



AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH STUDY INTO THE

EUPHORIA FANDOM

BCM 241: MEDIA ETHNOGRAPHIES

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INTRODUCTION



This ethnographic study will delve into the fandom surrounding HBO's 2019 series Euphoria. I decided upon utilising three separate methods of data collection when conducting this ethnographic research. The first involved observation of social media sites such as Youtube, Twitter and Instagram. The second method of data collection I carried out was interviewing, I put an Instagram story up on my personal instagram to ask my followers if any of them had seen Euphoria, I also did a poll on instagram asking if any Euphoria fans would be interesting in answering some survey questions about the show for me. These survey questions were administered via Google Forms for easy accessibility. I selected three of the respondents answers whose were the most in-depth to showcase in this study. The final method of research involved archival study, this took form in analysing past ethnographic research as well as background theorists whose work contributes to the understanding of motivations surrounding fandoms.

My personal desire to undertake the study on this specific fandom was mainly because I am a huge fan of the show and this study allowed me to explore deeper the reasons why Euphoria fans are so allured by the show and what connections they feel they have to the show which makes it so remarkable. I also use my own knowledge from being an avid fan of the show.

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CHRIS

WHY ARE YOU A FAN OF THE SHOW?

Most shows aimed at young people shy away about an inch from actually connecting with them. It could be the cutting away from a sex scene or a violent outburst for the all-important PG-rating, or the refusal (consciously or otherwise) of older writers to acknowledge how young people engage with themselves and others; there is a huge disconnect between the creative class and an on-the-ground audience who may extract a lot of value from that representation. Euphoria's barely-there acknowledgement of a trans-feminine character, stark representation of mental health struggles in everyday contexts, the rage epidemic affecting young men, and the way these personas communicate through ever-shifting social channels felt real and relatable. I also feel its broadcasting on a traditional network week-by-week rather than being just another streaming show released all at once allowed its cliffhangers and confronting episodes to breathe, with real room for conversation and word of mouth amongst friends. Like, it felt like the number of people I knew watching it by the second half of the series was 10x that of the start. Anyway tl;dr it says some real shit with a good soundtrack. "

DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH ANY OF THE CHARACTERS ON THE SHOW?

There are general themes in Nate and Kat's storylines that I felt had a lot of parallels — more than anything their insecurities are of mutual scale and self-destruction despite being from very different backgrounds. I think they both have very different outlets for a similar frustration and rage at the world. It might not be exactly what I have gone through, but certainly mimics behaviours I've watched those around me go through and confronted head on.

DID YOU TELL PEOPLE ABOUT EUPHORIA OR POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA ABOUT IT?

Definitely. Even from a production perspective, it's just a very cool show to watch. Maybe it's my circle of friends, but the interests and stories feel super relatable. I also retweeted lots of memes on twitter about the show.

STREAMED



WHY ARE YOU A FAN OF THE SHOW?

I watch a plethora of television series - some of which, are not even English-based programs, however, nothing has been as pleasurable to watch in literal years than Euphoria. Euphoria was a refreshing take on adolescence & everyday life in the 21st century. Unlike other television programmes/films I have come across, it provided in-depth sociological insights into many social issues facing not just its characters, but society as a whole, whilst remaining entertaining & at times, satirical - even breaking the fourth wall through its witty & purposeful narration (Rue's voice over). It reminded me of a combination between Degrassi: the Next Generation (issues presented in adolescence) & Skins (a romanticised, yet, dark, portrayal of adolescence), however, still managed to define its own branding. Overall, it was really enjoyable to watch & it is really not hard to see why it now has a cult-like following.

DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH ANY OF THE CHARACTERS ON THE SHOW?

Yes, & to my surprise, it was not just one character. I identify with many behaviours & ways of thinking (not necessarily voluntarily, but merely, as a result of the process of socialisation). Maddy, Rue, Jules, Cassie, Kat & even Lexi. Whilst these characters each embody various stereotypes within the show, I found myself able to relate to many of the issues they were presented with in their everyday lives - whether it was with their relationships with their friends, families or peers; but also with their relationship with themselves, their bodies, their mental anguish; & even their associated vices.

DID YOU TELL PEOPLE ABOUT EUPHORIA OR POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA ABOUT IT?

I have recommended the show to pretty much everyone I know after I binge-watched it - from friends, family, coworkers & even to fellow academics as not only was the show something original & entertaining, it also provides an accurate & in-depth/insightful portrayal of adolescence in a post-modern era in Western cultures, but also many subcultures. Yes - I posted on about pretty much everything about the show from its plots, characters, fan theories, aesthetic (e.g. fashion & makeup cultural impact), soundtrack, actors/actresses, local (my social word) & worldwide (media/academic) reception, fandom...to name a few. I also live tweeted all of the episodes.

PAID FOR SUBSCRIPTION



LIVE TWEETED



SARAH

WHY ARE YOU A FAN OF THE SHOW?

I really loved the show because at moments I was taken aback by it and by how much I related to it, and also thought of how I knew my friends had been through some of those experiences. It was quite triggering to my own memories of being an adolescent .. highlighting to me just what a daunting and overwhelming experience it really was. In hindsight I realise that, and it was definitely magnified once I had watched the show. While I was living it, I didn't realise the magnitude of the changes I was experiencing at the time. It also made me reflect on past choices I had made, and had my experiences been different had I chosen to align myself with certain people more closely.. and if that would have been a positive or negative thing for me. I loved the way each characters story was explored in every episode individually. It gave insight into their personalities and why they are the way they are .. I think this is crucial to any sort of character development / exploration in a show like this. Plus the cinematography was amazing, unlike anything I have seen.

DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH ANY OF THE CHARACTERS ON THE SHOW?

I identify with the causal drug taking and partying that all of the characters engage in. I also see myself in Nate and the secrecy, confusion and shame he feels in regards to his sexuality, however it doesn't manifest in aggression in me.yes. When Rue was falling for Jules, I have never seen a WLW relationship depicted so well before, I cried. I think we identify a little with all the characters which makes the show so engaging, being a bitch like Maddy, obsessive like Nate, and just all the issues of relationships and partying, just in general I feel like most of the characters act like I would/have in their situation.

DID YOU TELL PEOPLE ABOUT EUPHORIA OR POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA ABOUT IT?

YES, been trying to get all my friends to watch it & hear they're opinion on it because I think it's so important for everyone in their late teens early twenties to watch it. I posted online about the show each week when it aired trying to get more and more people to give it a go because the more of the episodes I watched, the more I fell in love with the show.

DOWNLOADED



LIVE TWEETED



Although this research project is entitled ‘An Ethnographic Study into the Euphoria Fandom’, I would argue in the case of this specific “fandom” I would prefer to refer to the fans as “stans”. Majority of my background research into this fandom was done whilst I was watching the show myself each week as it aired and participating in live-tweeting, in doing this I can confirm that the subcultures which I engaged in could be defined as “stan twitter” (definitions: fig.1 & fig1.1) as they engaged in utilising the common stan twitter vocabulary.

These two definitions vary significantly because the Oxford Dictionary of English’s definition shows a dated definition of the original meaning of stan, an amalgamation of the words ‘stalker’ and ‘fan’, this evolved over the years as stan twitter reclaimed the word as an over exaggerated way of describing their fondness for pretty much anything, not just limited to celebrities but quite literally anything.

The Euphoria fandom utilise Twitter as a key social media platform in conjunction with YouTube. Although my interviewees only really note using twitter as their main platform, YouTube was avidly used for the purpose of makeup tutorials in which fans emulate the makeup showcased on the show.

stan | stan | *informal*

noun

an overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity: *he has millions of stans who are obsessed with him and call him a rap god.*

verb (**stans, stanning, stanned**) [*no object*]

be an overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity: *y'all know I stan for Katy Perry, so I was excited to see the artwork for her upcoming album.*

ORIGIN

early 21st century: probably with allusion to the 2000 song “Stan” by the American rapper Eminem, about an obsessed fan.

Figure 1: Oxford Dictionary of English definition of “Stan”

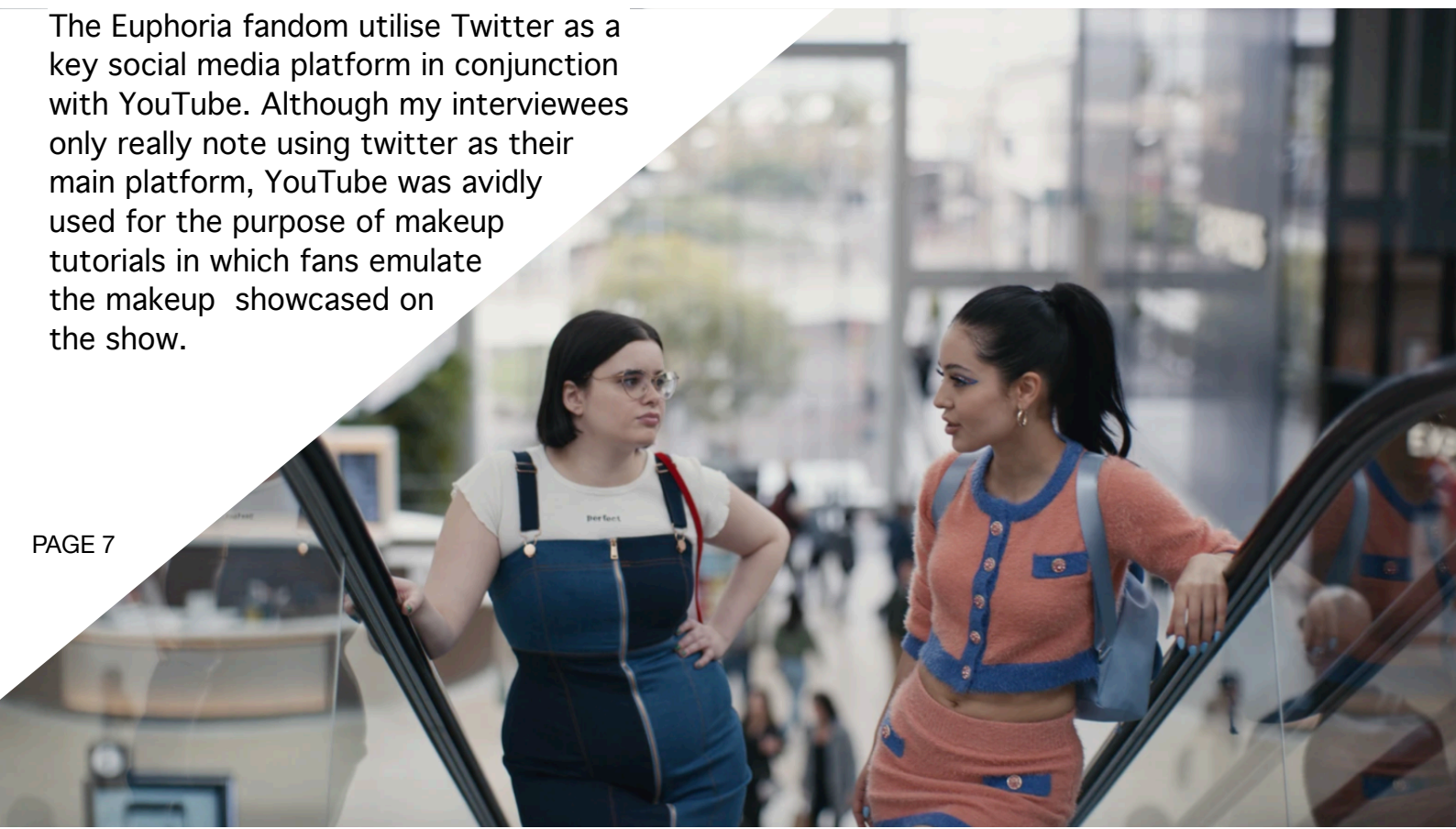
TOP DEFINITION



Stan Twitter

A section of Twitter that is comprised of cult-like-fandoms that worship popular artists or artist groups. This section consists of fans engaging socially to online individuals, discussing topics relating to their **faves**, **fan girling/boying** over updates on their faves, and a competitive **battle ground** amongst the different fandoms. Stan Twitter is also **notorius** for its trolls that utilize their tweeting privileges to cause an emotional reaction to others within or outside of their fandom. Common activities **stans** of any fandom are seen doing are trolling, arguing with someone within their fandom of from another fandom, or conversing with an internet friend on their timeline for everybody to see. Most stans tweet with a reaction pic that corresponds to the caption that are utilized to display emotion and/or ensure humor into the tweet.

Figure 1.1: Urban Dictionary definition of “Stan Twitter”



TWITTER BACKGROUND



ana paula
@anapauhal

Replying to @euphoriaHBO

Me telling my friends about Euphoria



Figure 2



JOHNNY SIBILLY
@JohnnySibilly

absolutely nobody:

the girls on Euphoria:



Figure 2.1



ashley o updates
@yourgalangela

im watching euphoria and holy shit i need someone to do these ICONIC glitter eye looks on me

6:59 PM · Aug 5, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

4 Likes



Figure 2.2



ALEXA DEMIE STAN ACCT
@bhlossom

the scene in euphoria of rue depression binging love island is too fucking real we have all been attacked here on this day

1:54 AM · Aug 2, 2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

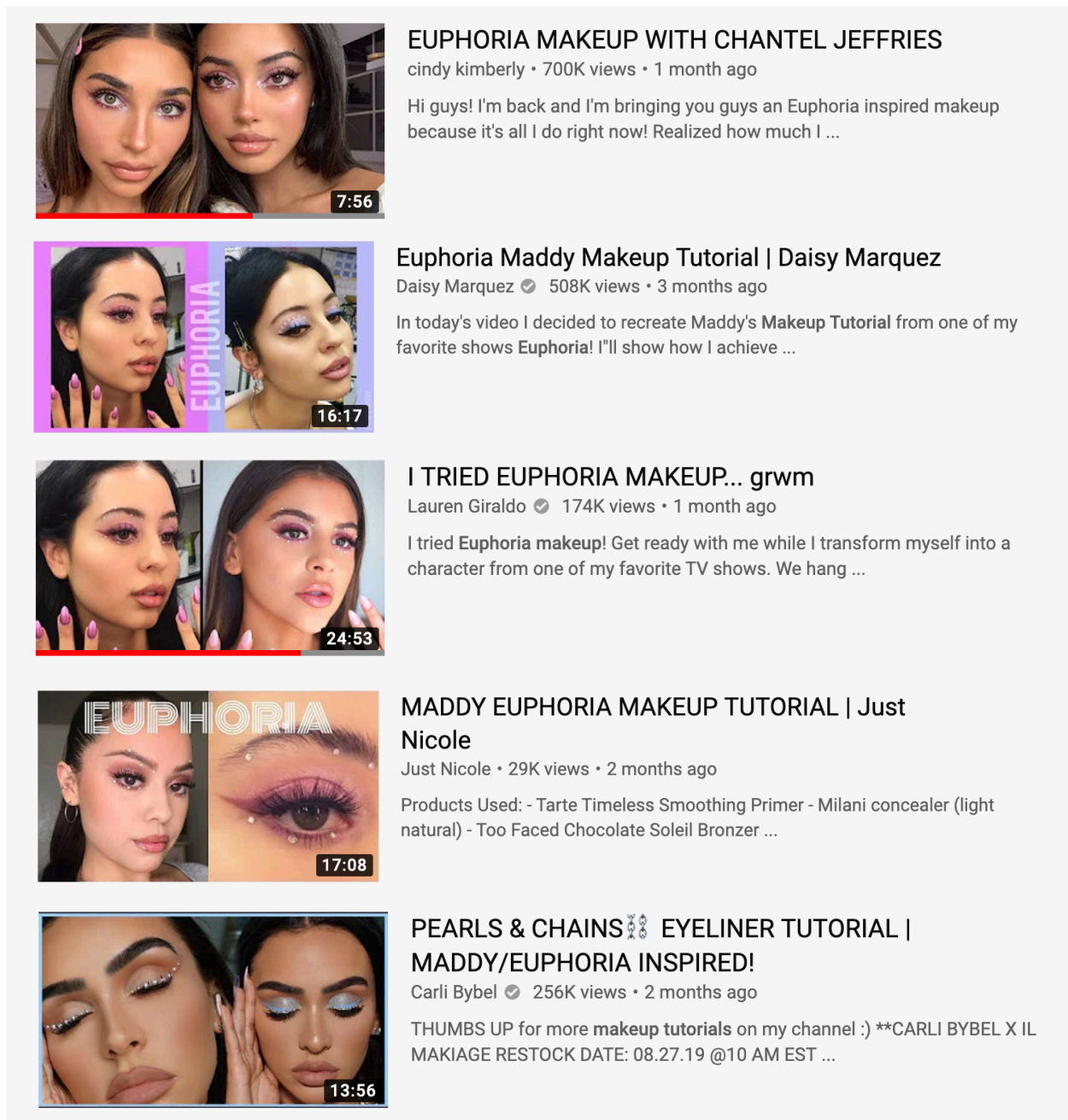
[View Tweet activity](#)

4 Likes

Figure 2.3

Common trends among the Euphoria fandom include making memes about the show (Fig.2.1) and tweeting about the makeup which is showcased in the show (Fig. 2.) as well as tweeting about how relatable Euphoria is (Fig.2.3) and how eager the fans are to tell their friends about the show.

YOUTUBE BACKGROUND



The image shows a vertical list of five YouTube video thumbnails and their associated titles, view counts, and upload dates. Each thumbnail includes a video duration in the bottom right corner. The first video is 'EUPHORIA MAKEUP WITH CHANTEL JEFFRIES' by cindy kimberly (700K views, 1 month ago, 7:56). The second is 'Euphoria Maddy Makeup Tutorial | Daisy Marquez' by Daisy Marquez (508K views, 3 months ago, 16:17). The third is 'I TRIED EUPHORIA MAKEUP... grwm' by Lauren Giraldo (174K views, 1 month ago, 24:53). The fourth is 'MADDY EUPHORIA MAKEUP TUTORIAL | Just Nicole' by Just Nicole (29K views, 2 months ago, 17:08). The fifth is 'PEARLS & CHAINS EYELINER TUTORIAL | MADDY/EUPHORIA INSPIRED!' by Carli Bybel (256K views, 2 months ago, 13:56).

EUPHORIA MAKEUP WITH CHANTEL JEFFRIES
cindy kimberly • 700K views • 1 month ago
Hi guys! I'm back and I'm bringing you guys an Euphoria inspired makeup because it's all I do right now! Realized how much I ...
7:56

Euphoria Maddy Makeup Tutorial | Daisy Marquez
Daisy Marquez ✓ 508K views • 3 months ago
In today's video I decided to recreate Maddy's Makeup Tutorial from one of my favorite shows Euphoria! I'll show how I achieve ...
16:17

I TRIED EUPHORIA MAKEUP... grwm
Lauren Giraldo ✓ 174K views • 1 month ago
I tried Euphoria makeup! Get ready with me while I transform myself into a character from one of my favorite TV shows. We hang ...
24:53

MADDY EUPHORIA MAKEUP TUTORIAL | Just Nicole
Just Nicole • 29K views • 2 months ago
Products Used: - Tarte Timeless Smoothing Primer - Milani concealer (light natural) - Too Faced Chocolate Soleil Bronzer ...
17:08

PEARLS & CHAINS EYELINER TUTORIAL | MADDY/EUPHORIA INSPIRED!
Carli Bybel ✓ 256K views • 2 months ago
THUMBS UP for more makeup tutorials on my channel :) **CARLI BYBEL X IL MAKIAGE RESTOCK DATE: 08.27.19 @10 AM EST ...
13:56

Figure 3: “Euphoria make-up tutorial” YouTube search

The above search is what is displayed on YouTube if you search the term “euphoria makeup tutorial”. The search is flooded with videos of Maddy, a sassy, hyper-feminised character who arguably has the most daring makeup looks. The sector of the Euphoria fandom who engage in creating YouTube content about the show is a small sub-culture within the fandom. Many of these accounts listed in the search are already quite popular YouTube accounts whose target audience is almost the exact to that of Euphoria’s, this can be observed in the comment section attracting comments about the show specifically and the characters. The Euphoria makeup trend penetrated the beauty community so rapidly and on such a huge scale that any major beauty YouTuber who wasn’t creating a Euphoria makeup look could be seen as out of touch.

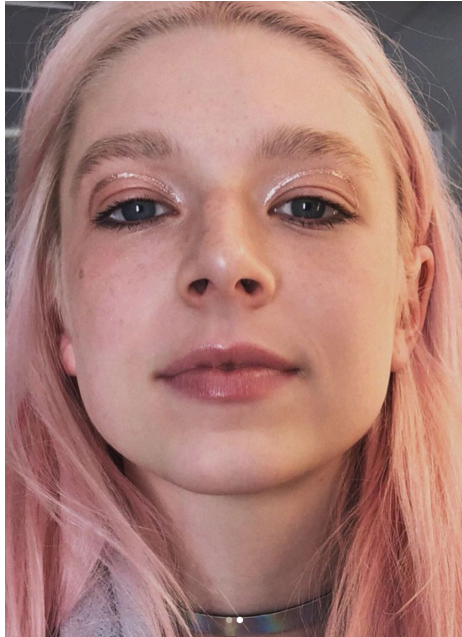


Figure 4: Hunter Schafer
@donni.davy

These Euphoria makeup tutorial YouTube videos are rich prime examples of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) ; this term was coined by Henry Jenkins and postulates upon the notion that audiences are not simply passive consumers of different forms of media but they actively produce and distribute it alongside and in conjunction with consumption. Participatory culture in fan culture facilitates belonging on a wider and varied scale. By association participatory culture establishes social connection through the sharing of these forms of free expression as demonstrated in these tutorials on YouTube and also through the practice of live-tweeting episodes or even the creation and sharing of memes about Euphoria.

THEORY DISCUSSION

The Euphoria fandom in particular can be seen as a fandom which is a mass active audience and the practice of wearing a Euphoria inspired makeup look or closely identifying within the characters such as Chris, Angelica and Sarah described, can analysed theoretically through lens of the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler, 1974). The uses and gratifications theory focuses on why people seek out certain media to satisfy needs. There are five deductions for media use which have been simplified here, these include; to be informed/ educated, to identify with characters of the situation in the media environment, simple entertainment, enhance social media interaction, escape from the daily stresses of life. I will be applying 3 uses which include personal identity or individual psychology, diversion (or tension release) and social integrative needs.

For Euphoria specifically I believe the uses majority of the fanbase engage with the users and gratification theory through personal identity or individual psychology; this is described by Blumler as value reinforcement or reassurance; self understanding, reality exploration. Euphoria's episodes are curated in a way in which each major character essentially has their entire story told in one episode, this gives the viewer a chance at a deep exploration into the character's contextual history and their personalities as well as whatever issue they are going through in that specific episode. Chris, Angelica and Sarah each recounted feelings of identification with either one or more characters or their actions and behaviours. The thematic concerns of each episode vary ferociously as there are essentially 11 main characters, given the in-depth episodic exploration only happens with 7 of the characters but this means there is an enormous range for the audience to view and potentially connect with, which they successfully did.

The second use I believe audiences engage with is diversion or tension release needs, this notes escapism from routine and problems or emotional release and is associated with the modern phenomenon of 'binge-watching'. Binge-watching or bingeing is defined as the practice of watching episodes of a television programme in rapid succession, typically, but not limited to, watching via a streaming service such as Netflix. Binge-watching has been linked to the action of escapism as well as a reordered continuous stream of dopamine in our brains as noted by Dr. Renee Carr, Psy.D, a clinical psychologist (Page, 2017). Angelica also noted binge-watching the show "I have recommended the show to pretty much everyone I know after I binge-watched it".

Social integrative needs, I personally forced a lot of my close friends to watch Euphoria and after interviewing Chris, Angelica and Sarah it seems they were just as keen on spreading the word. I was so blown away by Euphoria I felt it necessary to shout these feelings from the rooftops, this usually came in the form of recounting the entire synopsis of the show, to forcing my loved ones to watch the show and report back immediately with their take on it. I found that because Euphoria was not on Netflix or Stan or any other major streaming service in Australia, the show was deemed 'hard-to-access' by the untrained individual. I found that if any of my friends who didn't have the capabilities to simply locate and access an illegal stream of the show or illegally download the episode or they didn't want to pay for a subscription to HBO, they simply would not watch the show. This meant that I would have to send links to illegal streams and walk said friends step-by-step through the process of accessing the stream.



To put it simply because Euphoria wasn't easily accessible in Australia, this made it even more exciting when I came across someone in real life (IRL) who actually had actually seen the show. I began making friends with people I barely knew over our shared interest in the show. This is unique to the uses and gratification theory however I believe that social integrative needs can be presented as use for watching Euphoria as it creates a level of engagement socially.



Euphoria connects to its audience inextricably in many ways, the 48 minute long episodes are jam packed with hundreds of Gen Z thematic concerns and intertextual references. Through the

ability of the fans to relate so deeply to the show and the characters, the fans are able to foster personal connection to the characters through an artificial feelings shared experience. As aforementioned there truly is something for everyone in this show and anyone who watches is able to connect to either one of the characters or the behaviours in some way. However this isn't the only reason the show is so acclaimed among critics and fans, the show exhibits a subversion of typical filming techniques and gets extremely creative, this was noted by my interviewee Chris extensively:

“ I think the first time I heard of Euphoria I saw the trailer posted by HBO on Twitter, and a little bit of press hype around it mainly because it was being exec-produced by Drake. The trailer was unbelievable and looked super cinematic — in stark contrast to the big-budget, low-fidelity last season of GOT, it was a refreshing, colour-soaked approach to a world that had me intrigued. The cinematography is hard to beat — several key moments (the carnival episode, Nate and Jules at the nightclub with the strobe lights, Rue at the spinning house party, Nate taking his dad on in the finale, Rue talking about how her summer went) were filmed so spectacularly that it felt like a feature film level and gave a lot more weight to the scenes. I probably pay most attention to the production of the show itself — the cinematography, music, costume, make-up (!), anonymous setting and choreographed moments is of such mind-boggling scale for a teen TV drama.

”

Undertaking this ethnographic research study aided me in taking a deeper look at fan practice and the theories which underpin the motivations behind fan behaviours. In conducting a digital interview with 16 of my friends who have watched the show I was able to narrow down 3 specific interviewees who provided the most in-depth responses. In analysing both Henry Jenkins participatory culture theory and Katz and Blumler's uses and gratifications theory I was able to make deductions about the Euphoria fandom specifically. Throughout conducting ethnographic research in the form of interviews as well as deep observations on a multitude of social media platforms I was able to develop a profile of the demographic of Euphoria fans and analyse this fandom with the help of the established media theories listed.



REFERENCES & FIGURES

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FIGURES

Figure 1: <<https://www.google.com/search?q=stan+definition&oq=stan+def&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j69i57j0j69i60l3.1311j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>>

Figure 1.1: <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Stan%20Twitter?>>>

Figure 2: <<https://twitter.com/anapauhal/status/1174411756841644034>>

Figure 2.1: <<https://twitter.com/johnnysibilly/status/1157404241159262208?lang=en>>

Figure 2.2: <<https://twitter.com/yourgalangela/status/1158301575179227137>>

Figure 2.3: <<https://twitter.com/bhlosssom/status/1156956395570266112>>

Figure 3: <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=euphoria+makeup+tutorial>

Figure 4: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bza3QlOpXKf/>>

*All other images throughout the text courtesy of HBO