have submitted for assessment is entirely my original work, and that no part of it has been taken from the work of others unless explicitly cited and acknowledged within the text of my thesis.

Brno October 11, 2022

.....  
Bc. Eliška Sýkorová



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## **GLOSSARY**

### **AFAB**

assigned female at birth

### **AMAB**

assigned male at birth

### **Butch (adj., n.)**

an individual expressing oneself in the realms of masculinity, often used by binary lesbian and gay people, but is widely used by non-binary and trans people to express one's gender orientation on the spectrum of masculinity and femininity; similar to masculine/masc

### **Butch for butch / B4B/ butch-but**

a relationship dynamic between two butch individuals

### **Cisgender/cis (adj.)**

an individual whose sex assigned at birth corresponds to their gender identity

### **Cross-dresser**

an individual, who wears clothing of the opposite gender to their own (e.g., an AMAB person wearing a dress)

### **Drag queen/king**

an individual, who performs femininity or masculinity, often in a stereotypical overexaggerated manner

**Dysphoria (gender dysphoria)**

a form of psychological distress caused by the misalignment of assigned gender/sex at birth and one's gender identity; in some people it can be resolved by a set of surgeries (e.g. mastectomy, penectomy, etc.)

**Eurocentric beauty standards**

a set of beauty standards that heavily rely on white-centric ideas of beauty such as skin colour and hair texture, they are used against non-white people to justify racism

**Femme (adj., n.)**

an individual expressing oneself in the realms of femininity, often used by binary lesbian and gay people, but is widely used by non-binary and trans people to express one's orientation on the spectrum of masculinity and femininity

**Femme for femme, F4F, femme-femme**

a relationship dynamic between two people who are femme

**FTM**

female-to-male transition

**Gender**

a set of markers that indicate one's social and legal affiliation to the label man or woman; different from assigned/biological sex

**Gender binary**

a binary system that promotes the division of masculine and feminine human qualities, instead of viewing them on a spectrum; the current division of power views gender as binary oppositions

**Gender expression**

person's gender identity expressed outwardly through clothing and mannerism

**Genderqueer (adj.)**

a term used to describe a person who is outside the binary, often used for non-binary trans people, historically, the term replaced the umbrella term transgender as a label for outside the binary as transgender was claimed exclusively by binary trans people

**Gender identity**

person's identity based on their gender, not necessarily outwardly visible

**Gender-non-conforming (GNC) (adj.)**

a term used to describe a person who does not conform to the rules of the binary gender system

**Gender norms**

a set of rules based on the expectation of what role a woman and a man ought to play under the rule of the heteropatriarchal system of power

**Hegemonic femininity + emphasized femininity**

the heteropatriarchal expectation of what an ideal woman is, which is regarded as superior to some masculinities and femininities; emphasized femininity is the same expectation for women, however, it is regarded as solely inferior to masculinity disregarding its power over other femininities and some masculinities

**Hegemonic masculinity**

the heteropatriarchal expectation of what an ideal man is, which is regarded as superior to other masculinities and femininities

**Heteronormativity/cisheteronormativity**

the system which deems heterosexuality and cisgender identity as the default and non-heterosexuality as an anomaly

**Heterorespectability/cisheterorespectability (heterorespectable queer)**

a set of rules, that grants a person the approval of the cisheteropatriarchal majority, it promotes assimilation and adherence to normativity, it is based on the respectability politics

**Heteropatriarchy**

a system currently in power that relies on heterosexual and patriarchal rules

**Homonormativity**

a set of rules which promotes heteronormativity among non-heterosexual people in exchange for social and legal benefits promoted by the heteropatriarchal capitalist society (marriage, military service, child-rearing), it promotes assimilation and adherence to normativity

**Homosocial environment**

an environment, that is based on socialization of the same sex, typically men

**Intersex (adj.)**

an umbrella term, which describes bodies that do not fit the male/female binary

**Masc (adj.)**

an individual expressing oneself in the realms of masculinity, often used by binary lesbian and gay people, but is widely used by non-binary and trans people to express one's orientation on the spectrum of masculinity and femininity

**MTF**

male-to-female transition

**Non-binary (adj.)**

an individual, whose gender experience/expression/identity falls outside the gender binary; in this thesis also an umbrella term for any form of genderqueerness

**Normativity (normative society)**

The system in power that dictates what is deemed acceptable in a given society. It prefers a certain expression of humanness over other non-normative expressions. It is influenced by patriarchy and capitalism.

**Passing (adj.)**

The adherence of non-normative individuals (queer, trans, etc.) to the normative system and reaping benefits that normativity brings.

**Patriarchal dividend**

AMAB individuals, who live socially as men are being disproportionately given power, status, and resources.

**Queer (adj., n.)**

an umbrella term for a member of the LGBTQ+ people; a reclaimed slur

**Radical lesbian/radical feminist**

a feminist perspective that focuses on the domination of women by men and by the patriarchal system

**Sapphic (adj., n.)**

a synonym to lesbian, can be used by bisexuals also; often used as a substitute in order to not invoke negative connotation connected to lesbianism - has the connotation of inclusivity

**Separatist (feminist/lesbian)**

a person, who denounces any form of relationship with men as form of a feminist resistance

**Sexual identity / sexuality**

person's identity based on their sexual orientation, different from gender identity

**Sex (biological sex)**

a set of markers that indicate one's biological affiliation to the label male or female, such as chromosomes, genitals, hormones, etc.

**Social construct**

a construct, which can be traced to society rather than to nature, often fabricated in order to serve the dominant society (heteropatriarchal capitalist)

**Stud (n.)**

a term used exclusively by and for Black lesbians

**Transgender/trans (adj.)**

an individual whose sex/gender assigned at birth does not correspond to their gender identity; they do not always choose to fully transition (e.g., they might transition only legally/socially or take hormones)

**Transsexual (adj., n.)**

an individual, whose sex assigned at birth does not correspond to their gender identity; they experience gender dysphoria and seek a medical transition to alleviate it

**Transfeminine (adj.)**

a trans person, who falls on the spectrum of femininity in their gender expression

**Transmasculine (adj.)**

a trans person, who falls on the spectrum of masculinity in their gender expression

**Trans woman**

a trans person, who identifies with the identity of a woman, often MTF

**Trans man**

a trans person, who identifies with the identity of a man, often FTM

**TERF**

a descriptive for a trans-exclusionary radical feminist (here, not used as a slur)

**Transition**

a process of changing one's gender presentation (medical, social, hormonal, legal) to reflect their gender identity; does not have to consist of all spheres mentioned above

**Transmedicalism**

an ideology, that argues that in order to be trans one must undergo medical genital surgery

**“Wrong-body” model**

a model, which describes the narrative of the trans experience as being trapped in the wrong body, which can only be resolved with medical intervention.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

With the ever-growing discussion of non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-non-conforming people in media and academia alike, the label of non-binary sapphic falls into the hands of misinterpretation and stereotypical portrayals of hegemony. The thesis shall provide a deep dive into the representation of outside-the-binary and trans (gender) characters in a sapphic context. Working with the ever-present concept of intersectionality the crossing between feminism, lesbianism, and trans studies shall be the theoretical basis for the comparative analysis and dissection of the following tv shows - *Feel Good*, and *Euphoria*, where a sapphic non-binary/gender-non-conforming/genderqueer/trans character is placed in a leading role.

As the topic of outside-the-binary existence receives significantly more traction and made substantial steps towards visibility oftentimes such narrative suffers under the influence of gender hegemony. This thesis aims to determine whether the representation of this intersectional group introduces a new set of tropes and stereotypes in its portrayal or if it is just about recycling neighbouring archetypes and treating such narratives with the same prejudice as with other issues in its intersectional fields - whether the representation is more about exclusion rather than inclusion. It will also attempt to compare and contrast the two approaches towards telling queer stories present in the tv shows - one that is semi-autobiographical, written by a non-binary person, and the second with less first-hand experience on such a matter.

The research around genderqueer identity is still developing and is not yet discussed in its entirety, especially with such a specific unit of intersecting with the sapphic context.

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Each individual component is fairly covered in academia - especially feminist and lesbian discourse, yet there is a wide area overlooked in the analysis of this specific intersectionality for it is not just a sum of its parts, the ecosystem is rather specific, and hence is worth dissecting, for there is an opened slot for academic research waiting to take place.

Chapters 2 and 3 shall provide a thorough examination of the main topics relevant for the analysis. In Chapter 2 – “Sapphic Through Time”, the main cultural intersection that shall be in the center point of the thesis is the ecosystem around the topic of genderqueer people and sapphic relationships. The intersection must take into consideration three main approaches – the dual vision of man-woman - significant for feminism, the contrast of the heterosexual-homosexual - dealt with by the field of gay/lesbian studies, the distinction of cis-trans (gender) – the focal point in trans studies. For its complex nature, the occupation of more than one field of study must be treated simultaneously to introduce a dialogue covering all three fields of study at the same time to establish a steady ground for the analysis of the non-binary sapphic. Chapter 2 “Sisterhood Is not Just for CISTers”, will focus on the systemic issues that are called into the debate of the non-binary sapphic. As the analysis primarily deals with the formation of a stereotypical image of a label that is very diverse, and its whole premise rests on non-conformity, the enforcement of hegemony shall be studied. First, hegemonic masculinity shall be discussed to provide the climate that affects all the fields mentioned above, including the effect hegemonic masculinity has on the portrayal of queer women and their relationship with masculinity. Second, hegemonic or emphasized femininity shall be dissected to show the influence that the hegemonic ideal has on society’s understanding of women’s role, as well as on the understanding of the

rigid binary that stands as a hurdle on the path of free expression of the non-binary sapphic. Lastly, hegemony, or the enforcement of it in outside the binary experience shall be analysed. It will include the evaluation of assimilation tactics in form of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and heterorespectibility. Chapter 4 – Queering the Public will start with an analysis of the current tactics on screen and how the representation affects the genderqueer label outside the screen followed by a qualitative analysis presenting a cross-section of the current big-screen representation of genderqueer characters. Next, a close watching of the two shows accompanied by the study of the script shall be provide. The analysis itself includes the debate centering gender roles and the character's place in binary world, exploitation of their genderqueerness and sexuality, and gender expression within the framework of a rigid binary. The narrative of looking non-binary shall also be discussed, especially when discussing narratives of binary transness. The aspect of authenticity shall be also touched upon regarding the authors' life experience. All the aspects mentioned above shall be first discussed separately for each show. Only after a thorough investigation of the narratives individually will the two shows be cross-examined in a comparative analysis providing a full evaluation. Through this complex analysis it will be possible to assess whether there is a running thread between the on-screen portrayal of sapphic genderqueer people, whether the representation benefit from in applying autobiographical elements in contrast to doing less so, and whether the representation of genderqueer people in sapphic relationships must be regarded separately from its intersectional parts.

Finally, the author is aware of the fact that in the current gender climate the idea of non-binary as a widely available and accepted label is now unrealistic as society functions on a

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very strict binary narrative. However, such progressions are hopefully possible in the future, therefore it is important to continue the research regarding the phenomenon of gender abolition and its effect on society but more importantly on queer people who live through the experience. For, the more frequent and accurate portrayal of identities such as the non-binary lesbian gives the possibility for dialogue, internal as well as external.

## 2 SAPPHIC THROUGH TIME

*I'm not missing a minute of this. It's the revolution!*

– Sylvia Rivera

Within the ecosystem around the topic of genderqueer people and sapphic relationships the thesis shall take into consideration three main approaches – the binary vision of man-woman significant for feminism, the contrast of the heterosexual-homosexual, dealt with by the field of gay/lesbian studies, the distinction of cis-trans (gender) – one of the focal points of trans studies. Such item of discussion – the existence of a genderqueer/trans person within the context of a sapphic relationships does not simply fit only one box, and therefore must be considered within the grand scheme of the social stratification to be analysed and understood in its fulness, especially given its growing presence in the academic discourse. For its complex nature, the occupation of more than one field of study must be treated all together to introduce a dialogue covering all three fields at the same time.

In the following subchapters, these approaches will be discussed from their respective historical backgrounds, however, as these fields intersect greatly each subchapter is bound to include some information from the other two. Firstly, the historical exclusion of lesbians from feminist circles for their incompatibility with the heterosexual matrix, the discussion around the initial demand for inclusion, and later the desire for separation of feminist and lesbian theory shall take place. Second, the rejection of trans people from lesbian and gay circles as well as from feminist spaces shall be analysed. Finally, the expulsion of non-binary folk done by binary trans people and the influences that lead to this

rejection paying attention to the current rise in such rhetoric shall be the topic of discussion in the last subchapter. Each subchapter shall also illuminate key historical events that affected the relationships between the rejector and the rejected.

### 2.1 Lavender Menace as a Threat to Normativity

#### **Historical Silencing of Lesbian Voices**

Lesbian visibility, or rather lack of it, is thought to originate in the legal dismissal of its existence at the end of the nineteenth century. According to the myth of Queen Victoria's intervention in punishing female homosexuality, lesbianism would not be punished unlike male homosexuality as women simply do not do 'such things'; therefore, there is no need to punish them (Derry). However, the dismissal of lesbianism verbalized through the myth was present in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 which only punished male homosexual activities and did not include lesbians as a "consequence not of prudery but of the deliberate strategy of silencing." (Derry) Furthermore, this also affected the future of lesbian visibility. The Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1921 introduced gross indecency among women, only for the bill to cause controversy, not to be passed. Even though the MPs agreed on lesbianism as unwanted, they also settled on the fact that the existence of female homosexuality should remain a secret to avoid its promotion; the knowledge of the possibility of lesbian relations was kept by men and withheld from women. However, the bill was passed eventually, as the awareness about female homosexuality traveled into the mainstream (Derry). However, it is important to stress here that lesbian awareness spread only as the government feared the upper-class women from "choosing" lesbianism. After that, new narratives of 'sexual inversion' came into the

picture. Notably Radclyffe Hall and her novel *Well of Loneliness*. The novel was so controversial because of its unpunished homosexuality and its “promotion”. Furthermore, with the popularization of this novel and the rise of sexology, in Europe and the UK but also across the ocean, queerness awareness seeped into public knowledge.

In the 1940s women flooded the workforce in big numbers (as most men left to fight the war) in the urban areas and the newly gained working-class conditions and gave the lesbian identity the chance to flourish (Newton). The broad use of utilitarian clothing allowed butch lesbians to wear pants outside the home, fully embracing their identity; the urban centrality of the labour force also made space for gay bars as queer women headed into cities and needed a place to meet. At that time, the thriving bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s especially in working-class New York gave rise to the butch-femme dynamic.

Furthermore, in the 1950s, parallel to the Red Scare, the “Lavender Scare” (LS) swept the United States. The purpose of the Lavender Scare “was to purge the federal government of anybody who did not fit the ideals of American morality” (Owens 115) targeted at queer people. The government purged at least ten thousand government employees and forced many into the closet (NGLCC), influenced the private work sphere, and cemented the idea of homosexuals as dangerous not only for other people but to the State. Before the LS, though not accepted homosexuals were viewed as a harmless “peculiar secret” (Owens 122), afterwards they became a threat to the American Dream<sup>1</sup>. This made it more challenging for LGBT activists to voice their issues, but despite that,

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<sup>1</sup> The Lavender scare also gave rise to the *Hayes Codes*, excluding queer narratives from the entertainment industry, or pitching queer people as villains worthy of punishment, usually death – the Hayes codes though not mandatory today, still affects the current depiction of queer characters

LGBT organizations such as the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis (DoB) were formed. At that time, DoB was the only “all-women organizations available to lesbians” (Smith, 400). However, it mostly represented the opinions of white, educated, middle and upper-middle class lesbians, voiced most strongly in their periodical *The Ladder*. During the early times of the organization, DoB’s approach towards lesbian existence was through the lens of assimilation; in many cases forced. Butch lesbians of DoB were advised to dress more feminine (Smith 402) and the butch/femme dynamic was also deemed unacceptable for it recreated the heteronormative dynamic and would “alienate straight society” (402). This was mostly caused by the desire of the middle-class lesbians for normativity - to separate themselves from the working-class bar culture and be accepted by the heterosexual middle-class society (402-3).

### **No Lesbians without Feminism? No Feminism without Lesbians.**

During this time, as the lesbian movement was gaining visibility, the feminists verbalized their fear of the interference of lesbians within the woman’s movement. They believed that as gender expression of some lesbians was masculine it “undermine the credibility of the women’s movement overall” (Westerband) and threaten their progress. Betty Friedan, the leader of NOW (National Organization for Women) wanted to have the already conservative DoB removed from the First Congress to Unite Women in 1969 as well as from the Second one in 1970. Though successful in 1969 (Them), at the Second Congress to Unite Women, a group of radical lesbian feminists who reclaimed Friedan’s insulting title Lavender Menace demanded the right to be included as there was no lesbian representative at the conference.

Lesbian exclusion was a pressing topic for many, Judy Rebick writes that lesbians and queer women were at "the heart of the women's movement", yet their issues were often "invisible (...) even though they were always essential, particularly in the anti-violence movement and the pro-choice movement." Instead of the issue of lesbian-exclusionary feminist being about combating identities, in reality, it represents the ability to hold and maintain power,

what lesbians fought for, women of colour fought for in the women's movement and are fighting for is to say if this is the women's movement, it has to represent all women, it can't just represent white middle-class women. And if it's going to represent all women, then all women have to participate fully in it (Rebick).

Eventually, the Lavender Menace were successful in voicing their right to be included at the Congress and in the feminist movement and harvested positive feedback especially from other intersectional fields such as Black and working-class women (Kahn). In their manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman" they talk about what it means to be a woman in today's society, and the struggles they face that are inherent to women living in a patriarchal society. The normative society expects a certain level of femininity, if a woman is feminine, she must fulfill all the criteria for what a woman is - docile, weak, and submissive in contrast to an aggressive, strong, dominant man. Hence, the further a woman is from this patriarchal ideal the less she is viewed as a woman by the normative society. Therefore, a woman who does not equate to the criteria mentioned above must be a lesbian, and a lesbian who does not submit to a man sexually and emotionally does not equate woman. Rather she is first made to fix her error and redeem her womanhood by regulating her aggression or else she will not be viewed as "normal" (e.g., a heterosexual

woman) and rather will be viewed as a lesbian, which would be undesirable. or many straight feminists the struggle of being labeled as a lesbian was connected to their feminist efforts, for they did not fit into what men deemed as acceptable and docile femininity, therefore they would be fighting a similar fight – fight against patriarchy. And that was the goals of the Radicallesbians, better known as Lavender Menace.

After the Second Congress lesbian feminists gained momentum in verbalizing their matters. One of them was Adriene Rich - the poet and a radical lesbian separatist. She introduced a document pivotal for the progression of the lesbian community – “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” in which she “encourage[s] heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as political institution which disempowers women” (Rich 11) as it is not only lesbians who are affected by compulsory heterosexuality as “heterosexuality is equally compulsory for heterosexual women and lesbians.” (Calhoun 560) Rich also talks about how the lesbian experience is closer to heterosexual women than it is to gay men for gay men’s desires do not align with lesbian desires (Rich 28). Furthermore, she argues that the lesbian experience is about “women-identified experience ... the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (27); the life of a lesbian is not just sexual attraction.

Furthermore, she examines the experience of the world that centers on heterosexuality as innate and natural. She discloses how “The ideology of heterosexual romance, beam[s] at [women] from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs [and] wedding pageantry” (20) and impacts women into thinking that heterosexuality is the only way onwards. She states that women are thought

of inherently as sexual prey of men and so they are to seek marriage (though oppressive and unsatisfying) to protect themselves (20). Also, she argues that the oppression comes from the male fear of women and women's sexuality, they fear they would be excluded from it altogether (22) "that men could be allowed sexual and emotional - therefore economic - access to women only on women's terms, otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix." (22)

Another notable entry to the discourse of the present analysis is the later push for separation of the lesbian and feminist theory in the 1990s. In "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory" Calhoun argues that feminism "generally treated lesbianism as an applied issue" (558). However, contemporary lesbian theorists focus less on "lesbianism as feminist resistance to male dominance" (558) and more on the insider issue within the women-women relationship intersecting with other fields (racism, agiesm, ableism, etc.). According to Calhoun, the issue lies with the view of lesbian identity solely through the feminist lens – an extension of the feminist theory - it would suggest no Lesbian theory as a category of its own. The initial steps of lesbian feminists were to solidify their claims as *not* anti-feminist "assert their allegiance to feminist aims and values rather than calling attention on lesbians' differences from their heterosexual sisters." (561) The privilege of heterosexuality was not to be discussed as the first step was to be included in feminism to further expand. Furthermore, the gay movement failed to realize the intersectional nature of the lesbian experience - the link between lesbians and heterosexual women in their oppression under patriarchy from heterosexual men as well as from the gay men in their own community; the double burden of being the asexual female subject suffering under patriarchy and the sexual deviant suffering under heterosexist rule (560).

As a solution, Calhoun suggests theorizing the lesbian label outside feminism, what is distinct for lesbians, and their own “relationship with heterosexuality, to the category of ‘woman’, and other women” (562). It would mean separating gender and sexuality politics, as the lesbian is inherently anti-gender and anti-binary for the labels woman and man are constructed on the conditions of patriarchy (previously verbalized in Monique Wittig’s “The Straight Mind”). However, the effect of patriarchy is not only individual, but institutional - men have power over women not only in the house but outside it as well, (564) through the power of the judicial system, the workforce, and the housing market; in general, queer non-men being forced to hide one’s lesbianism in public from the fear of harassment. For in the case of lesbian identity, “being a lesbian and being oppressed as a lesbian often matters more” (573) than being oppressed as a woman, and heterosexual women still benefit from the heteronormative mainstream. The only true liberation will come with the collapse of capitalism and patriarchy which will inevitably bring the collapse of heterosexuality as the two are intertwined (562). Calhoun’s approach presented a very pressing issue of lesbian oppression in the feminist circles as well as the act of self-oppression within the lesbian circles. Achieving a shift in lesbian feminist attitudes, pioneering a way forward for feminist theory as it is known today, and paving the path for further research including the research of trans and non-binary affairs.

## 2.2 Rejecting the Pioneer

Though recent history is more open to the existence of trans people, it is essential to clarify that trans people (both binary and non-binary) existed from the beginning of time and therefore it is not a modern invention contrary to the anti-trans discourse. The

existence of transgender individuals dates back to 3000 years ago in Iran, proving the existence of third gender (David). Similarly, Native American societies (Brayboy) as well as the Indonesian ethnicity of Burgis' (Hood) had/have multiple gender expressions. However, such examples can be found around the globe including Europe. There is evidence of trans people in Italy, Greece, and even Scandinavia<sup>2</sup>. What now is regarded as the transgender individual can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century Germany and Switzerland, where psychologists, sexologists, and medical professionals started the research and application of trans care. The first successful FTM transition was Dr. Allan Hart's in the 1918 (Gerlach) and Michal Dillon's in the 1930s (Historic England), and first MTF transition was Lilli Elbe's in 1930 (Britannica). Over the span of the next decades trans visibility gained momentum in the mainstream, especially through the publicized trans experience of Christine Jorgensen (GLAAD) and a series of sit-ins and protests for transgender rights that took place in the US culminating in the Stonewall riot of 1969. However, despite trans people being at the forefront of not only trans issues but the entirety of the gay liberation movement (GLM), they were side-lined and othered the most by both cisgender gay people and cisgender feminists.

### **Sex v Gender Debate**

To begin with, though pivotal for the solidification of women's position, many of the radical feminists were largely anti-trans including such significant scholars as Adrienne Rich, for the radical form of the term woman often carries the exclusion of non-cis people. One of the tactics used against trans, non-binary and gender-non-conforming people is the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see Lang, McDaniel, Henley, and Merritt

maintenance of the rigid category of woman and man. One such definition of biological sex can be traced to the author of *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1979) Janice Raymond – a radical feminist, who openly spoke against the validity of trans experience. She defines biological sex based on six criteria outlined prior by John Money. Those criteria are: 1. chromosomal, 2. anatomical/morphological, 3. genital, 4. legal, 5. endocrine/hormonal, and lastly 6. psychological/psychosocial (Raymond 6-9) therefore, according to Raymond, a biological woman exclusively has XX chromosomes, has fat, bone structure, and body hair distribution that are feminine, has ovaries, has female a marker in legal documents (F), has high levels of estrogen in the body, and behaves according to conditioned femininity. However, a narrative that suggests ticking all boxes (such as the one mentioned above) to be a viewed as a *real* woman, prioritizes the *idea* of a woman instead of the reality of being one, excluding instead of including. Yet, instead of just excluding trans women who are thought to be a threat to feminism, femininity, and womanhood with their assumed hyper-femininity and rigid adherence to gender roles (XIII-XV), the trans-exclusionary feminist groups limit the access to the label of woman for a far broader group. Such omission means the rejection of intersex people identifying with the female gender, women with muscular and masculine bodies, women who underwent medical treatments such as hysterectomy, women with outside-the-norm hormonal levels, and finally, women who do not meet the social indoctrination of emphasized femininity of submission, docility, and weakness.

### **Trans Against the World**

A pivotal documentary from Susan Stryker *Screaming Queens* and her book *Transgender History* (both cited in Brady) show how trans people were often “trapped in

cycles of poverty, incarceration, and victimization because society disdained their transgression of the gender binary system and gender roles and expectations” (Brady 7). Those unable to pass as cisgender (and especially trans people of colour) were significantly more at risk of being harassed. For many trans people “simply appearing in public and not having a physical appearance deemed ‘respectable’ by the police led to arrest” (18) solely based on their non-normative appearance. Furthermore, trans women who did not meet the cisgender beauty standards were harassed more frequently as they were unable to pass as easily (Brady 17). When incarcerated, trans women were placed in male jails despite them having breasts and no facial hair, and there their “femininity made them especially vulnerable to sexual assault, rape, and murder,” (Stryker 67) which is still the case nowadays. The trans community was also exiled into ‘gay ghettos’, extremely poor crime-filled places such as Tenderloin in San Francisco (Stryker 66,67). It was a relatively safe place for trans and queer folk as the “primary goal of the police department was to keep sexual and gender minorities away from the general public” (Brady 17), however, despite that, Tenderloin and other such places were frequently raided by the police. However, the police were not the only perpetrator of crimes against trans people. Many civilians harassed and attacked trans people in the streets as the anti-trans sentiment seeped into the public (22).

That being said, it is even more striking that within the gay liberation movement, trans exclusion was credited to the inability to assimilate into a normative society. As “many transgender people violated these norms of behavior and dress, many gay liberation activists believed the inclusion of transgender people and causes would hinder the movement’s success” (Brady 9). Despite their desire to end oppression, the GLM

distanced themselves from the trans community to be accepted into the heteronormative mainstream. A certain norm was formed within the GLM that was based on respectability - whiteness, class, and normativity. Many from the trans community did not meet the expectations, working as prostitutes or performers and living in poor areas, therefore, they were deemed unsuitable to represent the GLM. This attitude towards the trans community would show during the first and second official Pride parades in 1972 and 1973. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were very vocal about the lack of inclusion of trans issues in the gay liberation movement. The two were of the best-known trans activists and despite them being oftentimes credited for their involvement in the Stonewall Riot of 1969, they were rejected out of white and often male-dominated gay spaces such as Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) (Stryker 86). In 1973, the second Pride Parade consisted of two events instead of one - one that allowed trans people to participate and the other that did not (Stryker 102). Those, who rejected the inclusion of Drag queens and trans people primarily consisted of “lesbian separatists and more conservative gay men” (Beemyn 24). This blatant rejection of the trans community was met with the outrage of many from the ranks of trans people one of which was Rivera who gave a fiery speech at the Liberation Day Rally in NYC calling out the racism, classism, and transphobia of the gay liberation movement.

Similarly, feminists and lesbian feminists felt threatened by the trans community. Many of them “excluded transgender women from their organizations and treated transgender women disrespectfully because they believed ‘drag’ reinforced oppressive stereotypes of womanhood and hindered the success of the women’s liberation movement” (Brady 41) as many did not differentiate between a drag performer and a trans woman

simply existing. Furthermore, as many feminists rejected traditional feminine attire, cis women and trans women alike who enjoyed expressing themselves as such were rarely at the forefront of the women's movement, rather they were singled out as supporting the oppressor (Green 233). Consequently, many trans-exclusionary radical feminists (such as the aforementioned Janice Raymond) believed and still believe that trans women are not real women (especially when dressing feminine) and therefore their inclusion in feminism feeds male oppression of women (Beemyn 26) For example, in 1973, the DoB's vice president and editor Beth Elliott left the group based on hateful comments she received at one of the conferences. Although only a third of the votes were against her staying at the DoB Elliott left because of the harassment (Beemyn 23). This was one of the early cases of what would become a form of policing of women's spaces by lesbian separatists that continues to this day. The same year the Lesbian Feminist Liberation announced they declare "drag queens as an insult to women" (24) and before the end of the 1970s transphobia was circulating through the radical lesbian and radical feminist circles.

### **The Empire Strikes Back and the Transgender Manifesto**

One of the most influential anti-trans figures was the aforementioned Janice Raymond and her 1979 *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Even though Raymond's *Transsexual Empire* is largely disregarded as academic, because of its "circular logic and questionable research methods" (Green 24) her book became a leading voice in the anti-trans movement including the debate about what "defines 'woman,' the medicalization of gender and sex, the social and biological legitimacy of trans identities, the placement of biological influences in a social constructionist feminist movement, and the purpose and sanctity of feminist space." (Green 235) The pseudoscientific book was

then re-published in 1994 during the publication of "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" by Sandy Stone which is regarded as the trans manifesto and the beginning of transgender studies (Brady 5). In it, Stone questions the existence of the "archetypal transsexual" (Green 235) as a learned behaviour that is crafted by the medical field of trans care.

Stone argues that the handbook of trans care - *The Transsexual Phenomenon* by Harry Benjamin<sup>3</sup> which served as an outline of who should receive surgery is the reason for the skewed idea of the trans individual – historical and current alike. This handbook was commonly redistributed among the trans community to receive treatment despite numerous not fitting the narrow binary criteria set up by the medical professionals. Many trans individuals altered their testimonies to receive the treatment they needed. Consequently, the overwhelming homogeneity of trans patients should be questioned as well as the set of rules created (Stone 8,9). Furthermore, Stone mentions the application of colonial tactics of exoticification, probing investigation, deprivation of subjectivity and expulsion from their own discourse (10) on trans patients. Those tactics are doomed to eventually have a tremendous impact on the discourse especially around the non-normative trans experience, as "[t]he people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves" (11) and the representation rarely reflect the genuine experience. The aforementioned issues correspond to the issue of passing and erasing history prior to one's transition suggested in the manifesto. Stone articulates the internalized silencing of the queerness of trans people, which plays into the rigid binary thinking of the

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<sup>3</sup> It would later become the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care that serves to assess access to trans care nowadays

heteronormative patriarchal society; by strictly rejecting the queer about one's history in exchange for hollow acceptance, such people perpetuate reductionist uniform identity politics. "Passing means the denial of mixture" (14) and in this case the denial of the spectrum on which people that do not adhere to the mainstream could sit comfortably.

### **The Return of the TERF**

In most cases, the anti-trans narratives come from the inability of some members of the oppressed group to realize they are oppressors themselves, such as in the case of the trans-exclusionary feminists. Unfortunately, "the current politics seem to dictate that the protection of the feminist movement is more important than the oppression of transpeople by anti-inclusion feminism." (Green 245) Especially in recent years as trans (binary and non-binary) issues receive more attention, anti-trans sentiment once again seeps into public discussion, notably in online spaces. While the US transphobic politics connect to the right-wing politicians (though they mostly share the values of the UK movement), the UK's transphobia stems mainly from the pens and mouths of TERFs – a relatively new label for trans-exclusionary radical feminists. Even though the fight for bodily autonomy and voice is shared by feminists and trans people, many trans-exclusionary radical feminists keep on using the same bio-essentialist tactics to exclude women who were not born into a binary female body (Stryker 98). Their fear-based strategies executed now by the TERF movement remain the same – excluding trans women from women's spaces (e.g., "penis police" (Earles 155)) claiming them to be sexual predators who undergo a transition to harass biological women (Earles 174). Furthermore, many argue with the danger of de-transitioning – a fear tactic that argues that there is a high chance that those who medically transition will inevitably regret it, especially if the person deciding is a

child/young adult. In reality, de-transitioning counts for less than half percent, research shows (Davies et. al 118).

In recent years there has been a re-emergence of the anti-trans sentiment with groups such as Get the L Out (GtLO) and The LGB Alliance which represent the above-mentioned anti-trans rhetoric. GtLO's agenda is based on claims that the existence of trans people threatens lesbians who are indoctrinated to transition to fit the heteronormative society, stating the advances in trans politics erase lesbian numbers. Similarly, The LGB Alliance - a UK trans-exclusionary group which separated from the Stonewall LGBTQ+ charity, claims to fight for LG and B rights separately from the T, yet they exclusively promote anti-trans ideology as evident from their presentation of their questions for the 2019 prospective parliamentary candidates which only focused on anti-trans claims (Parsons). Despite the fact that both their narratives are widely disregarded as hate speech by the LGBTQ+ community and most media, BBC - the leading British Channel (Watson) (which is known for their own anti-trans sentiment) has been accused of platforming the anti-trans groups such as GtLO and The LGB Alliance.<sup>4</sup> With mainstream public figures such as J. K. Rowling,<sup>5</sup> Julia Beck<sup>6</sup> and Sheila Jeffreys<sup>7</sup> the hateful online discourse spreads and spills over into the offline. The rhetoric spread by TERFs became in recent years a new source of hate against women, especially trans women. However, that being said, the UK public's attitudes are generally rather positive (such positive attitudes are

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<sup>4</sup> See Watterson

<sup>5</sup> See Ennis

<sup>6</sup> See Gilchrist

<sup>7</sup> See Burns

more common among women, younger people, and more educated people (Morgan et. al 3)). The same can be applied towards the USA where the public is generally open to trans inclusion (Luhur, Brown, Flores). However, despite the reality of trans acceptance among the general public, groups representing the TERF ideology such as the GtLO and LGB Alliance continue to raise moral panic into everyday discourse, seeding division into the queer community which only brings turmoil in furthering the queer pursuits of liberation.

### 2.3 Battle of Binary

Within the debate around trans people and their bodies, there has been a growing upheaval of who can claim the trans identity. A small group of trans activists has been arguing against the inclusion of trans non-binary individuals who do not wish to medically transition into the transgender community. The medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria, therefore, becomes a ticket to trans spaces. This phenomenon spreads the belief that some form of gender dysphoria is necessary to be assessed as transgender aka, medical transition or the desire to undergo such transition is the requirement for trans people's identities (Konnelly 5). Likewise, it further divides non-cisgender bodies into medicalised and non-medicalised ones pitching those two highly marginalized groups against each other. This approach is widely known as transmedicalism and despite its relatively small representation in the queer and trans community, such individuals substitute in their loudness.

#### **Trapped in the Self-Policed CISTem**

Before the 1990s there was only one standard way to describe the trans experience and that was being trapped in the wrong body. The "wrong-body model" (Bettcher 383)

was supported by the previously mentioned Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, which introduced an inaccurate idea of homogeneity among trans people. The model perpetuates transsexuality as a misalignment of the gender identity and the body and can be corrected by a full medical intervention (383). It corresponds to the understanding of trans people as transsexuals who seek medical intervention to correct their physical form, distinct from transvestites who "merely wanted to change their gendered clothing." (Stryker 18) This distinction would grant transsexuals legal and bureaucratic recognition of their identity including their legal gender. From the 1990s onward, the discourse was enriched with the new term transgender which became "a broad umbrella term—bringing together different gender-variant people (including transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, and others)." (Bettcher 384) The new term opened the door for other forms of gender non-normativity including those outside the binary. The label was introduced because most people under the umbrella "d[idn]'t fit neatly into the two dichotomous categories of man and woman [and through the medicalization of their bodies and the 'wrong-body' model] attempts are made to force them into this binary system." (384) The transgender label is often seen as a political vision and rejection of it is seen as complacency with the heteropatriarchal gender binary. Consequently, as many trans women and men self-identify with the transgender label, a new term that would replace the idea of beyond binary emerged in form of the genderqueer label (385).

However, the split between binary transsexuals and beyond-binary transgender people lived on and only recently re-surfaced into the trans discourse. In recent years, there has been an emergence of transmedicalist views among trans people. One of the most vocal advocates of transmedicalism is Blair White – a republican trans(sexual) woman,

who is often praised by the right-wing leaning people for speaking against non-normativity and diversity of the LGB and especially the T community, supporting narratives of assimilation and transnormativity – which include the idea of doing gender correctly according to the rules of hegemony (see Chapter 3.1) - ticking all the boxes of the archetypal transsexual affirming one’s gender legitimacy (Johnson). Through her online presence, she spreads the message that the only valid experience under the transgender label is a binary medicalized experience. In a debate found on YouTube titled “LGBTQ+ Community Debates Identity Politics and the 2020 Election (Part 2/2)” she argues that non-binary people “injected themselves into the trans label”, (White 4:39-41) and her transsexual self-identity has a “medical basis [while] for non-binary it's really not the case...[furthermore, she] think[s] that non-binary is more of a political term.” (4:48-58) She also proclaims that the non-binary label is fabricated by the Left, taking over the conversation where according to White, when “it comes down to conversations about trans people [she] just wish[es] actual transsexuals were having them” (6:00-06) discrediting non-binary people’s experience of the same oppressive system. Furthermore, White argues for gender dysphoria as the only valid reason to be included in the trans community, however, her claim (and claim of other transmedicalists) goes against what the American Psychiatric Association deems as part of the experience of gender dysphoria. They do not only include dysphoria that would need medical intervention but takes into consideration, for example, the social and legal aspect of gender misalignment. It is also important to mention that the APA acknowledges that transgender feelings can express desire outside the binary in form of an “alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender” (APA) Furthermore, White bases her exclusionary tactics on the aforementioned “wrong-body”

model. She discredits non-binary people's experiences under the trans umbrella since some chose not to undergo a full set of surgeries or do not wish to undergo any at all to accommodate for their non-cisgender experience. White and other transmedicalists argue that such people's experience is, therefore, not valid unless they experience a certain "misalignment in [their] brain and misalignment in [their] body and within who [they] are" which, according to White, must be manifested solely through surgery and medical transition into the binary opposite.

Finally, it must be stressed that those who propose the transsexual "wrong body" model often dwell on old-fashioned bio-essentialist claims that are harmful to the community and themselves, as well as gatekeep support and advancement of those who do not adhere to the strict ruling of the cisheteronormative binary. It perpetuates the idea of queer people's identities as only valid when suffering (Earl) which promotes an image that is often internalized by the queer and trans people depriving the community of joy based on a picture sustained by the dominant society. Further damage is done when people are seen solely as male and female, for the social construction of gender roles and its real negative effects are disregarded altogether. Consequently, the oppressors' desire to further divide the community from the inside by breadcrumbing access to human rights is accomplished through the turmoil that has been demonstrated in this very chapter and will be further demonstrated in the chapter following.

### 3 SISTERHOOD IS NOT JUST FOR CISTERS

*We're born naked, and the rest is drag.*

– Ru Paul

To begin the discussion around the topic of genderqueer identity and the variety and manifestation of sex and gender, this chapter shall first delve into the many structures under the umbrella of stereotypical expression of one's sex and gender, including the discussion of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, its historical roots, and current manifestation, and how those two phenomena affect the societal perception of man and woman. To showcase the everchanging and constricting nature of such narratives, the discussion around how this narrative seep into queer community shall follow debating whether hegemony is possible for the queer and non-binary category and whether gender hegemony affects non-binary people as much or even more than it does binary people. Showing how queer folk applies the learned behaviour of (cis)homonormativity, homoliberalism, and (cis)heterorespectability to their non-normative lives.

#### 3.1 Binary Gender Hegemony – Impact and Revision

Within the framework of “sexual character” (167) introduced by the Australian scholar Raewyn Connell in her work *Gender and Power*, the author argues that within our society there are hegemonic binary oppositions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity – oppositions that reflect the politically and socially dominant ideology (including race, social status, sexuality, age, etc.) of what male and female role in society should be. Those ideals become “hegemonic [when] the vast majority of the population

accepts ideas about gender complementarity that privileges the masculinity of propertied, heterosexual, White men as natural, normal, and beyond reproach” (Collins 187). Connell introduced those two terms that reflect a certain social attitude toward the gender binary, each having a set of rules and connotations where one is either feminine or masculine. The author writes:

Often it is assumed that there is just one set of traits that characterize men in general and this defines masculinity. Likewise, there is one set of traits for women, which defines femininity... It can be quite explicit ...[yet] more often [it is] implicit...calling into play shared assumptions of this kind: that women are hopeless with cars, that men are hopeless around the house. More sophisticated, but logically similar, ideas appear in academic writing. ... [for example,] how women’s sexual character prepares them for mothering and men’s does not... [or how] a lust for domination [is at] the core of male sexuality (167).

Such division based on sex influences nearly every aspect of day-to-day life ranging from the labour sector, through the various medical fields, to the psychosocial sphere. This notion comes from academic psychology, where to streamline research academics simplified sex/gender categories into binary oppositions - F and M, mostly on vague and one-dimensional terms. It is safe to say that “at this level, scalar research is part of the domestication of sexual politics in the name of science.” (174) This simplification seeped into other fields as well as into everyday life and prevailed strongly to this day.

In addition, Connell’s colleague James W. Messerschmidt in their article “The Salience of ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’” about the importance of the debate around this topic today notes the following:

Gender hegemony functions to obscure unequal gender relations while effectively permeating public and private life, encouraging all to endorse, unite around, and embody such unequal gender relations. Hegemonic masculinities are expansively distributed as culturally ascendant prototypes of gender relations throughout local, regional, and global levels, they are part of normal, everyday life—they are customary all around us (98-90).

It is crucial to dissect the effects of gender hegemony within the social sphere and how it affects the general public's perception of one's role in relation to society, others, and themselves. The concepts of hegemonic masculinity and femininity can provide an insight into the expectation of the binary, and consequently gives insight into the expectation for the outside-the-binary. To provide the current state of gender hegemony, a brief history of feminine and masculine hegemony will be given as well as a discussion about a possible hegemony for the non-binary identities. Furthermore, as hegemonic/emphasized femininity is far less researched in current academia, it will be given more attention and space within this present chapter.

### **3.1.1 Hegemonic Masculinity**

In an essay for *Women in Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies* in “Masculinity Politics on a World Scale” Connell speaks about the term patriarchal dividend which refers to the fact that people assigned male at birth living socially as men, have a disproportionate advantage in society being given power, status, and resources freely, unlike women who often have a hard time obtaining the same freedoms (Connell 234). Such dividends are given out based on affiliation to a certain

fraction of masculinity, in *Gender and Power* Connell introduces five types of masculinities: Subordinate, complacent, marginal, protest and the one pivotal to this chapter hegemonic reiterated later by Messerschmidt in “The Salience of ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’” (86,87). Hegemonic masculinity is the stereotypically patriarchal view of the masculine in the seat of power, power over non-hegemonic masculinities (such as marginal, subordinate, complacent, and protest masculinities) and femininities – it is often connected to class/social status, physical attractiveness, age, able-bodiedness, sexuality, as well as race.

### **Path Towards the Hegemonic Man of Today**

When analysing history, it must come clearly to us that masculinity was and still is the dominant force in society dictating what is and is not acceptable for men and women.

However, this patriarchal narrative changes through time, especially hegemonic masculinity. The concept of *the* man could be distinguished not only in accordance with the era in which it is produced but it relies just as equally on one’s social status.

Observations of the roots of modern hegemonic masculinity can be traced to the turn of nineteenth century North America. Michael S. Kimmel sets the American models of manhood in sharp contrast to the “corrupt and effete” Europeans, “dependant and helpless” or “hypermasculine [and] sexually aggressive” black men, and “foolish and naïve” child-like Native Americans. The models are the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan, and a later addition - the Marketplace Man.

The Genteel Patriarch was the European model resettled in America, he represents the upper-class landowner, with the emphasis on his aristocratic background. He is a

devoted father who derives his power through those who worked under him. In contrast with the Genteel Patriarch, the model of the Heroic Artisan is presented – he is the labourer, the farmer, or the craftsman and bases his worth on his own often manual labour. It is also worth mentioning that just like the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan is also a devoted father (Kimmel). However, with the rise of industrial power, the Marketplace Man took over, diminishing both previous models as

his identity derived entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He [is] the urban entrepreneur, the businessmen ... [he is] an absentee landlord and an absent father with his children, devoting himself to his work in a homosocial environment (Noir 12:17-12:29).

The Marketplace Man – also known as the self-made man, is therefore, the basis of the archetype of hegemonic masculinity how it is known today. Furthermore, a more recent framing of hegemonic masculinity traced to the Marketplace Man is given in the aforementioned essay by Connell. There a twentieth-century example of the formation of masculinity is presented through the manual labour force and professionalism, where the hegemonic masculinity thrives. Manual labour environments generate an “aggressive, sometimes violent ... cult of masculinity centering on physical prowess, and sexual contempt directed at managers, and men in office work generally, [viewing them as] effete.” (180) In the case of professionalism, the environments allow for masculinity that is “emotionally flat, centralized on a specialized skill-based dominance over other workers, and requiring for the ... complete freedom from childcare and domestic work provided by having wives and maids (181). Consequently, such environment, especially the latter, actively strives for the exclusion of women from their fields of expertise such as

engineering (181). Each of the mentioned do carry fragments of the Marketplace Man archetype, first and foremost in the neglect of domestic duties and the absence during child-raising that are viewed as undesirable, unfun, and unmanly in favour of social capital.

### **The Manly Ideal under Scrutiny**

As mentioned before, the hegemonic masculine traits set the idea of a rich, attractive, white, cisgender, heterosexual man who is granted patriarchal dividend in return for following and sustaining the hegemonic traits of masculinity; every man should therefore strive to achieve this ideal – even when such an ideal is unattainable. Tee Noir in her video essay on Manosphere “Surviving 'Alpha Male' Mentality” writes that men who strive to embody the hegemonic ideal of masculinity “have to constantly operate under the watchful eyes of their audience and under the invisible yet omnipresent surveillance of masculinity” (Noir 40:31-40:40) however, given the social expectation that is placed on men, in general, this is applicable to almost all men, including trans men. Moreover, femininity is viewed as unmeasurable to masculinity for femininity is undesirable and subordinate, rather it is being compared to other realizations of masculinity - the level to which other men adhere to it for “manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval” (Kimmel) not for women. Femininity (in women and gay men) is therefore made to be the Other

against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake claim for their own manhood, women threaten emasculation by representing the home, workplace and familial responsibility, the

negation of fun. Gay men have historically played the role of the consummate sissy on the American popular mind because homosexuality is seen as an inversion of normal gender development (Kimmel).

Both of those Others represent what the hegemonic man should never be – emasculated, feminine, ostracized. Furthermore, even though femininity is a negation rather than an equivalent during the formation of masculinity the adherence to the masculine ideal is very frequently channelled through relation to women. To maintain masculinity, it is a necessity for men to have power over women - sexually, economically, and socially in order to fit the said hegemonic standard. Kimmel in their essay *Masculinity as Homophobia* writes that “women become kind of a currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale”, women, therefore, serve as a tool used to achieve masculinity rather than its opposition.

Ultimately, though such an ideal of a strong, able, and therefore desirable man might seem advantageous as a form of role model the fact that it is widely inaccessible to nearly every man or masculine-presenting person makes it a dysfunctional model. Additionally, observations of such hegemony-inducing behaviours are relevant today just as they were in the past, as the false idea of masculinity that is largely unattainable still prevails and is ongoingly glorified especially in the homosocial environment. Connell and Messerschmidt states:

Hegemonic masculinities can be constructed [however, they] do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations. Furthermore, they

articulate loosely the practical constitution of masculinities as ways of living in everyday local circumstances. To the extent they do this, they contribute to hegemony in the society-wide gender order as a whole (838).

And as a self-policing male-only environment where “men prove their manhood to other men in the eyes of other men [, it] is both consequence of sexism and one of its chief props.” (Kimmel 214) Furthermore, research shows that men who strive for the hegemonic ideal of masculinity are at higher risk of mental health struggles (O’Neil 424). Finally, given the historical development making it everchanging and unstable, and for it being nourished and sustained on false pretense this current set of socially constructed rules of hegemonic masculinity is realistically unachievable, unsustainable, and bound to collapse.

### 3.1.2 Hegemonic Femininity

Within this system that casts women to the domestic sphere and men to the workforce, a clear division of power is implemented. The Western notion of where women should and should not be is heavily reliant on historical othering in the process of resource gathering (Alesina et. al 470). Furthermore, while the male gender role (and its hegemonic form) seems to shift more often as labour force evolves and is therefore socially more visible the female gender role was for a long time stagnant, the borders blurred, and the concept of femininity rather vague. The terminology also often brings misunderstanding.

Connell introduces the patriarchally desired form of femininity as emphasized for it is always subordinate to men (Connell 183). However, Connell’s approach lacks the intersectional element that makes emphasized femininity hegemonic in the eyes of other femininities, “not seeing any form of femininity as central to hegemonic power is a

function of monocategorical approach to gender” (Hamilton et. al 320). From the point of view of intersectional feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, this type of femininity must be written, spoken, and thought as hegemonic. Furthermore, as hegemonic masculinity seems to be the primary focus for the majority of academia,<sup>8</sup> the field of emphasized/hegemonic femininity is not as well documented as only a few delve into hegemonic femininity in depth. Still, femininity is more often than not shown only as an extension of masculinity, an accomplice to it, a concept that serves men instead of being an entity on its own. The expected way of being hegemonically feminine does change slightly but often resembles a Caucasian, heterosexual, gentile, kind, cisgender woman able to have children (at least one, but preferably multiple) and stay home to take care of the husband, children, and the house. The emphasis on whiteness, heterosexuality, and compliance with the patriarchy poses a threat not only to other femininities and gender-non-conformity but to women that aim to embody the emphasized feminine.

### **The Industrial Revolution and Female Psyche Through Archetypes**

Just like hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity has its roots in history, however, the stoic nature of the feminine role in the eyes of patriarchy and male-centricity makes the research around it rather obscured and one-sided. With the industrial revolution, the role of a woman was further cemented as the foundation of the household, unlike for men, “for women, of course, work and home remained the same” (Underwood 94). With that came the Cult of Domesticity (Keister, Southgate 228-9) populated mostly by white protestants (Lindley 56) the True Woman (56) was promoting “piety, purity, submission

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<sup>8</sup> Emphasized/hegemonic femininity has 3,460 and 3,900 entries on google scholar while hegemonic masculinity has 75,300)

and domesticity” (Welter qtd in Keister, Southgate 229) these ideals were cemented further with the rise of psychology at the turn of the twentieth century that took on the task of exploring the human psyche, solidifying what it means to be a man and a woman.

However, the interrogation of scholars such as Carl Gustav Jung and his female following (oftentimes based on guessing rather than facts) only fixated the idea of womanhood as complacent with patriarchal core ideas.

Despite his great influence over the psychological field, it is important to mention the prejudice towards women in Jung’s work. His archetypes of Anima and Animus closely follow the values of the West; where the Logos corresponding to Animus - “the function of analytical thought” (Goldenberg 445), and the masculine are assumed as superior while the Eros the Anima– the “ability to make connection” (445) and the feminine is viewed as inferior. Jung viewed the male as inherently logical and rational – expressing Logos, while the female as inherently emotional and irrational – expressing Eros. However, the connection of women to Eros and inability to master Logos is based on Jung’s prejudice and assumptions. When Jung talks about Eros and Logos he writes: "In men, Eros the function of relationships is usually less developed. In women, on the other hand, Eros is an expression of their true nature, while their Logos is often only a regrettable accident" (CW 9, 2:4). This idea of women essentially unable to move out of the grasp of the Eros into the land of Logos was further supported by his closest circle of highly praised scholarly followers which were predominantly women.

One of the scholars of the Jungian circle was Toni Wolff, first Jung’s patient, later his collaborator and follower, and finally an author. Wolff’s contribution to psychology lies in her work “Structural Form of the Feminine Psyche” where she introduces four

feminine archetypes each woman should strive to incorporate into herself. Once a woman masters all four “She will find her proper place in this modern world and will fulfil her cultural task” (Wolff 15). She argues that there are underlying archetypes that transcend such elements. The four archetypes are – Mother, Hetaira, Amazon, and Medial woman (5).

The first axis is concerned with personal relatedness. On one side, there is Mother on the opposite side there is Hetaira. The Mother’s primary role is to “focus all their energy on making a home in which the whole family thrives” (Vermeesch). Furthermore, Wolff argues that “once a woman is conscious of her primarily motherly structure, she will arrange her outer way of life accordingly, either through marriage or through motherly professions and activities” (Wolff 6) such as a teacher or a nurse. This archetype is an example of what femininity looks like patriarchy - under the rules of emphasized femininity, providing offspring is a core duty of womanhood.

Opposite on the first axis is Hetaira or companion and her focus is on her male partner, lover, or friend, and their inner life. This archetype illustrates a woman whose function stems from helping their men (and children) reach their goals. Furthermore, “for the man, a relationship in all its potentialities and nuances is usually less conscious and less important, for it distracts him from his tasks. For the Hetaira it is decisive. Everything else - social security, position, etc.- is unimportant” (7-8). Hence the role of Hetaira is there to show the importance of relationship - Eros, to a man preoccupied with Logos. Similar to Mother, Hetaria represents another core idea of emphasized femininity, being a man’s companion on his journey towards greatness.

On the second axis concerned with impersonal relatedness, Medial woman and Amazon are presented. The Medial woman or Mediatrix concerned with the outer collective world finds fulfillment in “giv[ing] a voice or a shape to what is unseen and unconscious to others” (Guzie, Guzie 5). Her role is often described as serving others to understand and make sense of the collective unconscious; Wolff casts the medial woman archetype among “the early Christian martyrs, the female mystics of the Middle Ages or, within a smaller sphere, [as someone who] devotes herself to the lifework of an individual man” (12).

And lastly, the Amazon concerned with the outer collective world. Wolff’s Amazon is a woman fulfilled by independence, “managing the outer world” (Guzie, Guzie 3) what would be thought of as a masculine role through her career or through or dominant position in the household. At first glance, the Amazon allows women a role with no ties to men, however, Wolff later writes: “the positive aspect of an Amazon can be that of a refreshing comrade of the man - a comrade who makes no personal demands - a competitor and rival who deserves to be taken seriously, who incites his ambitions and inspires his best male achievements” (9-10). Therefore, even when the Amazon archetype itself does not relate to men per se, Wolff assumes woman’s purpose to be of use to a man.

Both Jung’s and Wolf’s findings are extremely one-sided, male-centric, and heteronormative. Jung’s idea of women as inherently inferior unable to grasp Logos and fundamentally driven by Eros solidifies women’s role as a homemaker and nothing else laying the foundation of the emphasized feminine to enforce a uniform reality. Despite efforts made by scholars such as Goldenberg who strive to revisit Jungian ideas from a more critical, queer, and feminist standpoint, non-academics and scholars (such as Jordan

Peterson)<sup>9</sup> alike use Jung to justify their misogyny and enforcement of patriarchy-driven feminine norm. Similarly, Wolff's formation of the feminine archetypes frame women as incomplete when not in relation with men, as the ultimate goal is to emphasise the Mother and Hetaira - the foundation of emphasized femininity. There is essentially no scenario according to Wolff in which a woman is not tied to a man or children and is complete at the same time, it is her duty to provide and be a tool to achieve male greatness, giving the impression of emphasized femininity as the only correct and natural option.

### **The Odd Ones Out and The Spectrum of Lesbian Identity**

Despite its expansive historical base, the emphasized feminine is only a tool used to further other and marginalize the non-hegemonic femininities – queer women, sex workers, unmarried women, infertile women, manual labour force, etc. to forward the assumed correct womanhood. However, regardless of the existence of emphasized femininity, there is no one way to express femininity as many factors affect the lived experience. It is important to mention that femininity is not a universal experience, about that Connell writes:

There need not be any psychological traits which all femininities have in common, and which distinguish them from all masculinities or vice versa...what unites femininities of a given social milieu in the double context in which they are formed: on the one hand in the relation to the image and experience of a female body, on the other to the social definitions of a woman's place and the cultural oppositions of masculinity and femininity (179).

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<sup>9</sup> See articles by Bowles and Heer on Peterson's harmful rhetoric

## SISTERHOOD IS NOT JUST FOR CISTERS

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The formation of femininity and the experience of it is judged based on social markers such as race, sexuality, social status, able-bodiedness, etc. and their application during a specific era. It is evident, that at its center, emphasized femininity is often tied to masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness (Hamilton et. al 334). However, other factors can be added according to the milieux. The exclusion made based on the criteria mentioned above dictate one's assumed access to power and or lack of it, it imposes a certain level of remoteness from the emphasized feminine into the margin.

The margin is often seen as undesirable from the perspective of the hegemonic and compliance masculine and emphasized feminine for it does not benefit hegemonic men. Groups that are in the margin are often missing at least one of the key factors of emphasized femininity such as whiteness or heterosexuality. However, intersectionality plays an enormous role in this present field of research, variables such as socio-economic background, for example, play a big role in the formation and re-formation of these categories and despite them not being a focal point of this present analysis would need attention in the future.

In the case of lesbians and their relationships with the emphasized feminine and hegemonic masculine, the main issue is the manifestation of femininity and masculinity in women and what those two concepts signify. A new study from Just Like Us showed that 68 percent of lesbians delay their coming out due to negative stereotypes including being Butch/masculine, man-hating, over-sexualized, and unattractive (Just Like Us) showing the negative connotations tied to the label 'lesbian'. Many of the negative connotations mentioned in the study can be traced to the harmful narrative of hegemonic femininity – attractiveness and submission to one's man and men in general. It also seems that many

stereotypes about lesbianism come from the disapproval of female masculinity. In the case of butches and studs, the issue lies within the assumption that masculinity is not womanly and butch and stud lesbians and masculine queer women, in particular, strive to be men.

As intersectionality plays a big role in butch expression variables such as race, class, religion, or age affect the way masculine lesbians chose to present themselves.

However, the butch aesthetic is modeled on a rather strict image of a

white, working-class, youthful masculinity. But in spite of the enduring glamour and undeniable charm of these figures of rebellious individualism [such as Marlon Brando], they do not encompass the actual range of lesbian masculinity. Butches vary in their styles of masculinity, their preferred modes of sexual expression, and their choices of partners (Rubin 474).

The assumed scenario follows the binary butch-femme dynamic, the paring of the feminine and the masculine. However, though very popular in the 50s among working class, butch-femme pairings were heavily stigmatized during the second wave of feminism as it was thought to perpetuate the heteronormative ideal of a man and a woman as the correct way of expressing attraction and love (Them). Especially in the past, femme lesbians were expected to follow the rules of the heteronormativity playing the role of a hegemonic woman while a butch plays the role of the man, for it was believed that butch and femme had a “certain fixed relationships to one another” (Rubin 475). Not only is this strict ruling perpetuating the assumed norm, but it also marginalizes the groups that do not meet the societal expectations, further perpetuating the toxic practices of how heteronormative society demonizes homosexuality – normative or otherwise.

Additionally, lesbian couples, and especially couples with a femme individual (especially F2F) have been oversexualized by the porn industry (Forestiére 5). They are not seen as solely queer, as the lesbian (not strictly but often F2F) relationship is understood as performing for the male gaze and male pleasure. The assumed performativity only further perpetuates the erasure of the real experience of the lesbian label. They are thought of as a spectacle for men or an opportunity for men to “turn lesbians straight” (Wayans). Likewise, the stereotypically feminine appearance of some queer women gives the false narrative of heterosexual desire and in many cases, they experience the effects of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich). This dynamic between society (mostly the heterosexual porn consumer) and the fabricated lesbian identity characterised by performance for men generates sexual violence towards queer women (Forestiére 13), as well as further alienates in the lesbian community. Consequently, the reason why butch + butch is not accepted by the majority is that it is neither the norm (femme + butch) nor is it sexually exploitable material (femme + femme).

### **The Body and Mind of the Hegemonic Feminine**

The discussion around hegemonic/emphasized femininity leads into what Hamilton, Armstrong, and Seeley coined as femininity premium. It is a “set of individual benefits that accrue to those who can approximate (...) ideas” of hegemonic femininity, it is the motivation for performing it. However, because hegemonic femininity is not accessible to everyone, the reaping of the benefits of femininity premium can be acquired only by a handful – often “White, affluent, heterosexual women” (Hamilton et. al 316). Eventually, as the femininity premium can be acquired only by a narrow group of women, the access to the benefits is gatekept further marginalizing the out-groups. Furthermore,

“successful performances of femininity also reinforce benefits accrued along other axes of domination, such as race and class” (Hamilton et. al. 316) making those successfully embracing emphasized/hegemonic femininity and reaping femininity premium the dominant group. They are further widening the gap between them and the rest in a process coined by Hamilton, Armstrong, and Seeley as *intersectional domination* (316). However, even when one is handicapped in one of the aspects whether it is race, sexuality, or social class the pursuit of hegemonic femininity does grant some benefits though not in its entirety. Consequently, “their efforts may be read as evidence of good character, morality, and commitment to the project of producing cultural ideals of femininity and other identities” (Hamilton et. al 326). Within this system, femininity premium can take the form of framing their own sexual behaviours as the norm granting access to privileged (wealth, class, attractiveness, popularity, etc.) long-term commitment of romantic partners and therefore the economic and social benefits of marriage. White women also gain a certain level of protection, for their morality and purity must be defended by the authority (white men, police, court, etc.) Protection against domestic violence is far less effective in non-white households, quite the contrary in many cases involvement of the state in family affairs has a negative effect (327). Therefore, it is understandable why such performance would be glorified and promoted.

One of the movements promoting emphasized femininity that became popular online<sup>10</sup> is the *trad wife* movement. Trad wife, short for traditional wife is a “woman in the twenty-first century, who has decided not to work in the outside economy, but instead

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<sup>10</sup>Circa 2020 when an article with a trad wife Alena Pettit was released on BBC, see BBC news

subscribes to strict and classical gender roles and spends her time taking care of her home, family and husband” (Sitler-Elbel 2) often trying to emulate the 1950s housewife rejecting the twenty-first-century woman. The online discourse around the hashtag trad wife is often accommodated by privilege - conservative Christian values, white, suburban, and upper-middle class body of women (Sitler-Elbel 9). Trad wives often describe themselves “around modesty and ‘submission’ or ‘service’ to one’s husband, [she] not only stays at home because she wants to be domestically focused but because she, as a woman, must cater to and take care of her husband in these ways” (2). repeating the Cult of Domesticity (see “The Industrial Revolution and Female Psyche Through Archetypes”). Such claims are often tied to conservative Christian values promoting biblical womanhood,<sup>11</sup> which promotes submission to one’s husband as it is God’s will (3). Despite the woman overseeing the household chores, she is not part of financial decision-making. Therefore, the autonomy that is usually brought by money is diminished in the case of trad wives.

The oppressive nature of the traditional wife model has been already discussed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan argues that the picture-perfect image of the 1950s housewife is not suitable for everyone and for many it is a prison (Friedan). However, her white upper-middle class feminist perspective lacked intersectionality. Critiques came from activists such as Bell Hooks who pointed out that attitudes towards feminism such as Friedan’s do not take into consideration class and race and solely elaborates on the axes of privilege (Hooks 2). The same critiques could be raised when discussing trad wives. As the discourse around them re-emerges into the public discussion

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<sup>11</sup> Such as the rhetoric of the Girl Defined on YouTube, see “It Takes a Brave Girl to Live Out Biblical Womanhood”

as of late, there is a significant inclination towards criticism solely based on sexism instead of classism and racism that allowed the glorification of such lifestyle. The inspiration for traditional femininity is the 1950s diminishes the real struggle of anyone who was not white, heterosexual, suburban, upper-middle-classer in the 50s, idealizing the era rather than representing it. Furthermore, the narrative evolves around the “guarding the idea of normative whiteness” (Sitler-Elbel 9). The main goal of this movement seems to be the “revival of a glorified, and whitewashed, past” (10) which is shared by alt-right groups, white supremacists and nationalists as well as anti-feminist (10). However, it must be said that trad wives are not inherently Alt-right nor are they homogeneously anti-feminist though according to Sitler-Elbel research, a significant portion of them are part of such groups. Even those who do not openly participate in Alt-right groups participate in the system indirectly, as they adhere to traditional Christian living they support and create the basis for these groups, and therefore add to the issue.

It is evident that the trad wife movement and the concept of femininity premium are tied to emphasized femininity, and the spike in the online discourse around trad wives and traditional marriage promotes the heteropatriarchal narratives and only other the margin further. Furthermore, the hegemonic/emphasized femininity manifests itself as a “global subordination of women to men that provides as essential basis for differentiation” (Connell 183). Men in its hegemonic form are the social default and women (even when following the strict rules of emphasized femininity on the path towards femininity premium) are cast out as the Other. “There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men” (Connell 183) because

none of the femininities has such overrule over the rest of society as hegemonic masculinity does. There is

limited scope for women to construct institutionalized power relationships over other women [as well as the] dominance over the other sex is absent from the social construction of femininity [and additionally there is no pressure] to negate or subordinate other femininities in the way hegemonic masculinity must negate other masculinities (187).

However, it can be argued that emphasized/hegemonic femininity is being socially punished by hegemonic masculinity the least for it is compliant with the patriarchal practice of heterosexual men. Emphasized femininity is “defined around compliance with the subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell 183) other forms of femininity that do not comply with hegemonic masculinity are to be side-lined by both hegemonic masculine and feminine for emphasized femininity always does what benefits hegemonic masculinity.

### 3.1.3 The Hetero-Respectable Queer

Under the influence of mainstream society, even queer people strive for hegemony to sustain a certain level of power paying a price with one’s authenticity. In the dominant society, the term (cis)heteronormativity represents the “hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality” (Robinson 1). It reflects the assumption that its people are inherently heterosexual as well as cisgender. Under heteronormativity, the hegemonic binary understanding of feminine and masculine is also an evergreen – “the gender roles of

masculine men and feminine women are naturalized (Robinson 1) for masculinity is solely tied to men and femininity to women. Heteronormativity in practice means overrepresentation of heterosexual people and underrepresentation of queer people in media, lack of representation of queerness in education including history or sex-ed, or assuming everyone follows the cis heterosexual narrative - marriage, children, monogamy, and consumption (Robinson 1).

### **Homonormativity, the Hetero-Respectable Queer, and Acts of Gaiety**

The term homonormativity coined by Lisa Duggan reflects the desire of the dominant society for queer people to participate in it under the influence of heteronormative institutions (marriage, children, monogamy) closely resembling the heterosexual way of living (Duggan 179). Many critics see homonormativity as a force that further divides the LGBTQ+ community from within; while sexual minorities who can and want to assimilate do so and harvest the benefits, those who are not able to, or do not wish to adhere to the hetero-patriarchal system are othered and left behind (Robinson 1). Interwoven into homonormativity stands homoliberalism coined by Sarah Warner in *Acts of Gaiety*, that reflects the adherence to the requirements of homonormative narrative such as the desire for military service, a monogamous government-regulated relationship, accumulation and transfer of wealth, and the perpetuation of the nuclear family (xi-xii). Homoliberalism and homonormativity both talk about the privilege that comes with the adherence to this one way of living, to the mainstream culture. The normative queerness is celebrated. It is characterised by the desire for equal rights of queer folk, mostly regarding marriage and adoption. It works with the system that is already in power, and, consequently, it silences the minority that does not fit into such a scheme - non-

monogamous people, queer people of colour, and nonbinary trans folk (Robinson 1,2). Furthermore, the homoliberal ideals sway queer people from the idea of revolution for they argue that the current situation is stable and advantageous enough, as queer people are granted the right to marry or serve in the military. However, it would be short-sighted to assume that such aims are the desired end goal for all non-normative individuals (xii).

Ultimately, they both promise equal treatment, however, only under strict conditions. Homonormativity and homoliberalism are the normalizations of one narrow way of expressing a queer identity, those who follow those strict requirements embody the framework of respectable queerness (Yoshi 415). Based on Yoshi's findings, the term hetero-respectable queer shall be utilized to pinpoint the individual on the hunt for the benefits of respectable queerness. The hetero-respectable queer's desires are aligned with the desires of the heteronormative society but at the same time to "differentiat[e] oneself from others who fall outside the norm" (418). Their goal is to achieve similar if not equal access to privilege through the narrative of commonality with the heterosexual individual - to prove their worth and position in the hierarchy of the dominant society as the equal to the heterosexual, claiming superiority over the Other (419). In order to access power and privilege, the hetero-respectable queer usually "seek[s] these rights through consumption practices, monogamy, marriage, domesticity, and reproduction" (Robinson 1). This phenomenon often takes place politically on the conservative side of the spectrum (Duggan, 190) where otherwise conservative individuals seek the benefits of heterosexual life while at the same time living openly as gay/lesbian. The equality and freedoms are narrowed to fit the hegemonic ideal of living, being accessible only to the few 'correctly'

queer people. The heterorespectable queer is the result of silencing the non-hegemonic queerness and domination of the queerness accepted by the hetero-patriarchal society.

As a reaction to the homoliberalist homonormative approach to queer politics, Warner uses the term *Acts of Gaiety*. It is the “jocund and waggish response to the absurdity of the political, ideological, and environmental scenarios in which homosexuals have been cast” (xvi) that urges queer folk to flaunt one’s flamboyant non-normative sexuality and call for advancement; not only equity but also the alternate approach to non-normative ways of living (xii). It represents the opposition to the hetero-respectable queerness that condemns flamboyant and non-normative expression. Similarly, *Acts of Gaiety* play against the narrative around queer identity as inherently tragic which is often present in their portrayal - expressing grief, suffering, and abuse at the expense of more positive feelings. It often voices solely the narrative of how queerness must be punished<sup>12</sup> that consequently becomes internalized in the homoliberal and homonormative thinking. However, this tragic queer narrative is still very prevalent in politics and in art/film despite the progression of the movement. Consequently, the trope of queer suffering becomes internalized and turns into a marker of authenticity (Paulsen) as most of the representations from the past solely depict queerness as worthy of a penalty. Whether it is by implementing the “bury your gays” trope (Hulan 17) or framing the queer character as a villain predestined to fail and suffer (19), it is evident that the historical imposition of queer suffering is still alive and well today (19). Such portrayal only perpetuates the idea of queerness as inherently negative, undesirable, and worthy of punishment.

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<sup>12</sup> Caused by the internalization of the Hayes Codes from the 50s

### **The Inherent Non-normativity of Queer Experience and the Prospect of the Non-Binary Lesbian**

Given the social climate generated by the dominant society, despite its limiting nature, the desire there is for normativity – more specifically heteronormativity. However, in reality, the queer experience is inherently *not* heteronormative. When the focus is brought to the non-binary/genderqueer label, it is defined through the perspective of neither/nor – a person who identifies as neither male nor female “but instead choosing to be neither, both or partly male and partly female” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries). With individuals that use the genderqueer/non-binary/gender-non-conformist label, the problem is in the expected performance behind the label that is always read as either masculine or feminine. Subsequently, even in queer experience, the notion of binary gender performance is relevant. For many, the term non-binary allows the escape from the rigid binary of the male/female opposition. But, in the eyes of the dominant society the implementation of gender-non-conformity causes identities assumingly reliant on the man-woman dichotomy to lose their meaning.

Consequently, it is presumed that the non-binary label is incompatible with a seemingly binary category such as the lesbian identity. However, the lesbian experience is inherently tied to gender non-conformity. As the dominant society views femininity (and lesbian experience) as linked to the female body (and its reproductive power), it often does not take into consideration the fact that the term woman is not stable, and it is definitely not homogenous. Forcing hegemony on labels such as woman and lesbian that are affected by intersectionalities is rather reductionist and essentialist. Furthermore, such reading of the word woman in many cases ignores the presence of especially trans bodies which are

part of the lesbian experience also. Additionally, feminine men and masculine women suffer under this rigid binary as well as the members of the trans and non-binary community for they are outside the hegemonic masculinity spectrum. Such binary viewing of the world does not distinguish womanhood and femininity. Instead, as Connell writes, “[f]emininity and masculinity need not be treated as polar opposites i.e. as ends of the same dimension” (174) and should be treated as a set of qualities that can be embodied free of biological sex. As is the case, the lesbian experience for example allows a multitude of expressions of both masculinity and femininity, exploring said qualities of the spectrum.

Throughout history, the word lesbian was oftentimes naturally connected to gender-queerness for its non-normative nature and its lack of adhering to the dominant society. There was a certain “slippage between gender difference and sexual orientation [and it was argued that] butch lesbians and effeminate gay men were considered ‘true homosexuals’... whereas feminine lesbians weren’t really authentically true homosexual... being either a victim of the true homosexual or [being complicit, as homosexual acts were] convenient for them” (Chenier 7:23-7:52). This changed in the 1950s, when during the Lavender Scare femme lesbians were deemed more dangerous as they were the “undetectable threat to America’s security” (Owens 116). Later, the idea of androgyny and having an opposite soul rose from the lines of homosexual people themselves. The experience of a “trapped soul” (Fassler 242) was assigned not only to what is now known as trans identity but also to gay people explaining their gender-non-normativity (Chenier 8:30-8:37). Fassler gives the example of ‘transvestism [as a] common mark for homosexuality’ (243), the choice of androgynous clothing being the marker of queerness.

Used to temporarily obtain the privilege of a masculine look, “cross dressing as an expression of one's homosexuality and a liberation of one's soul seems to have been especially common among women” (243). Just as was the case of Vita Sackville-West’s experience of “swing[ing] wildly between feminine and masculine periods” (251) what would be now regarded as genderfluidity, therefore destabilizing the idea of a solid unchanging soul or gender identity; despite the initial binary definition of opposite or trapped soul, when observing such occurrence with the vocabulary of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the possible explanation suggests both trans and non-binary experience.

As the term lesbian was reclaimed by the queer community at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in reaction to the second wave of feminism the term became much more than just a label it became a rigid marker of binary territory. This generation’s perception of the label was influenced by their feminist views and was about “growing up as a female being oppressed in this culture that is incredibly toxic [and reclaiming their body and sexuality from the patriarchy, therefore for them, the term is] ...grounded in being cisgender and taking ownership of their own bodies” (Chenier 5:44-6:06). Therefore, many lesbian feminists of the time practiced the exclusion as “a purposeful act of reinforcing boundaries in order to define group identity against other types of people” (Hord 8), exclusion of non-cisgender individuals.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick comments on this very notion of how “mainstream, gay-centered politics has tended not to be structured as strongly as feminism has by that particular ethical pressure” (62). Therefore, the assumed goal of that generation of lesbian feminists was to strongly associate with the term woman and lesbian and separate oneself from the term ‘man’. About that Butler writes: “identity categories tend to

be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (308). For the forceful adherence to one rigid category in the end serves the oppressor. Similarly, Monique Wittig’s perception of the lesbian identity argues the inherent non-conformist non-binary substance of the lesbian; for “a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society” (247) as it breaks the heterosexual matrix; she also further criticizes the feminist mythicization of the woman category for it is from the male perspective. Wittig’s ideas of what is and is not lesbian were quite controversial, especially among those who constructed their identities on binary heteronormative narrative. Consequently, some lesbian feminists of that generation feel threatened by the genderqueer/non-binary terminology for it would assumingly destabilize the identity. However, this scare for visibility is nothing new as it was applied to other identities that were believed to decrease lesbian visibility such as butch women, bisexual women, trans women and trans man, and the non-specific queer label (Hord 4). Consequently, the term non-binary lesbian though present in history, is still deemed oxymoronic by many scholars of today as their lived experience was formed on binary terminology.

With the evolution of the queer community and the language that comes with this shift, the gender-non-conformist label allows for further rethinking of the lesbian label. For, according to Hord, the “non-binary gender, as is exposed in its pairing with lesbian, does not rely on the systems of binary exclusion that have heretofore been used to describe foundational gender identity and the sexual specificities which rely on it” (Hord 2). It is also unclear what the future holds for the lesbian identity label, for Hord believes that the

non-binary label could save the at-first-glance binary identities from extinction (3).

Nevertheless, the current understanding of identity still remains in the realm of binary. In almost all cases found in dictionaries the term lesbian is tied to female sex and womanhood (OED, Merriam-Webster, Cambridge Dictionary, etc.) however, given the vastness of the lesbian experience illustrated above, the term is ought to be broadened to sustain their existence in the future as well as to encompass those that fall under the lesbian umbrella, the umbrella of resistance against patriarchal wrongdoings.

### **Hegemonic Non-Binary Identity?**

After a thorough discussion of hegemony in femininity and masculinity, the question of hegemonic non-binary identity arises asking whether there is a blueprint for being non-binary/genderqueer. As label seeps into the perception of the dominant society, the query regarding the influence of the hetero-patriarchal male gaze and enforced hegemony on gender-non-conforming individuals is to be discussed.

In a recent interview for *Big Think* titled “Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender | Big Think”, Butler proclaimed that “gender is culturally formed, but it's also a domain of agency or freedom and that it is most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms, especially against those who are gender different, who are nonconforming in their gender presentation” (2:34-2:56). Expressing oneself authentically against the hegemonic norm is a powerful statement, however, for the mainstream, the non-binary label carries a specific narrow aesthetic. Despite the nature of the identity of genderqueer/non-binary resting upon the notion of freeing oneself of the conventions of traditional hegemonic masculinity and femininity, as the non-cisgender experience gains more visibility the dominant society’s ideals are projected onto this

outside-the-box label. The issue lies in the cisheteronormative hegemonic perception of men and women and applies the same logic to non-binary people. Consequently, gender-non-conforming people are judged based on the combination of hegemonic masculinity and femininity – white, thin, masculine-centric. Just like the stereotypical portrayal of the butch lesbian (see *The Odd Ones Out* and *The Spectrum of Lesbian Identity*), the non-binary individual is modeled on a Eurocentric ideal that favours light skin, slenderness, and attributes that mirror the visual of a hegemonic man (see “The Manly Ideal under Scrutiny”). The mainstream portrayal of the non-binary person embraces the visual identifier such as

short, “boyish” haircuts, a lean, angular body, the ability to “pull off” makeup... an affinity for well-fitted suits and nondescript but fashion-forward clothing ... [or any other visual cue] that can upend notions of traditional masculinity or femininity while still remaining loyal to the masculine-feminine binary so commonly defaulted to in modern society (Simmons).

However, though androgyny might play a part in genderqueer gender expression it does not equal it. In “Gender Isn’t a Haircut: How Representation of Nonbinary People of Color Requires More Than White Androgyny” Simmons writes that “there is no one way to visually present the body in such a way that it can be clearly read as non-binary without explicit proclamation of being so” therefore such identity does not have one distinct look. They continue: “a non-binary person can express themselves through androgyny, femininity, masculinity, and any variety of combinations of traditional or non-traditional gender presentations. They can also reject these categories altogether.” Furthermore, Simmons stresses the obsession with visual androgyny as a marketing tactic which,

however, only furthers the one acceptable physical aesthetic for gender-non-conforming individuals. Consequently, focusing on the hegemonic-centric ideal hurts both those closer to the ideal (white, able-bodied, slender individuals) as well as those who are not. Just like the cisgender people are impacted by the rigidity of gender roles, the accepted genderqueer people do not solely reap benefits from their normativity for the assumed acceptance hides the regulation of one's expression. The mainstream representation of non-binary people limits their expression and approaches them with a presumption that each member looks like the other, forming a monolithic mass.

Sabrina Strings traces Eurocentric beauty standards and fatphobia to the era of slavery, where the ideas of racial theorists such as Meiners and Blumenbach about Caucasians as superior and beautiful flourished. As society turned away from voluptuous figures admired in the Renaissance, they turned towards racially charged idealization of slenderness and thinness and expulsion of fat and non-normative bodies. She explains the bias towards fat bodies originating in the stereotypic portrayal of Black people as overindulgent (both in sex and food) resulting in them having fat bodies as an effect of their "sinful" behaviour and lack of discipline. Consequently, the male gaze and its constant desire to monitor (mostly female) bodies are the result of colonial racist rhetoric which only further damages marginalized communities. The non-normative body in the eyes of hetero-patriarchal colonial society rejects any form of diversion from the standard, hence the dismissal of the representation of bodies that do not follow the whitewashed hegemonic idea of androgyny. Consequently, the non-normative body is deemed undesirable, especially in mainstream representation. Consequently, people of color (Gray), as well as fat people (Harrison) are left out of the Western-centric debate about gender.

## 4 QUEERING THE SCREEN

*You can't be what you can't see.*

Marian Wright Edelman

The idea of queerness depicted on screen in full authenticity was once a utopian concept. However, that is slowly changing, and diversity is creeping into western TV and film as well as other forms of media. With the growing representation, however, comes the hard work of depicting such intersectional identities correctly not falling into the trap of hegemony. This chapter shall first discuss the power of representation and current tactics in TV and film. Second, an analysis of two TV shows – *Feel Good* and *Euphoria* shall be provided regarding the stereotypes and archetypes that are perpetuated in media. And lastly, a comparative study of the two depictions of gender-non-conformity in a sapphic context will be completed in order to compare and contrast a portrayal by a writer who themselves are gender-non-conforming (Martin) and the portrayal by a writer who is gender-typical (Levinson).

It must be stated that this analysis covers episodes that aired before the submission in the fall of 2022 – two seasons of Martin's *Feel Good* with the second being the final season. And two seasons of Levinson's *Euphoria* which was renewed for a third season. It must also be mentioned that part of the transcriptions is done by the author of this thesis and the rest of the dialogue is gathered from unofficial sources found online such as subtitle files and fan-made transcripts. Furthermore, the dialogue is enriched by the descriptions of the visuals that are omitted from the spoken dialogue transcription found online. Names of the character speaking were also added to the dialogues to resemble a

legitimate script and to be more appropriate for academic publication. Timestamps provided are mostly gathered from unofficial transcripts and therefore may slightly vary from the original recordings.

### 4.1 The Formative Power of Representation

Harrison defines desirability politics “as the methodology through which the sovereignty of those deemed (conventionally) attractive/beautiful/arousing is determined.” This is at the end at the core of representation – those deemed desirable are displayed more frequently than those who are not. Eventually, this plays out in the representation of non-binary people as well. Those who meet the conventional Eurocentric standards dictated by the dominant society are the new hegemonic representative – the new norm. Between the years 2020 and 2022 there were twenty-four non-binary and genderqueer characters on TV and in film.<sup>13</sup> Thirteen of them were white or white-passing, fifteen of them were visually more masculine-coded and fourteen of them had short more masculine-coded haircut out of which three had a shaved head. Finally, out of all the characters, only one was plus-size. It is therefore evident that the desired image of representation in current media mirrors the preconceived notions of the aforementioned Eurocentric beauty standards. However, contrary to the dominant society’s belief, non-binary cannot be summarised by one aesthetic “precisely because it does not rest on established correspondences between sex, gender, and expression, nor does it rest on established narratives of their rejection” (Hord 11). The hegemonizing tendencies of the mainstream are rooted in binary thinking and fear

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<sup>13</sup> According to the list of NB characters on Wikipedia, out.com, and a movie page on IMDb website

of anything other than the binary. They rely on the binarity of gender as a source of domination and control for “if one were both *not man* and *not woman*, expunging all that had been coded as masculine or feminine, and going against all “proper” behaviors assigned to these genders, there would be nothing left with which to populate an experience of gender” (Hord 12).

In the binary perception of the world, there is yet not a place for those who do not fit the two frames of man or woman as the mainstream casts those who resemble the admired qualities of both allowing for only one specific aesthetic to dominate the representation. It is also important to mention that this trend is not specific to transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals for it affects cisgender people also. There is no one way to express femininity, for femininity, just like masculinity is a term that can be prescribed to and be a descriptor for a diverse group of people regarded of their gender. Femininity is often linked with female bodies and womanhood and masculinity with manhood and male bodies; however, this assumption creates barriers to non-normative bodies and adds to the stigma of not only people that do not identify with either of the binary - those occupying the spectrum, but to the non-hegemonic expression of cisgender feminine men and masculine women.

Finally, the idea of deserving human and civil rights based on one’s performance within a political structure is distorted and bases one’s worth on a set of acts that the government deems acceptable. Consequently, those who are queer in any way are pressured into adhering to these rules, assimilating to the mainstream culture to obtain or sustain their rights. But ultimately, only a small number of people (even within the heterosexual mainstream) are able to adhere to this very strict scheme of living whether it

the social expectation for societal contribution, devotion to gender roles (childbearing, child raising, income distribution, household chores, etc.) or adherence to physical, psycho-social, and sexual normativity (able-bodiedness, mental wellness, the expectation of heterosexuality, to lack sexual deviations and kinks, as well as practicing monogamy). Therefore, by challenging the heteronormative scheme, more people than just the queer community would flourish would the idea of gender be less binary.

### 4.2 How to *Feel Good* About One's Gender

First of the narratives with sapphic non-binary representation is the show *Feel Good*. To begin with, just like the other materials gathered for this analysis, *Feel Good* is semi-autobiographical, and therefore it partially reflects their creator's life. In the show, they slowly realize their identity and readjust themselves and the people around them to the label. The story deals with many themes present in non-binary narratives including the exploitation of queer relationships, patterns of unlearning gendered binary society, and personal journey of gender expression which will be discussed in the subchapter. Before delving into the discussion of the non-binary experience in *Feel Good* it is important to mention that Martin - the author, uses they/them pronouns. Mae in the show expresses a certain distaste towards the gender binary, and out of respect for the creator as it is their story and their autobiographical show, Mae shall be referred to by the neutral pronoun as well.

### Being a Difficult Gender Rule Breaker

Throughout the show, the audience is to follow the haphazard and chaotic relationship of Mae – an ex-addict comedian, and George – an ex-straight middle-class teacher. As their relationship progresses, they try to navigate George’s secrecy about the relationship and her sexuality and Mae’s addiction and gender questions as well as their joined internalization of gender norms. Already the first episode shows how Mae, and their gender are perceived by others when Pete, a new comedian reacts to Mae by saying “who is this man” (21:30) mistaking them for a man as they visually resemble a masculine individual with their short boyish haircut, no makeup, and gender-non-specific clothing. Furthermore, throughout the show, Mae is called a plethora of gender-specific names, most of them about their masculine appearance such as “small dude” (“s02e02” 24:58) or “little buddy” (“s02e04” 3:50) by their roommate Phil, or a “man” on multiple occasions (such as in “s02e01” 17:34). Several times is Mae called “sir” each instance being important to the understanding of their gender identity by Both Mae and George. In season one episode five George, Mae, and Phil are at a café and the waitress gives the bill to Mae.

[Mae] Oh, you know what, I’ll get this.

[George] Really?

[Mae] Yeah

(...)

*After a brief moment, the waitress comes back.*

[Waiter] sorry sir, your card’s been declined

[George] Uhm, *she* is a girl

*Waitress is confused*

[Mae] that’s ok. I don’t know why that would be.

[George] It's ok I'll get it ("s01e05" 8:34-9:58)

Mae, however, does not respond dismissively towards being called "sir" while George reacts negatively by stating that Mae "is a girl". Also, the fact that Mae is given the bill suggests the Waiter's internalized gender stratification of who should pay the bill, assuming that Mae is the one taking care of it as a "sir", for the dating scripts suggest that the man is expected to pay<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, at the very end of season two in episode six, Mae is called "sir" by a hotdog vendor which opens a conversation between Mae and George about Mae's gender identity and how they are always mistaken for a man. This dialogue shall be discussed in a later subchapter.

In one instance, based on their visual presentation Mae is also described as "an androgynous Muppet" ("s01e05" 5:28) by a misogynistic comedian Arnie which brings up the issue previously discussed in "Hegemonic Non-Binary identity?" in Chapter 3 about 'looking' non-binary. Rather Mae is a non-binary person who does not express themselves according to their sex assigned at birth. However, it must be noted that Mae's character is what would be understood as the hegemonic ideal of what the mainstream regards as the visual representation of a proper non-binary person - white, slender, able-bodied, and conventionally attractive. In contrast with Mae, George, their partner, is a conventionally attractive, stereotypically feminine woman. At the beginning of their relationship, as

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<sup>14</sup> Based on a study examining date expenses; however, it can be argued that the same issue can be applied when in a group setting as the narrative of the dominant masculine person pays.) (Wu, Luo, Klettner, White, Albritton)

George was previously only dating cisgender men, she has issues with the power dynamic in a non-heterosexual relationship especially while being intimate.

[George] Wait. Why did you run home before you ran here?

[Mae] I got the dick. I got a strap-on.

[George] Oh, my God, great. Can you put it on?

[Mae] Yeah, or you could.

[George] What?

[Mae] I don't know. You could put it on. You've never really worn it.

[George] Yeah, I have, but I hold it in my hand like a weapon, like it's the same thing.

[Mae] Is it the same thing?

[George] Mae, it really suits you. I don't think I'd suit a massive cock.

[Mae] I really think you would actually, but okay (“s01e03” 2:10-2:27).

George suggests a hookup at the school where she works, and it is suggested that before this instance, Mae was the only one wearing the strap-on. Mae expresses their desire for George to wear the strap-on, however, George who had always been with men feels uneasy wearing it as she would not suit it while Mae, the masculine person in their relationship, would. George, therefore, shows that she expects Mae to fulfill the masculine role during sex. George sees Mae to represent the visually masculine partner who is supposed to have the penis in the sexual endeavour, recreating the heterosexual power dynamic. Later in the show, George starts to work on her internalization of the hegemonic gender roles, however, her early behaviour which also included secrecy about their relationship, impacts Mae’s attachment and makes them anxious about their connection. Later in episode five, during a sex scene, Mae verbally expresses their arousal through

penetrating George with a strap-on articulating that they can climax from it (11:01-11:17). It seems to be partially performative to satisfy George who previously articulated their preference not to wear the strap-on as well as her assumption that if they were to break up George would continue to date men (7:14-7:30).

George's history in secrecy brings a lot of strain into the relationship, one of the reasons George does not want to share her relationship with Mae is George's friend group. Binky, George's best friend was in the past not very open towards the queer community, however even after being introduced to the idea that George is not dating a man, Binky expresses her internalized prejudice towards Mae and especially towards their gender expression. In one instance, Mae and George invite Binky, her husband Hugh, and their friend Jared, who on multiple occasions tries to date George despite her being in a relationship with Mae. Binky brings up Mae's comedy skit where they talk about their thought about being trans.

[Binky] So, Mae, I saw your comedy set online. I really liked the bit where you talk about wanting to be a boy. It's actually really funny.

[Mae] Mmm. Yeah, I'm glad you find my pain hilarious.

[Binky] Well yeah, it's comedy. Isn't that the point? ("s02e03" 10:43-10:54)

Before the dialogue escalates into a fight as Binky makes fun of Mae for their comedy, Mae stresses Binky's insensitivity towards Their gender identity. Binky sees it only as a joke as Mae shares their thoughts on their gender on the stage, despite it being a real struggle. The comedy stage is a form of an outlet where Mae can express themselves, a place where they can try to verbalize their gender questions without immediate judgment from people close to them. Binky does not understand that Mae's comedy is deeply

personal, and it is hurtful to make fun of Mae for “wanting to be a boy”. Martin shows the audience can appropriate shared ideas and misunderstand them. Later in the episode, after Binky gives birth to her child Boothroid, she expresses understanding towards Mae. Binky shares that “If Hugh and [her] die in a boat accident, then George will become Boothroid's legal guardian (...) It means if [Mae] and George are together, [they] will be Boothroid's father.” (21:09-21:18) It shows that despite her not understanding fully what Mae is going through Binky is able to express sympathy and to an extent can accept Mae's non-normative identity. Her understanding is very binary; however, Mae seems not to be offended when Binky proposes them to be the father of Boothroid assuming that they want to be a man, therefore fulfilling the role of the father. Binky sees the roles of parents in an either/or manner and probably does not know what non-binary means her speech, however, seems to bring Mae euphoria. Being referred to by a gendered male term seems to be reassuring for Mae based on their facial expression.

It is apparent that, as is the case with Binky, the binary understanding of gender is still ingrained in the general public which causes non-normative individuals to feel excluded and misunderstood. Throughout the show, Mae exhibits a certain desire to not be regarded as “special” (“s02e04”), a burden, or as “intense” (“s01e01”) which plays into what Robert Brittner mentions to occur in young trans people when they first investigate their gender expression. Brittner writes “that a young trans person has a legitimate desire to be considered normal. Whether this normalcy means completely fitting in with society or simply being able to get out of bed in the morning without fear of rejection is not the point; the point is simply understanding that the desire is a healthy one and is not cause for

shame (31). In their youth Mae was preoccupied with serious abuse and addiction which left little space for gender exploration, therefore feelings about one's non-conformity that would usually occur during one's formative years were postponed until Mae's twenties. Nevertheless, Mae's desire to not be difficult clashes with them fully expressing their gender identity. In season two episode four, Mae is to star in Arnie's comedy show on TV, before going in front of the cameras, Mae is having a conversation with a makeup artist.

[Makeup artist] Hello, darling. Hello, my love.

[Mae] Hi.

[Makeup artist] Let's have a little look at you, shall we? Bit of blusher, bit of eye shadow, bit of lippy and we're done. Yeah?

[Mae] Maybe we just keep it really plain like...

[Makeup artist] It's just for the camera, love, so...

[Mae] Oh my God. Maybe if you just do me like you'd do a boy?

[Makeup artist] Like a boy. Mm. But you're not a boy, are you sweetheart? You're not gonna make my life difficult, are you? (08:56-9:09)

Through the makeup artist's reaction, the audience is shown the everyday reality of non-binary experience. Martin reflects how any form of non-conformity is making it difficult for other people, by not doing Mae's make-up for the camera "like a girl" but doing them like a boy which would bring confusion to the makeup artist. Furthermore, despite Mae's wishes, the artist dismisses them as someone who is not a boy and therefore should wear makeup projecting their own gender binary ideology. Afterward, while Mae talks to the crewmember, the makeup artist tries to put a bowtie on them, which they dismiss. It, however, shows that the makeup artist is trying to figure out Mae's gender within a limited set of rules of a binary opposition pushing their rigid ideas about what a man or a woman should look like – men wear bowties and women wear visible makeup.

### **Being Exploited by Patriarchy and Capitalism**

One of the topics that are brought up in the show is the exploitation that Mae faces because of their identity – both because of their sexuality as well as their gender identity. The exploitation based on their sexuality and their relationship with George can be observed throughout the entire show. The first hint is given at the end of the third episode of the first season. George is in a hospital being given morphine and calls for Mae, and as she is drugged, she reveals their relationship to the bystanders that are George’s aforementioned friends. After expressing her love for Mae, George proclaims that she will make Mae climax with a strap-on, which she previously refused to do, and when the couple kisses, Hugh and Jared must be escorted from the room by Binky because they are staring at Mae and George. Later, in episode 5, after confining in Arnie that George had a crush on Arnie, he offers Mae to go on a comedy tour with him. Arnie takes Mae to a bathroom stall, while taking drugs he asks:

[Arnie] Are you a lesbian Mae?

[Mae] I don’t really label myself, as you heard I am very complex. I had a threesome with Jack and when I was homeless, I had a boyfriend named Vlad

[Arnie] No!

[Mae] Yeah.

[Arnie] Vlad the Impaler.

[Mae] Yeah.

[Arnie] Did you touch Vlad’s penis?

[Mae] Yes, I did...I’m gonna go.

[Arnie] Do you wanna touch mine? C’mon don’t look so shocked were gonna be on a tour together and it gets very intimate.

[Mae] Are those things connected, the tour and becoming intimate with your dick?

[Arnie] Yeah, they go hand in hand. By that, I mean dick in hand.

*(Mae is leaving)*

C'mon where is your sense of humour?

[Mae] I don't know...

[Arnie] C'mon! I promise you it's bigger than Vlad's penis! (18:53 –19:27)

It seems that Arnie assumed that, because Mae openly discussed their love life with him and on stage, he is entitled to their intimacy. Arnie said prior to Mae's show that he will pay Mae if they decide to perform their monologue, therefore, he feels like it is for him as he is paying for it. During the skit, he is shown to videotape the performance while Mae talks about having sex with George (18:34) as it was made solely for his enjoyment. Similarly, in season two episode four, when Scott is Skyping Mae as they are reconnecting after they visited them in Canada after rehab, he mentions how attractive George is and to "Skype [him] next time [they]'re making out (6:00-6:04). Mae just like other people in sapphic relationships has to deal with microaggressions and harassment from men as lesbian/sapphic relationships are viewed as under the ownership of men and for their pleasure. Mae realized how they do not like being viewed as a lesbian couple (despite both of them being bisexual) for they experience the exploitative power of the male gaze in form of Arnie, Scott, Hugh, and Jared. The struggle that comes with being in a lesbian relationship exposed to the male gaze was partially discussed in "The Odd Ones Out and The Spectrum of Lesbian Identity" in Chapter 3. Furthermore, it is apparent that Mae's and George's relationship is seen as a spectacle. Laura Mulvey the scholarly pioneer, who discussed the male gaze in film discusses the significance of this debate around the patriarchal exploitation of lesbian relationships. According to Mulvey, "woman then

stands in patriarchal culture as signifier of the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker, of meaning” (Mulvey 15). All men above mentioned, therefore, expect the lesbian relationship to be a scopophilic (16) fantasy created for them. It is evident that neither Arnie nor Jared has any problem alluding to or blatantly expressing their desire for a sexual act despite George and Mae being together as they view the lesbian relationship as lesser as it lacks the phallus which in a phallogentric society validates their dismissive behaviour.

However, the patriarchy and the male gaze are not the only exploiters mentioned in the show, Martin shows quite extensively how the entertainment industry uses queer narratives for their own gain disregarding the queer narrator. It is apparent through the way Arnie Rivers urges Mae to expose their love life on stage to harvest success from their personal story. Rivers even points out how “current” (“s01e05” 6:10) gender topics are. However, the most visible exploitation practice comes from Mae’s agent Donna and the people she represents. Throughout their professional relationship, Donna showcases that all she wants is someone who would fit the diversity box. When Donna meets Mae for the first time, she disregards Mae’s other comedy ideas and expresses that she wants Mae to perform about their trans identity. She says that “what [she] love[s] about [Mae] is [they]’re very now. [they]’re an addict. [they]’re anxious. [they]’re trans (...) [they] look like something out of “Deep Space Nine.” [they]’re a lonely millennial” (“s02e02” 2:34-2:48). insinuating that their comedy is only of value when exposing oneself beyond their

boundaries. Donna puts labels on Mae as she sees them as a product to be sold. She mentions how much she wants to work with Mae, but only on her terms as she refuses Mae's other comedy ideas. Before their performance, Donna suggests Mae does "some trans stuff" ("s02e02" 15:19). During the show, she reminds Mae to talk about their trauma and gender. After a performance, Donna gives Mae feedback about their comedy.

[Donna] and I'm sitting there watching you, thinking, there's that pain, you know? And that's your generation. You're sad. You're really, really sad.

[Mae] So you're... you're not gonna sign me?

[Donna] Oh my God, if you don't sign with me, I will commit arson. The big boss loved it.

*(The same older white man is still sleeping in a different chair)*

[Mae] Really?

[Donna] Mm-hmm.

[Mae] Okay, so great. Thank you. So, I have an agent ("s02e04" 20:41-21:03).

The agent Donna plays into the stereotype of suffering and grief as the selling point for queer stories, she sees it as a lucrative field that she can use to further herself. Donna views Mae as an object that can make a lot of money for queer and genderqueer topics are really current and therefore profitable. By playing into the queer suffering trope, she is perpetuating the narrative of queer people as inherently sad and doomed to suffer. This trope is often internalized by queer folk and consequently, queer people believe that they do not deserve happiness solely because they are queer. It plays into what was discussed in the previous subchapter about how Mae struggles to meet their need for attachment and

authenticity and how those two spheres fight for acknowledgement.<sup>15</sup> Martin presents their commentary on how the entertainment industry drains queer stories for their relevancy by big companies despite their lack of interest in actually furthering the fight for queer lives.<sup>16</sup> In episode four when Mae shares part of their traumatic past, Donna forces Mae to pursue an appearance at Rivers' show despite them being sexually assaulted by Arnie in the past. Donna justifies her pursuits as a way to get revenge on Arnie and uses Mae and their vulnerability as a way to make money. Mae is pushed into working with Arnie again, to produce a good show and create drama.

In said show, Mae is presented with what they should be saying as an introduction for the show. In the introduction, they are supposed to say: "Hi! I'm Mae Martin. Some people think I look like a boy." "It's kinda weird, but kinda cool too, I guess" ("s02e04" 10:01-10:06). The writer of the introduction assumes Mae's identity and forces them into a box, however, Mae oftentimes stresses how they are not keen on putting themselves in a box, they even say they are not into the introduction. While in front of the cameras Mae mentions in Arnie's show that they are there to "fill up the diversity checkbox" (15:25-15:28), they are presented as a sexual and gender minority for people to laugh at. Furthermore, the crewmember mentions that Mae was a replacement for a man who was "ranting on Twitter about defunding the police" (17:38) expecting that Mae would not be controversial, which derails them from exposing Arnie as a predator. Also, it sets the tone

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<sup>15</sup> This notion of attachment v authenticity is explored by the philosopher Gabor Maté, his talk is available online; see Maté

<sup>16</sup> It seems ironic that the show airs on Netflix as the platform is one of the most problematic platforms when it comes to canceling queer and especially lesbian; see Mussen

of not expressing their activism, or else they should be excluded from the entertainment industry altogether. It is a big issue as the trans, and non-binary community is often silenced or watered down to be palatable by the general public. It plays into the exploitation of queer voices for profit.

### **Being the Anemic Scarecrow**

Lastly, Martin weaves into their story their journey of gender exploration and self-acceptance. The show explores Mae's experience of their non-normative mind and body and their path to exploring their own unique gender expression through language as well as through visuals. throughout the two seasons of *Feel Good*, Mae slowly explores their gender expression as they shift their understanding of it on the spectrum of concrete to rather abstract. Mae accepts their identity as being on the masculine side of the gender spectrum with gendered terms such as "big boy" ("s02e04" 03:45) and or through the personification of masculinity through celebrities such as Adam Driver or Ryan Gosling ("s02e01" 4:49-4:53). The desire for the last two gender performances is expressed by Mae at rehab when the counsellor Audrey asks Mae how they identify if not as a woman. Mae verbalizes their desire to be like Adam Driver or Ryan Gosling, identifying with the trans non-binary spectrum, denouncing the label and identity of a woman. It seems to be a big step for them to verbalize that outside of comedy where the issue can be played off as a joke, despite their real feeling of discomfort with the binary label, and their comfort with a label that is not so tied to their AFAB status. It is also very important that Audrey does not dismiss Mae's identity and later in the episode uses their preferred identity referring to

them as Adam Driver (7:55). Mae, therefore, experiences their identity being finally understood and respected.

After that, Mae is more confident in expressing their gender experience moving towards more abstract terms that are not as easily understandable by the mainstream as they reach far beyond the binary gender expression. In one instance, Mae shares with George and her friends that they are not a lady but rather “an anemic scarecrow” (8:22-8:24) which brings confusion among the party. There, Mae expresses their understanding of their own gender which goes beyond the binary. Oftentimes, the non-normativity of non-binary gender expression goes beyond the cisheteropatriarchal understanding of what gender can be. Here Mae talks about themselves as instead of being a lady, they are an anemic scarecrow which is an abstract term that reflects their gender better than simply the label “man” or a “woman” ever could. Furthermore, Mae gravitates towards non-specific non-mainstream terms to express themselves. When Donna repeatedly labels Mae trans Mae expresses their hesitancy with the trans label that is pushed on them by Donna. As they are not binary, the premise of the trans identity does not fit them fully. Finding the language for one’s identity is crucial which Mae accomplishes through non-conforming descriptive language. During the dinner with George’s friends after hearing Binky’s commentary on their gender expression on stage Mae criticizes Binky for being homophobic. It can be argued that Mae’s feelings about Binky disregarding their gender are transphobic rather than homophobic, however, at this point, Mae lacks the language to call it transphobia as they themselves do not see themselves as trans or non-cisgender. Therefore, Mae would not see Binky’s commentary

as transphobic and rather express their feelings through the language they know calling Binky homophobic despite them attacking their gender identity rather than their sexuality.

During the scene at the dinner table, Mae also expresses how painful their gender struggle is as they experience gender dysphoria which begins as a desire to be the ideal partner for George and escalates into their desire for different body parts. After meeting Arnie for the first time Mae confesses to George that Arnie is cool and that they “have to get tall” (7:10) like Arnie. Their thought process can be caused by Mae’s desire to fit their partner’s type as George had a crush on Arnie. Similarly, it can be an early sign of gender dysphoria as Mae does want to be seen as not a woman. After realizing their physique is diametrically different from a physique of a cis male such as Arnie, Mae goes to examine their body in a mirror covering and flattening their breasts. Afterward, they put on George’s feminine cut lingerie analysing their reflection in the mirror and when George walks in the room they panic and take it off and start doing crunches. In this scene it is apparent that Mae is exploring their body dysphoric thoughts, pondering how they would look without breasts which are usually regarded as a feminine body part.

As Mae usually expresses themselves in an androgynous or masculine manner, in the mirror Mae tries on George’s lingerie exploring their feelings about being in a feminine cut garment. George is in contrast to Mae a rather stereotypically feminine person wearing dresses, skirts, blouses, and heels while having long hair and makeup. Their pairing brings up the butch-femme relationship dynamic mentioned in “The Odd Ones Out and The Spectrum of Lesbian Identity” in Chapter 3 which was oftentimes criticized for its alleged recreation of the heterosexual dynamic. It can be argued that to an

extent, at the begging of their relationship, the couple did in fact recreate some of the heterosexual stereotypes most notably through George's unwillingness to wear the strap-on. This issue is brought up again when Mae is examining their body and after George walks in proceeds to hyper-compensate for their own thought by working out and performing hegemonic masculinity assuming that George would want Mae to be as muscular as Arnie for example.

During an intimate moment previously examined in "Being a Difficult Gender Rule Breaker," George shares her desire for Mae to ejaculate into her, which sends Mae into a spiral of not being enough as they are physically unable to do so despite their desire to be able to ("s01e05" 11:29-11:31). They also share their desire to be "who [George] want[s and] who [she] dreamed of" (11:44-11:52). It is evident that Mae is experiencing gender dysphoria as well as the feelings of not being enough for George. By proceeding with the strap-on after examining their body, the sexual act is both performative and driven by the desire for George and a different body. Mae wants to satisfy George with a penis, assuming that is what George wants as well as proving to themselves their desire for a masculine body with all its benefits which includes ejaculation and climaxing from penetration. The former is, however, impossible as Mae does not have testicles, this reality furthers their dysphoria. Mae even confides about their struggle with Arnie, and two other comedians at the comedy club expressing how they struggle both with their body and social position by saying that they "don't have the core strength cause apparently [they are] a woman" ("s01e05" 13:50-13:54) and that their "arms are made of yoghurt" (14:02-

14:04). Furthermore, Mae questions their gender because George, as they incorrectly assume, wishes for Mae to be more like Arnie.

Mae's confusion and frustration forwarded by Arnie escalate into them sharing their struggle with their gender and intimacy with George on stage. They share details about their sexual life and attempting to fit what Mae assumes to be a "dream version of [George's] high school boyfriend is (...) like a 90s heartthrob thing" ("s01e05" 16:00-16:05) which exhausts Mae. Unaware of George being in the audience, they continue by accusing George of being "culturally straight" (17:37) and that she will inevitably leave Mae for a man, who will "not even have to try (...) he must just be simple and kind and full of sperm so he can sperminate her" (17:42-18:01) conveying their own body lacking being the reason for George to leave them. Furthermore, Mae expresses their fear of not being enough when George is breaking up with Mae at the end of episode five.

[Mae] I am so embarrassed

[George] embarrassed? why Mae I should be embarrassed

[Mae] I am embarrassed I let myself think someone like you could be with someone like me

I am not a boy... I am not even a girl I am like a failed version of both. why am I such a freak? (22:04-23:20)

Mae's feelings of not being enough escalate when George breaks up with them. They express feeling embarrassed for letting themselves believe they would be enough for George, it boils down to Mae's gender identity as they feel to be a failure; not a boy, not a girl, a failed version of both. This conclusion comes from them being unaware of the existence of people like them. They are not aware that it is not an anomaly to not fit the societal construction of gender, however, Mae is very distressed by the fact that they

themselves do not fit the binary and blames themselves and their gender identity for not being what George assumingly wants. this comes from Mae's lack of resources about gender expression.

The couple eventually rekindles their relationship after a time of separation, now aware of their toxic behaviour. As they are now working on being more transparent and communicative in their relationship, Mae and George discuss their sex life and Mae's continuous struggle with their gender.

[George] And we've just been doing mad role-plays for weeks.

[Mae] Yeah. It's good, though.

[George] Yeah. You know that when we do that, it's not... it's not that I want you to be someone else.

[Mae] Yeah, it's nice.

[George] Okay.

[Mae] I think maybe it's like... like I want to be someone else, you know. Like, get out of my body ("s02e03" 22:21- 22:44).

Since they got back together, it seems that Mae started using roleplay in their sex life as a coping mechanism to distance themselves from their gender struggle. George stresses that their enjoyment of the roleplay does not stem from her desire for Mae to be someone else. As they move away from the thoughts they are not enough for George, it is apparent that they think that the stressor was their unexplored gender identity as Mae feels they "want to be someone else" for the self is too difficult to understand under the scrutiny of the forced mainstream gender binary. Eventually, at the end of the second and last season, Mae finally shares with George how they feel about their own gender expression, how it is

viewed by the world, and how they themselves experience it after being called sir by a hotdog vendor.

[Mae] Did you hear that?

[George] Yeah.

[Mae] People always call me sir.

[George] Yeah.

[Mae] But do you like...When you think of me in your head, do you think of me like a...like a boy or a girl, would you say?

[George] Just... you really

[Mae]- Yeah.

[George]: More importantly, how... how do you see you?

[Mae] Um, yeah, just me, really, I think. Yeah. But then that feels like not really a thing. I don't know what that means.

[George] I think that... that is a thing. That's non-binary, Mae. I... I do think maybe you should google it.

[Mae] Yeah.

[George] Yeah.

[Mae] I probably should google it.

[George] You tell me, and I'll use the right words... Did I say the right thing?

[Mae] Yeah, you said the perfect thing. Maybe I could google a therapist too.

[George] Yeah. Yeah (10:50-11:49)

Mae finally verbalizes their gender identity with George, having a conversation about their gender feelings. They speak out about their experience with gender and their inability to fit into the binary which brings them confusion. George's input is very important to Mae when she talks about the fact that she sees them not as a man or a woman but as Mae. George also shares with them that Mae's feelings are valid, and they are not alone in feeling like this. She mentions how those feelings are an expression of a non-binary

identity and that Mae should research it more on their own as there are many more materials online to which they agree. They also suggest going to therapy which would be beneficial not only for their gender identity but also for their trauma from addiction and abuse. As their earliest formative relationships were with older people who were misusing them, Mae's attachment and relationship are doomed to suffer unless they deal with the burden of abuse.

### 4.3 The *Euphoria* of Gender Expression

The second show that shall be discussed in the present thesis is the popular Emmy-awarded HBO show *Euphoria*. The main storyline revolves around Rue - an addict, who uses substances to escape her mental health struggles, and her love interest Jules - a trans woman, who seeks validation in her gender expression through male attention. The story of Jules is also semi-autobiographical as Hunter Schafer – the queer trans activist, model, and actor had the chance to co-write the special episode titled “Fuck Anyone Who’s Not a Sea Blob” between seasons one and two. However, the rest of the show is written and directed by Sam Levinson, who has a history of substance abuse<sup>17</sup>. And despite having the experience to write authentically about drugs through Rue's story, where he, however, is not experienced is the portrayal of authentic trans narratives.

The show follows Jules' journey of re-exploration of her gender identity and sexuality, as she navigates past abuse and a new relationship with an addict searching for her own place in the world. In the show, she slowly realizes her shifting identity and

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<sup>17</sup> See Burton

readjusts herself. As the TV show relies heavily on optics, it is done so mainly through the visual aspects connected to her character. The story deals with many topics relevant in the trans/gender-non-conforming (GNC) discourse - performance of femininity/masculinity, the exploitation of gender and queer identity, internalization of gender roles within a rigidly gendered binary society, and the redefinition of one's gender identity; all of which will be discussed in the following subchapters. Before exploring the narrative around Jules in *Euphoria*, it must be clarified that Jules is referred to throughout the show mostly by she/her pronouns. However, to prevent confusion, as Schafer uses she/they pronouns<sup>18</sup>, they shall be referred to by a mixture of she/her and they/them. Also, in comparison with Mae in *Feel Good*, Jules is far less present in the show as she is not a center point of the story (even less so in season two). However, due to the show's extreme popularity, there is a plethora of interviews and debates from the cast, designers and artist that were part of the show sharing their inspirations and intentions. Therefore, in comparison to the analysis of *Feel Good*, this leg of the analysis shall rely on the secondary materials just as it does on the scripts.

### **Finding *Euphoria* in the Acceptable Visuals of Womanhood**

In the show, the character of Jules is a trans woman who expresses her transness early on in her life and transitions in her early teens. It was stated by Schafer, that Levinson was very collaborative in the first season of the show. Schafer shares how she and Levinson

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<sup>18</sup> According to PopBuzz Schafer uses she/they; their Instagram bio used to be set to she/they however, is now set to she/her

“share[d] ideas together so he could hear [her] story as a trans person. Because that’s another thing [she] was worried about, entering this [show, where] the script was written by a white, straight cis man. And (...) there is only so much a white, cis, straight man can write for all these intersections that these characters fill” (Schafer qtd. in Stack).

Jules is shown to struggle greatly with mental health problems and body dysphoria as a child. In episode four titled "Shook Ones Pt.II" Jules’ childhood is shown on screen in a flashback. In it, Jules is put into a psychiatric facility by her mother for struggling with her mental health; there, she is shown to self-harm. In the hospital, Jules shares that she has been suffering from mental problems such as sadness and “being stuck on a thought” (4:51-4:53) since she was seven or eight, but her diagnosis is never clarified (4:25-3:28). When it comes to the intersection of queerness and mental illness Taliaferro et. al states, that transgender/GNC youth is at higher risk for self-harm in comparison to both cis heterosexual and queer youth, (204) as well as there is a higher prevalence of mental health struggles among trans/GNC youth. This is believed to stem from Minority Stress Theory, which “speculates that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create hostile and stressful social environments that may contribute to mental health problems among minority populations” (205) such as queer and trans individuals like Jules. Through Rue’s narration, young Jules describes her relationship with her mind and body as following:

She hated her body, not every part, just her shoulders, and her arms, and her hands. Also, her chest, her stomach, her thighs. Her knees were the worst. Plus, her ankles, and her big, fucking, stupid feet. She hated her life, not because it was bad but

because when you hate your brain and your body, it's hard to enjoy the rest. So, Jules developed a few coping mechanisms. None of them healthy, and a few scary enough to land her in... *Jules is shown to cut her wrists with a soda can in the psychiatric hospital (5:15 – 5:46).*

Through the narration, Jules is shown to exhibit body dysphoric thoughts from an early age. Those thoughts largely include thinking about her body parts such as her feet, knees, shoulders, arms, and hands, but also her stomach, thighs, and chest as too big for a girl as she occupies a male body despite her only starting puberty. Consequently, her self-image and her mental health are shown to deteriorate as she occupies a body that is not what she wants it to be, playing into the “wrong body” trans narrative (see “Trapped in the self-policed CIStem”)

It is, however, insinuated that despite her starting the transition process she did not stop struggling mentally as evident from her use of unhealthy coping mechanisms. At sixteen, Jules is shown to begin repeatedly participating in high-risk sexual behaviour with men. It is insinuated that Jules engaged with men on Grindr (a dating app targeted towards gay men, which is usually used for finding people that want to engage in casual sex), who claimed to be “cis, white, married, engaged, in long-term relationships, and always (...) straight” (7:36-7:46) despite their presence on a queer dating app. In most instances, Jules was shown to play the submissive role in the sexual encounter, in some, it is shown that the men were not only dominating but also violent,

and whenever anything got too uncomfortable...Jules would just imagine that she wasn't really herself, and this wasn't really her life. She was just a character in a

book or a movie or a show. That none of it was real, and if it was, how did it matter? It's not like her body ever really belonged to her in the first place (“s01e04” 8:24-8:46).

It is shown that Jules’ self-destructive behaviour stems from her gender dysphoria and from her feelings she must present and behave like a woman. She is aware of the reality of her non-normative body and is knowledgeable about where to find people who desire her for her non-normativity regardless of the exploitation she experiences within the encounter. It is communicated through her desire to fulfilling the role of the submissive participant in sex, never withdrawing from an uncomfortable or dangerous situation and rather disassociating. Furthermore, Jules also mentions that she never owned her body, and therefore it is rationalized by her that her body can be used as a currency in the heterosexual exchange gaining validation in her social role. Her desire to engage in such high-risk behaviors indicates that if those men who claim to be heterosexual desire Jules, then her womanhood will be cemented and proven as valid.

Furthermore, her desire to conform to stereotypical femininity is communicated through her clothing and makeup choices. At the beginning of the first season, Jules is shown to wear stereotypically feminine-coded clothing such as short skirts, crop tops, and dresses with flower patterns, all in a pastel colour palette. Heidi Bivens, the costume designer for *Euphoria* shares in “all for the style | in conversation with Hunter Schafer & costume designer Heidi Bivens | hbo” that

The colors that [they] chose for Jules specifically, from the beginning, were definitely inspired by Sam [Levinson]'s vision. (...) [F]rom the original notes in the

script, (...) Jules was very feminine, and very (...) candy-colored. And he wrote that she wears a cheerleading, (...) kind of tennis skirt” (Bivens 3:32-3:53).

Furthermore, for *Variety* Bivens states that Jules is meant to wear candy colours and be inspired by the animated show *Sailor Moon*. Furthermore, Bivens expresses her worry about

dress[ing] Jules [in a] very heteronormative [way,] and that [they] wanted to make sure that we weren't leaning into that. Then when [Bivens] received the new scripts for the rest of the season, (...) it became clear to [her] that [Jules] begins to empower herself [and] that she wouldn't feel like she needed to dress for men (4:38-5:06).

Initially, Jules' wardrobe choices reflect her wish to be regarded as a woman desired for her femininity. As a trans woman, Jules bases her visual ideas of womanhood on the stereotypical hegemonic hyperfeminine image of femininity through the media she consumes - feminine characters on TV (such as characters of the animated show *Sailor Moon*) which are shown to perform femininity in an exaggerated fashion. The performance of hyper-femininity by trans women is often shown to as a requirement of transitioning.

Oftentimes trans women are compelled by societal pressures to adhere to the path a similarly hegemonically coded as the animated femininity – an idealized narrative about playing the role of a woman. The mainstream acceptable representation of femininity is judged based on the routinely repeated performance of femininity. In the public eye this is done by trans women such as Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, or the previously mentioned

Blair White. Their performance publicized on magazine covers, on TV, and on the news shows a hyperfeminized image of what the label of woman entails disregarding those who do not wish to adhere to heightened feminine performance. In “The Paradox of Trans Visibility: Interrogating the ‘Year of Trans Visibility’” Stevie N. Berberick writes that,

The paradox of trans visibility is therefore defined (...) as an apparatus that highlights some portions of existence while obscuring others and creating a hyperreal icon of transgender people that is not only near impossible to achieve but also dangerous to those who do not achieve it – through refusal or inaccessibility (124).

By clinging onto such ideals of what femininity is and how a woman should look and act, many trans women including Jules fall into the compulsory performance of one’s identity. Oftentimes, the mainstream highlights the image of trans lives that fits their narrative of glamorous performance while silencing other less normative and less fitting stories such as I the case of *The Vogue’s* “The Year of Trans Visibility” article analyzed by Berberick. It is also alarming that, they focus was specifically on the performance of femininity disregarding transmasculine individuals, dismisses the rising numbers of violence against trans individuals, and only highlights bodies that can pass as cisgender (129).

Consequently, such “stories offer comfort to established imaginaries of what sexed bodies should look like” (129). Jules’ storyline seems to initially follow the trajectory of appeasing the cisheteronormative society and its desire for normativity but shifts as Jules enters a relationship with Rue and begins to unpack her compulsory cisheterosexual ideas about her identity. However, the show insinuates, that Jules is already breaking the

cisheteronormative expectation of what a normative body looks like. She is shown untucked in her (still feminine) underwear on multiple occasions which was a conscious effort of the designer to find untucked-friendly undergarments (Schafer 2:46-2:49) to showcase a trans body without shame.

Furthermore, in the video “euphoria | costumes of euphoria – season 2 | hbo”

Schafer shares about Jules’ style evolution and gender expression that,

we've seen Jules move from this like hyper-feminine, baby doll aesthetic, to something slightly in between, by the end of season one. And then, (...) in season two [her expression is] (...) more androgynous. (...) She's sort of released this need to (...) appease men and to honor (...) how she feels on the inside. Which (...) is [still] pretty feminine, but the form that that femininity takes feels more authentic (Schafer 7:00-7:39).

Schafer mentions that as the season progresses, Jules’ moves away from the image of infantilized womanhood towards a darker aesthetic with the intention to move away from the male gaze and move towards her own self-expression. For *Variety*, Bivens adds how Jules’ colour scheme shifts from candy colours and pinks “into more orange and (...) acid green” (5:47-5:50) which is reflected not only in her wardrobe but in her makeup as well. It is noted in *Allure*’s article about how Jules’ makeup looks are crafted to make the audience “evaluate the way [they] frame masculinity and femininity” (Abelman). Quoted in the aforementioned article, Davy says, that Schafer and Jules, are

artists who want to transcend gender stereotypes, (...) even though the character of Jules is transfeminine, [Davy] wanted to make sure that her makeup looks had a not-too-polished rawness to them that was more experimental and had an artistry to it that wasn't labeling itself as something (Davy qtd. in Abelman).

Davy still uses pinks in Jules' makeup but she does not correlate the hue with gender expression. "Her makeup isn't supposed to be assumed as androgynous, either. She's simply Jules" (Abelman) suggesting Jules' non-conformity in her makeup choices; rather than being read as androgynous, she strives to be viewed as an individual, not a category. Davy is subverting the stereotypical expectation about makeup on feminine presenting people and rather works with the character by incorporating stereotype-subverting elements such as a lack of mascara (Abelman) or black graphic liner in the inner corner<sup>19</sup> notably in episode one season two titled "Trying to Get to Heaven Before They Close the Door".

While season one was very collaborative, in season two, it is apparent that Jules had been majorly sidelined and her character and her choices are lacking the depth of the first season. The sole evidence of her character development can be seen in her progression away from the stereotypically feminine clothing choices that speak for her gender expression and her style evolution that began in late season one. She is shown wearing more pants and trousers, oversized sweaters and sweatshirts, and cargo pants. For example, for the winter formal in episode eight season one titled "And Salt the Earth Behind You",

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<sup>19</sup> The inner corner is usually filled in with lighter and brighter colours

she is dressed in a pantsuit and a long sheer coat with the trans symbol on the back, and the front pieces of her blond hair are dyed black, expressing herself without the hyperfeminine aspects but more importantly, unapologetically celebrating her trans identity.

In one instance in season two, it is revealed in a conversation with a character of Elliot introduced in season two about his sexuality, that Jules is wearing a binder – a garment used to flatten the chest of transmasculine and gender-non-conforming individuals.

[Elliot] You're a trans girl wearing a binder asking me whether I'm straight or gay?

[Jules] Well, I'm navigating a largely straight, binary world...

[Elliot] You sound like you're navigating a Twitter thread. I don't know what that's supposed to mean.

[Jules] But you know what I mean, like most people are straight.

[Elliot] And most trans girls don't wear binders, right?

[Jules] Yeah, and, uh, most guys don't hang out with two girls unless they wanna fuck them.

[Elliot] I didn't say that I didn't wanna fuck you or Rue (“s02e03” 23:36-23:56).

Here, Elliot talks about how he finds it hypocritical for Jules to ask him whether he is straight or gay when she herself does not follow the binary by wearing a binder. This is the first time the audience gets a spoken clue about Jules' non-conformist gender expression despite it being hinted through the visuals since the end of season one through the special tenth episode into the beginning of season two. He also suggests that by talking about the outside-the-binary experience she is presumed to make the debate more “difficult” for people unaware of gender-specific terminology, which according to him weakens her argument. Through Elliot's statement which reads “most trans girls don't wear binders”

the audience is given an insight into a non-normative outside-the-binary experience of what it means to be a transwoman that does no longer follow the hegemonic femininity standard that is often praised and internalized especially among trans women.

### **Finding *Euphoria* in Conquering and Being Conquered**

One of the key ideas mentioned by Jules is her desire to conquer men and therefore conquer femininity. It is apparent from the previous subchapter, that Jules is using her body as a currency in the sexual exchange where she provides her body – hyperfeminized, infantilized, and fetishized, in exchange for the validation of her womanhood. It is noticeable, that she is leaning into the compulsory heterosexual narrative where her womanhood and her femininity can only be validated by manhood and masculinity, fostering an extremely binary heteronormative reality for herself and her immediate surroundings. In “euphoria | unfiltered: Hunter Schafer on Jules Vaughn | HBO” Schafer mentions:

Jules is in constant search of affirmation and "love." Jules being trans-feminine and having this relationship to womanhood, seeing women in her life being treated a certain way by men and a certain dynamic playing out in almost every interaction she's witnessed, (...) it goes back to like something deep-rooted, like...  
 transitioning, wanting to be treated a certain way by a man in order to feel like a woman in this very binary vantage point (0:48-1:24).

Schafer gives insight into a transfeminine experience she can source from her own experience of transitioning as a transfeminine individual. Furthermore, this aspect of Jules’

character is explored in episode five titled "'03 Bonnie and Clyde". There, in a conversation with Rue, when asked about Jules' sexual encounters with men, she shares her indoctrination of compulsory heterosexuality.

[Rue] Is the sex, like, good?

[Jules] I don't know, it's like, it's not even the point, you know? It's more about, like, everything that leads up to it. That's the good part (25:15-25:29).

Here, Jules admits her relationships with men are not about her sexual attraction towards them, but rather the script of it. The process of courting in form of offering oneself on the queer dating app and texting exchange, the process of seduction, and the extreme power imbalance of the relationship reveals what Jules sees as the manifestation of femininity. It is apparent that Jules is not entering such high-risk situations out of the desire for men but out of the desire to be desired by them; craving their validation and feeling the need to appear attractive to them. As that is one of the aspects of the heteropatriarchal normative society that defines womanhood, the opposition to manhood, femininity being the Other to masculinity.

Later in episode seven "The Trials and Tribulations of Trying to Pee While Depressed" Jules visits her friend in the city where she lived before moving to the suburbs. There, she discusses the concept of femininity and how Jules views her own identity.

[Jules] I remember walking out of Sears with my first pair of heels in my backpack. (...) And my heart was fucking racing. (...) Like, it started with that, and then it was clothes and then it was makeup, and eventually hormones. Um, I just kind of kept leveling up.

[Anna] So, what level are you at now

[Jules] I don't know. But I definitely haven't reached my full power.

[Anna] - But you date guys, right?

[Jules] - Date isn't really the right word.

(...)

[Anna]- But you normally hook up with guys.

[Jules] Yeah, but... my relationship to men is weird (...) In my head, it's like. If I can conquer men, then I can conquer femininity.

[Anna] Why do you need a guy to make you feel more feminine? (“s01e07” 38:16 – 39:50)

When Jules talks about her identity, Anna suggests that framing femininity through the gaze of men is not a good solution for authentication of one’s identity. Jules views her use of feminine-coded garments, makeup, hormones, and eventually sexual encounters with men as a marker of legitimacy. By using the aforementioned tools, she can distance herself from her gender dysphoric past into what she deems the desired ideal. For her, the marker of legitimacy is a sign of “levelling up” towards what she describes as “a full potential”. Jules is unaware of what that is yet but is willing to transform herself in order to reach it.

In the “Fuck Anyone Who’s Not a Sea Blob” episode, Jules brings up the conversation she had with Anna and the feelings she gathered from it during her therapy session. Prior to the special episode, in their article, Alison Herman mentions that “Jules’s identity certainly influences her experience with hookup apps and romantic fantasies, but it’s also gone largely unstated” (Herman) the special episode opens the debate about Jules’s changing relationship with her gender expression. She shares with the therapist her evolving narrative about her own identity and her relationship with men. In retrospect, she shares:

I feel like I’ve framed my entire womanhood around men. When, like, in reality,

I’m no longer interested in men. Like, philosophically. (...) Like, what men want is

so boring. And simple, and not creative, and (...) I look at myself, and I'm like, how the fuck did I spend my entire life building (...) my body, and my personality, and (...) my soul around what I think men desire? (...) [I]t's embarrassing. I feel like a... a fraud ("s01e10" 4:30- 5:30).

Jules shares her definite lack of interest in men and blames herself that she wasted time performing femininity in exchange for male validation she does not deem necessary anymore. She labels male desire as simple and not creative, distancing herself from such relationships. She vocalizes her inner struggle about what she wants in comparison with what she thinks men want. Consequently, she feels like "a fraud" for playing into the cisheteronormative narrative that does not serve her re-imagining her identity without the direct interference of the male gaze.

Jules also shares how she views herself in the world and ponders about being conquered by the hegemonic idea of femininity perpetrated not only by men but also by women, who tend to look for flaws (such as body insecurities, ill-fitting or cheap clothing, chipped nail polish, etc.) in order to place themselves in an imaginary hierarchy of the femininity performance (8:14-8:34). This hierarchy is formed based on pointing out imperfections - diversions from the acceptable norm for feminine-presenting individuals. Jules shares how these flaws are then given the significance needed for perpetuating a certain ideal rid of unwanted behaviour. Such hierarchy practices include the adherence to beauty standards such as judgments of the face and body and socioeconomic judgment of clothing choices. They continue with her own perception of herself as a fraudulent image of a human.

[therapist] [So,] I'm looking at an avatar she created in reaction to the world?

[Jules] Yeah. Yeah. I'm here. You know. But you're looking at, like, a million layers of other people that I've grabbed and clung to throughout my entire life. That's, like, that's terrifying. It— I mean, that's why I think when I was talking to my friend about this (...) we were talking about how, I feel like my entire life, I've been trying to conquer femininity, and somewhere along the way, I feel like femininity conquered me (5:53-7:53).

Jules expresses how she formed her own personhood around what people around her deemed desirable, including men and other women instead of forming her identity and expression based on her own ideals. When talking about men, she describes her distaste towards them for the simplistic needs of their male desire. When talking about women, Jules stresses the perpetuation of hegemonic gendered power division through the judgment they cast on other women to create a mental hierarchy based on the adherence to acceptable hegemonic femininity. Consequently, Jules formed her person around the ideas of those two groups forming an avatar and eventually being conquered by the narrative of femininity that she internalized from her surroundings. She views femininity as an entity that must be conquered through the sexual conquest of men and the social conquest of women. Consequently, she is playing into the system of power imbalance that denies access to it to women and feminine presenting people and makes them fight among each other for it.

Furthermore, back in episode seven season one, when discussing her identity with Anna and TC, apart from her relationship with men, Jules continues the discussion and brings up her relationship with femininity.

[Anna] So have you? (...) Conquered femininity?

[Jules] I don't know. But it's not like I even want to conquer it. It's like I want to fuckin' obliterate it. And then move on to the next level. And the next, and the next. (...) Yeah. I don't really know what the means, or looks like, but- I want it.

[TC]- Queerness is infinite.

Jules suggested that seducing men, dominating them from a submissive perspective allowed her to dominate femininity. Assuring herself that she is what a “real woman” is despite her not being born in a female body. However, from her narrative, femininity is something that must be conquered to be surpassed, suggesting she sees femininity as a hurdle on her journey. By conquering femininity Jules steps into the role of the conqueror, the one dominating the submissive Jules expects to be empowered by it. She sees femininity as a level-up, as something to be achieved rather than be settled in, for Jules, femininity is not an end goal. She wants to obliterate femininity. She is stepping outside the enforced label of submission reclaiming the narrative of domination. In Jules’ case it is a sign of her diversion from conforming to the gender binary by trying to rid herself of the constraints of a narrow label. Jules says that she wants to move on to the next level after conquering femininity even though she does not know what that is. Furthermore, her friend suggests that “queerness is infinite” pointing out that gender as well as sexuality is not a binary opposition and has room for “leveling up” implying that one does not have to settle for an end goal of binary femininity.

The special episode offers a closer look at Jules’ struggle with her gender expression as she is also battling the binary assumptions about gender that are projected on her from her surroundings including her therapist. When Jules says that she wants to go off her hormones, the therapist immediately assumes that she wants to detransition (3:40-3:55)

however, that's not Jules' case. She just begins to redefine her role and her transness for herself instead of carefully curating it for other people, contrary to how she has been doing in the past. She mentions that she was thinking about what's next, as she already feels like she conquered femininity. She realizes that the role of a woman does not fit her properly, including her relationship with men, other women, and herself. The character continues to explain why they want to go off hormones, more specifically her puberty blocker Supprelin, which "stops [her] voice from dropping, [Her] balls from getting bigger, you know? The kind of shit that men wouldn't find desirable" ("s01e10" 12:49-12:57). The audience is presented with an active shift of focus towards an image that is, according to Jules, less desirable for men but feels more authentic for her. Additionally, by removing her puberty blockers, which are under her skin, she is shedding the imaginary internalized but also literal block that builds a wall between the carefully curated male-gaze-centric Lolita-esque image of womanhood, and her authentic self.

Afterwards, Jules continues to share her past experience with her identity, talking about the initial fear of puberty as an inescapable irreversible process that would cut her from the potential of femininity.

I've always thought of puberty as, like, a broadening, or a deepening, or like, a, a thickening. Which I, I think is, like, why I was always so scared of it, (...) 'Cause in my head, women were always, like, small and thin and delicate, and... You know, so, like, the thought of puberty, like this... irreversible, forever fucking metamorphosis was just, like, fucking terrifying. And, (...) when it happened, I'd just, like, end up on the other side. Like, stuck. Or even worse, just, like, a man.

Like, like, through and through. And then femininity would always be this (...), elusive, distant thing, (...) unreachable (13:06- 14:00).

Jules saw puberty as something that would take away from her being able to perform idealized femininity as she was indoctrinated that there is one narrow path towards femininity. By undergoing male puberty, she would lose her access to this path, unable to reach it. She mentions that in the past she believed that women are allowed to exist strictly within a narrow set of rules – they should be “small, and thin, and delicate”, the rules of hegemonic femininity. It was shown that those feelings of diverting from this ideal were already present in Jules’ consciousness in the early stages of puberty as was shown in the previous subchapter, however, here the audience is presented with a more well-rounded reaction to why she did not feel initially comfortable in her body; she knew that she was not a man. And the process of puberty was a daunting matter as it implies “broadening, or a deepening, and a thickening” which was incompatible with her narrative of womanhood. But also, Jules is now questioning womanhood despite her past desire to reach it.

Furthermore, Jules confesses that, in her mind, there is not one ideal she wants to follow. Jules conveys her gender expression through the assumed expression of femininity within inanimate objects.

But (...) then, I think about beautiful things that are also broad and deep, and thick, and I think of... something like the ocean. I think, like... that I want to be as beautiful as the ocean. ‘Cause the ocean’s strong as fuck. And feminine as fuck. And, like, both are what makes the ocean the ocean (14:03- 14:35).

Jules uses abstract terms such as the ocean to express her identity. It shows that she sees herself outside the binary ideal, she sees her expression as non-normative, open, and ready to express herself outside the expected societal gender narratives. Because, for Jules “being trans is spiritual (...), it’s not religious. It’s not, like, for some congregation. It’s for [her]. It’s [hers]. It belongs to [her]. And [she] do[es]n’t ever want to stand still. Like, [she] want[s] to be alive. (...) that’s what this has always been about, (...) staying alive (15:19-15:46). Just like her initial need for transition, her current redefinition of what her identity means to her is about survival and about occupying space as authentically as possible.

### **Finding *Euphoria* in the Exploitation of Queerness**

Despite being shown to be confident and generally comfortable in her skin and expression, the way Jules is treated by people around her reads as exploitative and often plays into the portrayal of the suffering queer protagonist. Through Cal and Nate, and Elliot the audience is presented with a certain level of exploitation, however, the exploitative tactics are not only done through specific characters but are present through the authorial gaze as well.

When it comes to Cal and his son Nate, both characters are queer and both of them have been linked sexually and romantically with Jules. In the case of Cal, he is shown in season one as the unfaithful closeted father of Nate. In his infidelity, he is sexually linked to trans women and gay men whom he meets in motels in secrecy, and without the other party’s consent is taping their sexual encounters and keeping the recordings (which are at the age of eleven discovered by his son Nate). Jules is one of the queer people he is

sexually intertwined and during their meeting, he mentions his envy towards Jules and people of her generation.

[Cal] Do you walk around like this?

[Jules] What do you mean?

[Cal] Well, this is how you look generally?

[Jules] I mean... yeah.

[Cal] You're beautiful.

[Jules] Thank you.

[Cal] I'm envious of your generation, you know. You guys don't care as much about the rules. You know, I think that's a good thing. And I don't want to be that old guy that gives you advice, but I look at you and I think there are two versions of how your life can go. You can either go someplace, where you're wanted for who you are. Or you can stay in a town like this. End up like me. Living your life out in motel rooms (“s01e1” 31:36 -32:41).

Cal insinuates that the younger generation has nowadays the freedom to be queer and that this queerness and expression is freeing. In season two episode three titled "Ruminations: Big and Little Bullys", the audience is presented with Cal's backstory about his queerness and how he had to terminate his romantic relationship with his best friend as his girlfriend announced her pregnancy. By stating “do you walk around like this? (...) this is how you look generally?” Cal compares his experience of queerness to Jules' alluding to a shift in societal expectation and stress put on queer people. Cal stresses the non-normativity in Jules' trans expression despite her adhering to the fetishized feminine ideal but deems her non-normativity beautiful; an expression of one's true self without the scrutiny of the heteronormative narrative. It is evident that Cal is living out his queerness vicariously through his non-heterosexual encounters, wishing his life was not as restrictive as he is closeted. He even advises Jules to leave the suburbs that still, according to Cal, cast

prejudice on non-normative expressions as he feels unwanted for his queerness and assumes the same for Jules' experience. He is using himself as an example of how a person deteriorated when repressing their queer self. Consequently, he is exploiting those openly queer as a gateway towards self-expression while clearly suffering in his performed heteronormativity.

Cal's son Nate character also struggles to express himself and is using Jules to channel his frustration from being forced (by society and by his internalization of it) to perform heterosexuality and hypermasculinity. When he first meets Jules in episode one season one, he tries to intimidate her to sustain his status. Despite him stating how she dresses for attention, he feels threatened by her unapologetic expression ("s01e01" 45:50-45:53) and this pattern of self-inflicted restriction drives his aggressive behaviour towards his sexual and romantic partners, his family, and his surroundings. The character of Nate is presented through the queer villain narrative where Levinson plays into the narrative of Nate's poor behaviour being caused by his queerness. Noir labels such narrative technique as "queer blame opportunism" (5:27) in her video titled "Euphoria: The Curated Collection of Clichés", where Nate's queerness is to blame instead of stressing the tremendous impact that the sex tape viewing had on him. As he is aware of his father's tape with Jules, he forms a persona named Tyler, which he uses to catfish Jules on the same queer dating app used by Cal. Despite what seems to be a genuine interest, in episode four titled "Shook Ones Pt.II" Nate reveals his identity after collecting nude photos Jules sent him and tries to blackmail her under the pretense of protecting his father's reputation playing into the narrative of how queerness is inherently dangerous.

[Nate] God, are you broken inside. And that's precisely why I don't trust you. Because you're so broken you don't even trust yourself. And that's scary. Not just for you, but for me. And for my entire family. (...) Over the last three weeks, you have knowingly produced and distributed child pornography. Including obscene images that were taken on school property. I've compiled all these photos, along with an IP address, and an account that's linked to your name I don't know if you're familiar with child pornography laws in this state. But they apply to minors just as they apply to adults.

[Jules] I sent them to you.

[Nate] No. You sent them to an account of a person that doesn't fucking exist. And I mean, anyone can anonymously report child pornography, right?

[Jules] Then I'd tell them everything.

[Nate] – Okay, you could do that, but, um... here's what would definitely happen. You'd end up on a sex offenders list. It means no more college. It's gonna be very fucking difficult to find a job. And everywhere you go, for the rest of your life, you'll be harassed, and spat at, and treated like a fucking animal (“s01e04” 47:28-49:16).

By pointing out the mistreatment Jules would undergo once she would be labeled as a sex offender, it is apparent that Nate plays into the societal internalization of trans/queer people seen as predators or sex offenders (this tactic can be seen in current discourse around furthering trans rights (Schilt and Westbrook 27)). Despite her ability to pass, her transness would be exposed without her consent during college applications and job interviews. But also, by doing so Nate exposes his own narratives about queerness as undesirable and as a source of trouble. He is aware of the “pearl-clutching” and “think of the children” (Stoker Bruenig) moral panics around queer and trans narratives, fearing his own queer identity being discovered. Like his father, he perpetuates the hypermasculine heteronormative persona to prevent others from uncovering his queerness. However, Nate’s negative attitude towards non-normativity is formed based on his father’s secrecy about his sexuality. Because he has been watching his father engage sexually with non-cis women, he internalized the existence of gay men and more importantly trans women as

morally wrong, and therefore undesirable to associate with. He views non-normativity as a weakness and both he and his father are flabbergasted by how Jules is unapologetically non-normative in some parts of her presentation. Nate unleashes his fear-based aggression onto Jules not solely because she is part of the community that is present in Nate's trauma, he does so because she exposes his deep seeded fear of vulnerability and lack of power that comes with his gendered performance of hypermasculinity.

Furthermore, Both Nate and Cal are envious of Jules' expression and are attracted to her queerness but Nate's deep seeded fear of being outed by his desire for her makes him abuse her. Despite Nate being pulled towards Jules, he justifies his poor behaviour towards her through his viewing of queerness as inherently bad and affirming of his own non-normative sexuality. Both Nate and his father are shown to project their own non-normativity-driven fears onto her person and exploit Jules' identity for affirming their sexuality. However, in the case of Cal being sexually involved with Jules affirms his queerness, and in the case of Nate refusing to be involved with her refutes his it. It has been stated in "The Problematic Structure Of Jules in Euphoria" by Mathilda Hogberg, that Jules is viewed as someone who makes men gay for being interested in her, which perpetuates the idea that she is not a real woman. However, it should be argued that that is the point of the narrative, as Jules herself labels Both Nate and Cal as gay ("s01e03" 49:52 – 50:00). Jules' expression is non-normative, she is portrayed as a person on a journey towards expression outside the binary instead of someone rigidly cemented inside a box. Hogberg's commentary argues that the story discredits trans women, for it is labeling men who are interested in her as gay, however, this narrative perpetuates the "wrong body"

model of binary trans people, instead of embracing their difference commentaries like the one by Hogberg perpetuates assimilation.

Similarly, Hogberg argues that Jules' relationship with Elliot is problematic also, as he expresses his desire for both men and women. She deems this to also discredit Jules' identity as a woman for her involvement with someone who is not strictly heterosexual. The same argument mentioned above of Jules leaning into her non-binary trans expression can be used to disprove her claim. The issue with Elliot and his relationship with Jules, however, does not lie in his sexuality, rather it rests in his exploitation of the friendship he has with Rue and Jules and his conquest of her person despite her being in a relationship. In one instance in episode three season two, Elliot tries to make Jules doubt her relationship with Rue by persuading her that Rue and she are not sexually compatible as Rue is less sexual than her who has more experience with sexual intimacy.

[Elliot]: I wouldn't blame yourself.

[Jules] I'm not.

[Elliot]- I'm just saying it's, like, easy to take that kind of stuff personally.

[Jules] Are you, like, trying to be an asshole right now?

[Elliot] I'm being sweet right now.

[Jules] How is that sweet?

[Elliot] 'Cause you're very fucking fuckable.

[Jules]- Why?

[Elliot] I mean, you're fascinating, right? 'Cause you're creative and you're smart, you're kind of fucked up. But you're cute, and you're awkward, and you're like... kind of clumsy but you're very much a whore, intentionally, which is great. You know, you're like extroverted and weird, but also introverted and shy... and your art is amazing. They should hang it up at fucking MoMA. But on like a more superficial note, you have great tits. And you and Kurt Cobain have the same

haircut... which is hot. (...) But I'm sure Rue told you all that. You guys are in love, right? (52:32-53:39)

Despite Jules' confession, which she made on multiple occasions about not being interested in men anymore, the story introduces Elliot as her new sexual partner despite her being in a relationship with Rue. Elliot is inserting himself in the relationship by leaning into what she wants to hear – acknowledging her creativity and artistry, not shaming her for being sexual in past (from which he would benefit as he is driven by his desire for a sexual relationship with her). Furthermore, he also leans into her gender expression when he acknowledges her femininity in form of her breasts and her masculinity in form of her haircut resembling Kurt Cobain's hair. He insinuates that he knows her better than Rue and he tells her what she wants to hear, therefore he should be granted her sexual and romantic attention. Furthermore, Elliot acknowledging her queerness instead of “just” accepting it (as it has been done by Rue) creates an environment of assumed comfort made on false pretense. It is shown that with Elliot, Jules can lean into her non-normativity. For example, in episode three, season two, as was already discussed in the previous chapter, Elliot acknowledges her wearing a binder and during a game of truth or dare, Elliot dares Jules to urinate standing up in the middle of the street to which she exclaims “All right. Sure, yes! Gender-fuck me, please!” (“s02e03” 32:52-33:01) insinuating that such act goes against the normative way bodies look and act, but Jules is not against the performance of non-normativity as it plays into her own perception of herself outside the gender binary matrix. Jules goes back to her old ways of coping as she has an affair with Elliot, despite her being in a relationship with Rue who is still struggling with addiction.

### 4.4 Comparing and Contrasting what *Feels Good* with the Feelings of *Euphoria*

Despite the many similarities between the two shows analysed above, such as their depiction of gender-non-conformity, addiction, and systemic exploitation, their approach towards these topics, and especially topics regarding gender vary significantly. There are four categories intersecting through both shows that shall be evaluated to analyse specific themes and their use present in feminist, queer, and trans narratives. The categories are the visual representation of the genderqueer characters, their relationship with gender, the exploitation of their gender and sapphic identity, and the author and their impact on the show. After contrasting each show within each category, a conclusion of which stereotypical portrayals are used and how they impact the genderqueer representation shall be drawn.

#### **The Variety in Visual Representation of Gender-Non-Conformity**

As was discussed in Chapter 3 “Hegemonic Non-Binary identity?” when it comes to the concept of looking non-binary, there are consequences for appeasing the image as well as diverting from it. Both Mae’s and Jules’ performances are judged in under the binary opposition they are closer to. Mae – AFAB, is on the spectrum of gender expression on the more stereotypically masculine side. They wear short hair, dress in the realms of masculinity and androgyny, and opt for no makeup. Their gender expression and desire to not occupy the rigid binary of the female label are often mocked as was the case with Binky, Arnie, and Donna. By a stranger, they would often be read as masculine and would be treated accordingly (e.g., they are given the bill). Jules on the other hand - AMAB,

starts in season one as hyperfeminine, with her expression resembling an infantilized feminine image inspired by the idealized femininity found in animation – such as *Sailor Moon*. As they progress on their self-realization journey, Jules starts to divert away from the hyperfeminine image toward expressing androgyny. She is wearing makeup, but it is unconventional rather than conformist and serves as a signifier of her artistic expression rather than her gender.

Mae is often called out for their gender-non-conformity, while Jules's expression is rarely credited to gender-non-conformity and rather is read as solely feminine and is ascribed to their artistic nature. Only in a few instances is Jules made to question her expression. One of them deriving from her sexual encounter with Cal, and one coming from the questionable love interest Elliot. In the last instance, Jules is asked about wearing a binder, which is unusual for someone who in the past subscribed exclusively to femininity in its hegemonic form. Apart from those, no one else is explicitly questioning her non-normative gender expression and assigns her the label woman. However, this variation might be caused by the generational difference between those two shows. While *Feel Good* depicts people in their late twenties, thirties, and even forties, *Euphoria* is focused on people in high school. In one instance, this aspect of generational difference is brought up while Jules' gender expression is questioned by Cal (who is in his forties) admiring her for her confidence in her femininity and comparing his own queer experience with hers living through her unapologetic expression.

While *Feel Good* does not dwell on visuals and costume designs as much, *Euphoria*'s major communication device is exactly that. Most of the story relies on the

senses such as the visual or the auditory - the colour schemes for each character, the score that follows certain emotions, and also the costume choices. While Mae fits into the image of the hegemonic non-binary individual fabricated by society almost perfectly, Jules represents something different. Despite her being slender, white, and conventionally attractive, she does not fit into what would be deemed hegemonically non-binary. She represents a divergence from the ideal perpetuated by the media (as seen in 5.1). In Jules, the audience is shown a visual progression of an individual that is so ridden by her desire to fulfill a role she was assigned by society when she decided to undergo transition in order to be more herself. But instead of truly being herself, she molds her whole presence according to a distorted image of a desirable woman in the eyes of hegemony. However, slowly Jules is shown to deconstruct her relationship with femininity and the male gaze to be authentically herself and begins to express herself in the realms outside the binary and outside any stereotype – feminine, masculine, and androgynous.

### **Relationship with Gender – Internalization and Binarity**

In *Feel Good*, the character is much more explicit and consistent about their relationship with gender. We follow Mae and their gradual progress in discovering their authenticity. The audience is shown the slow trajectory of Mae's identity deconstruction. Despite the character being very flawed their relationship with gender presents an intriguing retrospection into what it means to be constantly gendered in our society, while the assumed gendered label does not fit. They are shown to both battle their relationship with femininity and welcome their relationship with masculinity. They are discussing their body and mind, as well as their place within society, pondering what their role should and

could be. The audience gets a consistent and well-rounded image of someone, who is slowly unfolding their trauma, and part of it is their gender expression. In comparison, Jules, as only one of many characters in the show, is not given as much screen time as the main protagonist of *Feel Good*. Therefore, her understanding of her gender is not really talked about until halfway through season one and it is explored in depth in the special episode which was the least reviewed episode of the two seasons of *Euphoria*<sup>20</sup>, and she is majorly sidelined in season two. Jules' relationship with gender is very interesting as she moves from the struggles of a dysphoric child into a teen who assures herself in her transitioned body by using it as currency into someone who is deconstructing their binary perception of gender scraping binary thinking altogether.

As was discussed in "Trapped in the self-policed CISTem", body and gender dysphoria can be a part of the trans non-binary experience. Mae has dysphoria and wants to escape their AFAB body including their breasts, wishing for a penis to be able to conceive a child and satisfy George. Jules had dysphoria as a child wanting to escape her AMAB body, then moves onto femininizing and then shifts into someone who is wearing a binder and expressing gender euphoria when given compliments about her non-normativity when Elliot admires both her feminine breasts and masculine Kurt Cobain hairstyle. However, Jules is not shown to explicitly struggle with her body in the show. Though, it is likely that, as she is not very present in season two, the audience does not get the chance to notice her shift in gender expression she explains in depth in the special

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<sup>20</sup> According to IMDb, the special episode received 4290 ratings which is the least out of all the episodes currently available

episode. Instead, Jules' evolution and readjustment of her expression are pushed to the background and apart from a brief discussion about wearing a binder with Elliot are widely dismissed.

In comparison to Mae, whose gender non-conformity is pointed out from the first episode and whose experience with gender and sexuality is quite central to the story, it is apparent that Jules' identity in *Euphoria* is not initially a center point of her story. Schafer even stated that it is not the intention of the story to view Jules' identity before her person<sup>21</sup>. However, as the story progresses and Schafer gets involved in the writing, though not central to the story, the non-conformity of her gender expression alters Jules' narrative significantly, especially through the special episode narration. However, the snippets of self-perception of Jules' gender show that her desired femininity does not come from the human performance of it. Rather, Jules describes her femininity as relating to inanimate objects. As she progresses on her journey, she turns away from the hegemonic idea of femininity and describes her identity in less specific terms when she associates her gender with the femininity of the ocean. Furthermore, she is pleased when compared to Kurt Cobain. This occurrence is very similar to what is shown in *Feel Good*, where Mae describes her gender as an anemic scarecrow and as a personification of Adam Driver and Ryan Gosling.

Finally, it is important to get a story that does not center on the struggle of queer identity, for example, the narrative of coming out. In the case of Jules, it is not a struggle

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<sup>21</sup> See Schafer in Stack

but a broadening and re-definition of internalized binary thinking, an attempt to reach the next level, full potential instead of being crammed into a labeled box limiting one's expression. And in the case of Mae, the story centers on the relationships they have and how they navigate them while fighting addiction. Though they struggle with their gender identity when repressed, as an integral part of their life their gender expression is brought up bringing them relief once they grasp its vastness.

### **Gendered Relationships and Exploitation of the Sapphic Non-Normative Identity**

Concerning relationships, Mae's non-heterosexual relationships are what is one of the sources of the exploitation they experience. As a bisexual individual, they are shown to be interested in stereotypically feminine women such as George, or Lava. However, it was indicated that they were entangled with men who are not as masculine such as Scott and Jack (a long-time friend and a colleague). In both cases, Mae is seen not to be interested in overtly masculine characters as they themselves wish to fulfil the masculine role and validate their gender expression. However, it can be argued that as Mae evolves and accepts their non-binary trans identity the gender expression of their partner is not as important.

Jules on the other hand had sexual relationships with a variety of men, but notably with Cal, who exudes hegemonic masculinity and often leans into hypermasculinity. She also falls for Nate/Tyler who is like his father hegemonically masculine visually and socially. As she deconstructs her desire for male validation her desires shift and Jules starts dating Rue who is not explicitly feminine but leans towards androgyny, hooks up with Anna who is fairly feminine and finally is shown to engage with Elliot who does not

subscribe to hegemonic masculinity. It is evident that as Jules' relationship with gender changes, so do her love interests. She shifts from desiring hypermasculinity validating her hyper-femininity towards a less defined territory.

Furthermore, when it comes to the perception of the sapphic relationship from the outside, both the relationships in *Feel Good* and *Euphoria* are shown to be exploited, often by men. In the case of Mae and George's relationship, their relationship has been violated many times. This includes Arnie, Scott, and Jared. Arnie encourages Mae to share their intimacy with George and later tries to have sex with Mae despite them being in a relationship. Scott feels entitled to seeing them be intimate (kissing) and Jared first fetishizes them kissing in the hospital and then assumes that he has a chance with George despite her dating Mae. At the same time, Mae is exploited for her queer non-normative identity and expression by the entertainment industry including Donna and Arnie. They are meant to expose their core including their gender identity to serve the industry, as queerness is a profitable asset. Often, they are treated poorly and reduced only to their label, instead of seeing Mae as a whole person, Donna and Arnie are trying to exploit them disregarding their feelings.

In the case of Jules, though not very prevalent, she is also exploited for her queer sapphic identity by Elliot when he labels them lesbian ("s02e04" 20:26-20:34) but continues to seduce Jules. Furthermore, Jules is exploited by the men who sleep with her, including Cal, who uses her as a source of fantasy. because she is a trans woman in a non-normative body she is used by them to both quench their thirst for queer sex (as they find

for Jules on Grindr) while assuring themselves about their dominance over someone who they deem inferior by being in a submissive position assuring their masculinity.

### **The Author, the Intention, and the Experience**

Regarding the author, it is important to realize their intentions with the portrayal of underrepresented narratives such as trans and genderqueer stories. With that goes their own experience of the storyline, or alternatively their willingness to let people who do have such experience into the writer's room. The main difference between the two shows is the authors' experience in the aforementioned narratives. In *Feel Good*, the show was written by Mae Martin and co-written by Joe Hampson. It follows loosely Martin's life experience. The author is non-binary and bisexual; therefore, they were able to create an authentic sensitive image of what it feels like to go through life as a queer gender-non-conforming individual. Martin often talks about their experiences in stand-up comedy, however, as they themselves say, both their stand-up performance and their TV performance are a dramatized and "a fictionalized version" (Hattenstone) of their life. Martin is therefore often reluctant to share their real-life experience "because it inevitably leads to a compare-and-contrast with the show" (Hatterstone) and clashes with their storytelling. Furthermore, Mae Martin is very open about their non-binary identity, and despite the show being co-written with Hampson, Martin is often the one praised for the show and its success as the majority of it comes from their experience and their stand-up comedy skits. Martin's intention see to be in a dramatized yet still realistic portrayal of someone struggling with addiction and their gender expression and how they navigate the world. It is not, however, solely based on experience, but the final product depends on the

intentions behind forming it. Martin, as an open trans activist<sup>22</sup> fights and educates their audience, both through their presence online as well as through their comedy. In *Feel Good*, the exploration and explanation of Mae's gender was done thoughtfully, especially as the character of Mae is at first dismissive towards non-normative labels but later finds relief in them. This is significant also because after struggling with their gender throughout the two seasons unable to grasp it within their binary view, the acceptance coming from George when she shares with Mae that how they describe gender might be the manifestation of their non-binary identity brings Mae liberation as the show comes to its close.

On the other hand, Levinson's story does have some biographical elements as he briefly collaborated with Schafer on season one and co-written the special episode between seasons one and two. However, as he does in his other projects<sup>23</sup>, Levinson often uses his characters as a medium and pushes his worldviews into his characters. One of the most glaring examples of this treatment is Jules' infidelity with Elliot. Because ultimately, this shift in Jules' character seems disingenuous to the emotional and philosophical progress of rejecting men altogether she explains in the special episode and is used to evoke unpredictability through a shocking turn of events. The author changed his attitude during the filming of season two as it was postponed due to the covid pandemic. Zendaya shares for *The Cut* that "There are very few things that remain in the version you're now seeing", Many characters have been sidelined including Jules, and Levinson seemed to omit the

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<sup>22</sup> As an example of their activism, Martin responded to Bette Midler's transphobic tweet, see Hansford

<sup>23</sup> Such as *Malcolm and Marie*, see Deschanel (11:28-13:39)

extensive planning and collaboration that was done during season one which made the show so authentic. It seems that his decisions are based on the shock factor rather than responsible storytelling. In an interview for *Thrillist*, one of the actors in the show, Sydney Sweeney, shares her conversation with Levinson about her character storyline. She mentions that Levinson wanted the new season to be more extreme (Bell) which “seems to be his approach for every plotline this season. What’s the craziest thing this person can do - regardless of whatever we had built for them last season?” (20:03-20:13) shares Broey Deschanel in “Euphoria and the Art of Navel Gazing.” It is evident that Levinson relies on shocking plot twists disregarding their impact on the characters’ authentic portrayal.

Consequently, there is a stark difference between the portrayal of Jules through a cisgender, heterosexual, male point of view of Levinson and the point of view of Schafer’s trans, feminist and queer<sup>24</sup> narration that shines through in the special episode. Unfortunately, because of this narrative collision, the portrayal of Jules suffers from inconsistency. Consequently, Levinson often falls into exploiting his characters, who are often part of an oppressed group, for shock value or as a megaphone for his own desires. As a result, his identity overshadows the authenticity of the sidelined narratives and instead is misusing minority characters to tell stories he wants to hear instead of those whom the minority/oppressed groups need to hear. In a YouTube interview, Zendaya shares how “all the characters are just like different facets of [Levinson’s] personality” (1:29-1:35) and it is apparent, especially in season two which is less scripted and more

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<sup>24</sup> See Shatto

driven by Levinson's intuition which inherently drives the story away from the characters' authenticity.

### **Stereotypes Old and New**

Finally, it must be determined which stereotypes are used when depicting genderqueer characters and whether those stereotypes are solely a rebranding of stereotypes used for other minority groups such as queer people or women. The first archetypal portrayal present in both shows is the enforcement of gender roles and dominance in relationships. This is present in both shows. In *Feel Good*, Mae feels the desire to perform masculinity in connection to their more masculine appearance. Furthermore, they are expected to fit into the enforced binary heteronormative script of the butch-femme dynamic. The outside pressure initially came from George, as she insisted on Mae wearing the strap-on and avoiding wearing it herself. In the case of Jules, her initial desire to appear hyperfeminine, fulfill the submissive sexual role, and offer her body in the heterosexual power exchange allude to her need for male validation. As she moves away from the desire to appease the male gaze, by rejecting the hyperfeminine aspects of her initial performance she can lean into a less submissive position, dominating the construct of gender.

Next, given the manufactured box that is the hegemonic non-binary identity discussed in Chapter 3, both shows treat the hegemonic stereotypical portrayal of a genderqueer character slightly differently. In *Feel Good*, this is tied to Mae's androgynous, masculine-leaning demeanor which fits the hegemonic representation often shown on TV (see "The Formative Power of Representation"). They are a slender, white, androgynous,

able-bodied, and attractive individual. They do not wear makeup and are often in clothing more often seen in men. While Jules' expression first reads hyperfeminine and only after unsubscribing to the harmful behaviour connected to her performance of hyper-femininity does she begin to lean into what might resemble the hegemonic non-binary identity. However, despite her being white, slender, attractive, and able-bodied, as an artist, Jules leans more creative with her expression. She is combining masculine and feminine features using clothing and makeup to express herself, which often reads more feminine as male fashion is often bland, lacking in colour or non-traditional shapes and patterns. Though she does not have "boyish" short hair, she is complimented for sharing a haircut with Kurt Cobain a male musician. Therefore, she resembles an individual whose expression does not overtly follow the ideal stated above and rather expresses herself as she is. Furthermore, both Schafer<sup>25</sup> and Davy<sup>26</sup> stress that Jules is moving towards androgyny away from femininity as well as not being particularly feminine, masculine, or androgynous. but being "simply Jules" (Davy).

Furthermore, both shows portray a form of fetishization of lesbian and genderqueer existence. However, for *Feel Good*, as Martin assumingly experienced a form of fetishization of their relationships in the past, the treatment of it in the show is not exploitative. The show displays the struggles that the sapphic couple undergoes including the fetishization of their love usually by men, namely Arnie, Scott, and Jared. The last one - Jared disregards their relationship as valid and places his own heterosexual attraction

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<sup>25</sup> In "euphoria | costumes of euphoria – season 2 | hbo"

<sup>26</sup> In Ableman

towards George above their sapphic relationship. In the case of *Euphoria*, the character of Elliot also disregards Jules' relationship with Rue pursuing her despite her being in a sapphic relationship; here Levinson plays into the cheating bisexual trope, after explicitly labeling Rue and Jules as lesbian. However, unlike in *Feel Good*, Jules is shown to engage with him both emotionally and sexually despite repeatedly stating that she is no longer interested in men and despite being in a relationship with Rue.

Similarly, though both shows depict some sort of exploitation of the queer identity, each handles it in diametrically different ways. Mae's exploitation in the story is credited to the entertainment industry's desire for sensationalism. Mae is exploited for their queerness by Donna and by Arnie, however, they became aware of it and can escape. Despite their suffering, Mae is shown to resolve their trauma and escape the suffering they experienced. However, Jules is being exploited by both the characters in the show, and also by the author, who is using Jules' identity to forward the narrative playing into the "queer suffering" trope. Apart from the men who used Jules' queer body as a sexual object onto which they could project their insecurities, belittling her to uphold themselves, the author is the one using the queer character and makes them undergo hardship for shock value. In "Euphoria: The Curated Collection of Clichés" Tee Noir talks about Levinson's character choices regarding Jules. She says that "Jules might be one of, if not the most irresponsibly written character on this show" (35:27-35:36) and she describes her character as a "confused, impulsive, restless, deceitful character" (35:55-36:00). She continues by stating that she "just wish[s] they would have assigned those characteristics to any other

character but the trans one” (36:06-36:17) which brings up the element of exploitation of the intersectional character.

While Martin and Hampson allude to the existence of such tropes (such as the queer suffering, and the fetishization of queer and trans identities), they subvert them by not finalizing them and not using them for shock value. Unfortunately, Levinson is exploiting Jules’ character playing into harmful tropes such as the cheating bisexual (Mint 67) as well as leaning into the “bury your gays” trope (Hulan 17) portraying the couple as destined to fail by depicting them recreating tragic couples. In episode four season two, Levinson portrays Rue and Jules as the lovers from *Ghost*, *Titanic*, *Brokeback Mountain*, or even the tragic couple behind the main characters’ names *Romeo and Juliet* shown earlier in the show in episode six season one titled "The Next Episode" during a Halloween party. Consequently, in every intertextual portrayal depicting a heterosexual couple Jules plays the female character while Rue plays the male character which only further alienates their love story as it cements Jules in her feminine role which she is desperately trying to escape. However, Also the author alludes to Jules and Rue’s relationship to be tragic as the common denominator of all the shows mentioned above being that all are tragic love stories.

Finally, in its entirety, *Feel Good’s* autobiographical nature provides a unique view of a life of a non-binary person without the added layer of cisgender experience. Martin explores the struggles from many angles including the understanding of one’s place and self-acceptance in a world that generally does not acknowledge or is not educated about genderqueerness. They successfully discuss the readjustment of relationships especially

intimate ones, while also talking about mental health struggles and addiction and abuse. The freedom of gender expression should, however, be acknowledged as well, as Martin is what was previously established to be the hegemonic ideal of a non-binary person. Despite it, Martin's show provides a very valuable insight into the reality of addiction and abuse and their impact on a person's intimate relationships and especially the ones we have with ourselves. Despite them playing into some reoccurring themes such as queer suffering or fetishization of queer identities, it is done so consciously, and responsibly, and oftentimes those tropes are subverted as the story does not end tragically.

In the case of *Euphoria*, though majorly sidelined, the character of Jules offers a unique view of the shift from a binary trans to a non-binary trans experience. Jules is shown to overcome her internalized narrative of compulsory heterosexuality and re-adjusting her relationship with femininity while deconstructing her narratives about abuse. Through Schafer's experience, she and Levison explore the narratives of moving away from a stereotypical hegemonic and fetishized femininity formed based on the male gaze, as well as moving away from the narrative of heteronormativity. Despite its good visual communication, the show, however, lacks in educating its audience in trans narratives and plays into a plethora of harmful tropes such as the "unfaithful bisexual", the "gay villain", and the "bury your gays" trope. But consequently, most of the time does not fall into the trap of conformist hegemonic visual representation of gender-non-conforming individuals. In those instances, where Schafer as a trans person had more freedom to participate in the script-writing process, such as in the special episode, the story feels genuine. Once the decisions are removed from the arms of someone with comparable experience, the story

becomes distorted, insincere, and exploitative. However, as Euphoria has been renewed for a third season, there is hope for more creative decisions to be made by those with the stories to tell. Despite it, the story of Jules provides valuable insight into what it feels like to transgress expectations set by normative society not just once but on multiple occasions.

### 5 CONCLUSION

This present thesis' purpose was to shed light on the current TV representation of the intersectional identity of non-binary sapphic and the stereotypes and tropes that often come with the mainstream portrayal of this identity. Proving that the two portrayals in one way or another play into the stereotypical depiction of a non-binary sapphic both through tropes used for other minority groups such as queer people, women and queer women, but also through a new set of stereotypes used specifically for non-binary people.

To understand the context in which the non-binary sapphic is placed, the second chapter - "Sapphic Through Time" examined the historical intersection of feminism, queer studies, and trans studies. It draws the connection between historical and current issues regarding the intersectional discourse noticing the narratives stemming from the contra arguments of the feminist anti-lesbian advocates, anti-trans queer advocates, and anti-non-binary trans advocates. Furthermore, the chapter also illuminated the sex v gender debate as a pivotal element for fighting against the anti-trans discourse often connected to the TERF movement old as well as new, assessed the history of healthcare as well as discussed, the issue of policing and self-policing in and out of the queer community. And last but not least, introduces the debate around transmedicalism and the rejection of non-binary people out of the binary trans narratives including the introduction of the wrong body model and the issue of passing.

The third chapter- "Sisterhood Is Not Just for CISTers", sheds light on the source of the stereotypical portrayals of men, women, and even non-binary people based on a rigid binary understanding of human nature which is hegemony - a set of rules that is distributed

in a binary fashion towards those socialized as women and to those socialized as men. It dictates the social and political ideals of what men and women should be. Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are examined in order to analyse the harmful effects of their appliance, not only on gender-non-conforming individuals but on cisgender and heterosexual people also. Though both concepts change through time, the current ideal resemble a white, conventionally attractive, correctly gendered, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, and financially stable individual fulfilling the roles rooted in the time of the industrial revolution as well as in the work of C. J. Jung. Both hegemonic ideals affect marginalized communities, especially those that are intersectional (race, sexuality, gender identity, etc.) greatly. Furthermore, the analysis brings near the concepts rooted in hegemony - cisheteronormativity, homonormativity, and homoliberalism, and discusses both the non-normativity of queer experience - especially evident in the analysis of the non-binary lesbian, as well as the enforced binarification of the non-binary gender identity by the dominant society into a hegemonic non-binary label. Both chapters three and four serve the purpose of preparing the ground for the analysis cementing non-binary/genderqueer lesbian identity as an experience outreaching the current conversation.

In the final fourth chapter, “Queering the Screen” the analysis of the current trends in the portrayal of non-binary and gender-non-conforming characters on TV and in cinema takes place. It shows the fact that despite the core idea of the non-binary identity, the cisheteronormative society cemented one certain look of whiteness, slenderness, and Eurocentric attractiveness as well as the sourcing the current representation in androgyny leaning towards masculinity disregarding femininity as undesirable. This ideal of

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hegemonic non-binary label is then used to represent gender-non-conforming and non-binary people in mainstream media giving the wrong idea about the possibilities of gender-non-conformity. The analysis of the current representation tactics is then followed by an individual as well as comparative analysis of two TV shows – *Feel Good* and *Euphoria* uncovering the topics and themes used in the shows as well as exposing the difference in the treatment of gender-non-typical characters in a sapphic setting.

The analysis of both shows demonstrated that it is quite important to include people with minority experiences in the writers' room. In the case of *Feel Good*, the story mentions a certain set of stereotypes or tropes that a person who is in a sapphic relationship and is gender-non-conforming might go through. However, as the author is a trans-non-binary individual, their experience pours itself into the story; the show being semi-autobiographical opens the real-life experience of this intersectionality. Martin shows how sapphic gender-non-conforming people struggle with gender norms and gender roles, how they navigate gendered society internally and externally, and how they are oftentimes exploited for their intersectional identity including unsolicited unwanted sexual attention from men and profiling based on their non-normativity by the entertainment industry. However, eventually, it shows queer joy as well as suffering, handling the story carefully.

On the other hand, in the case of *Euphoria*, the show often suffers because of its cisgender, heterosexual white authorship. When Levison allows people with non-normative intersectional experience to collaborate (such as Schafer, or Bivens and Davy), the audience is given a raw vulnerable narrative of a trans experience. However, here the

downfall of the representation done without the input of the marginalized group results in irresponsible token representation, as is the case with Levinson's non-collaborative process in season two. The show presents a great visual representation of someone who shifts their expression to fit them better; from hyper-femininity towards less binary visuals – encompassing femininity, masculinity, androgyny, and the uniqueness of “just Jules”. However, it also presents a set of harmful stereotypes such as the “cheating bisexual”, “bury your gays”, and “queer villain” tropes that are extremely exploitative. Unlike Martin, Levinson leans into such stereotypes and does not subvert them, rarely depicting queer joy.

Consequently, the results showed that in both cases, the tropes were sourced from the stereotypical depiction of other marginalized groups such as queer people and women (the “bury your gays” and “cheating bisexual” tropes, as well as the stereotypical oversexualization and exploitation of queer women and lesbian couples) as well as from a new form of stereo-typing based on non-conformist gender identity (including exploitation and stereotypical portrayal of non-conformity based on an idealized hegemonized version of the non-binary label). The former one exhibited the usage of the stereotypical representation of genderqueerness and its exploitation of the gender-non-conformity label for its desirability in the current market by capitalism (in *Feel Good*) and the exploitation of it by closeted queer men (in *Euphoria*) and especially in the visual portrayal of the characters, leaning into the fabricated hegemonic non-binary label using it as an eye candy and an attention grab.

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Finally, the analysis showed that the author who is a part of the intersectional margin as well as the author who is not use similar set of stereotypes and tropes in their work such as queer suffering, exploitation by men and by society in general, exclusion based on one's non-normativity, or gender confusion. However, the research showed that while Martin used such tropes to point out an issue in queer non-normative lives and often subvert such narrative, in the narration of Levinson the tropes and stereotypes were far harsher toward the characters by showing graphic sexual, physical and mental violence done to the GNC character, hinting at Jules' tragic end, as well as treating the character's portrayal irresponsibly for they serve as a medium for a shock factor. Consequently, Levinson fails to subvert such harmful stereotypes. However, despite the use of damaging tropes by some mainstream filmmakers, the growing numbers of genderqueer stories written by or with genderqueer people suggest a new chapter for non-conformist representation and more opportunities to subvert those harmful tropes in the future.

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## 7 RESUMÉ

### 7.1 English resumé

This present thesis aims to shed light on the current TV representation of the intersectional identity of non-binary sapphic and the stereotypes and tropes that often come with the mainstream portrayal of such non-normative identities. The thesis provided a deep dive into the representation of outside-the-binary and trans (gender) characters in a sapphic context and tried to determine which tropes and stereotypical depictions are applied onto those characters.

The first part consisting of chapters two three served as a theoretical bases for the analysis. The two chapters introduced a set of key concepts of the intersection of feminist, queer and trans studies crucial for the analysis including hegemonic masculinity and femininity and a plethora of other concepts, tropes, and prejudices coming from the narrative of hegemony and cisheteronormativity. It introduced a new trope titled hegemonic non-binary identity. Part two consisting of chapter four worked with the acquired knowledge from chapters three and four and applied it onto an individual and then a comparative analysis of the tv shows *Feel Good*, and *Euphoria*, where a sapphic non-binary/gender-non-conforming/genderqueer/trans character was placed in a leading role. The analysis drew the attention to the authors' life experience as a source of authentic narration and included one author who is from a marginalized groups (Martin - trans-non-binary, queer, AFAB) and one who is not (Levinson - cisgender, heterosexual, male, AMAB).

The results showed that in both cases, the tropes were sourced from the stereotypical depiction of other marginalized groups such as queer people and women (the “bury your

gays” and “cheating bisexual” tropes, as well as the stereotypical oversexualization and exploitation of queer women and lesbian couples) as well as from a new form of stereotyping based on non-conformist gender identity (including exploitation and stereotypical portrayal of non-conformity based on an idealized hegemonized version of the non-binary label). It showed that the author who is a part of the intersectional margin as well as the author who is not use similar set of stereotypes and tropes in their work. However, the research showed that while Martin used such tropes to point out an issue in queer non-normative lives and often subvert such narrative, in the narration of Levinson the tropes and stereotypes were far harsher toward the characters, serve as a medium for a shock factor, and are rarely subverted.

### 7.2 Czech resumé

Tato diplomová práce si bere za cíl osvětlit současnou televizní reprezentaci intersekcionalní identity nebinárních sapfických osob a jejichž stereotypní a tropové zobrazení, které se často objevuje v mainstreamové reprezentaci těchto nenormativních identit. Práce poskytuje přezkoumání reprezentace postav, které spadají mimo binární a cisgender nálepku a soustředí se na trans(gender) postavy v sapfickém kontextu a měla za cíl určit, které tropy a stereotypy jsou na tyto postavy aplikovány.

První část obsahující kapitoly tři a čtyři slouží jako teoretická báze pro analýzu v kapitole pět. Tyto dvě kapitoly představily koncepty z intersekce feminismu, queer a trans studií klíčové pro tuto analýzu z kterých je obzvláště signifikantní koncept hegemonické masculinity a femininity. Dále představuje nepřeberné množství dalších konceptu, tropu a předsudků pocházející právě z narativů hegemonie a cisheteronormativity. Nadále je představen nový koncept, který je zde nazván jako trop hegemonické nebinarity.

Část druhá obsahující kapitolu pět následně pracuje se znalostmi získané v první části a aplikuje je na individualní a následně komparativní analýzu seriálů *Na Pohodu* a *Euforie*, ve kterých se nebinární sapfická postava nachází v signifikantní potažmo hlavní roli. Analýza stáhla pozornost k životní zkušenosti autorů jakožto zdroj autentického narativu včetně jednoho autora z minoritní skupiny (Martin – trans nebinární, queer, AFAB) a jednoho autora z majoritní skupiny (Levinson- cisgender, heterosexuální, AMAB, muž)

Výsledky studie dokázaly, že v obou případech zmíněné tropy pochází jak z stereotypického zobrazování dalších marginalizovaných skupin jako například ženy, nebo queer osoby, obzvláště pak queer ženy (jako např. “pohřbi své gaye”, “nevěrný bisexuál”,

či stereotypní oversexualizace a s tím spojená exploatace queer žen a lesbických páru), ale nově také stereotypizace nekonformistické genderových identit (včetně exploatace těchto identit a stereotypizace nekonformistické založené na idealistické performanci na základě role udané hegemonickou nebinaritou). Práce prokázala, že jak autor který je součástí interekcionální okrajové skupiny, tak autor který není jejím členem použili podobný set stereotypů a tropů. Nicméně, analýza prokázala, že Martin použili/y tyto tropy aby poukázali/y na existence těchto problémů v queer nenormativních životech a následně tyto tropy vyvrátili/y, zatímco v Levinsonové narativu mají obdobné tropy a stereotypy mnohem tvrdší dopad na zmíněné genderqueer postavy, slouží hlavně jako medium pro šokový faktor a jsou zřídka vyvráceny.