

Mental Health isn't Euphoric

Introduction

Imagine being able to understand why you are feeling overwhelmed to the point of punching the wall or breaking down and crying. Or when hearing these “demons” in your head egging you on. When watching television and seeing these behaviors demonstrated, is it an accurate depiction, or is it invalidating the emotions you feel? By enriching our knowledge of mental health, we are provided more context and background to the range of emotions we face in our daily lives. We would be able to understand where and why we get these complicated feelings and emotions; while learning how to cope with them in beneficial ways. There is so much time and so many resources contributing to educating students about, dare I say, unnecessary content. Teaching children and adolescents how our brains function in response to mental disorders would adequately prepare them for their independence and most successful futures. With there being a lack of education and preparation regarding mental health, we produce quite erotic and crude displays of mental disorders on television. A large sum of these shows and movies target or represent adolescents (high school or college students) who suggest their lifestyles are conventional behaviors of kids that age. Illustrating a glorified, extreme, and dramatized depiction of mental health on television leaves an inaccurate portrayal of the reality of it. This challenges and stunts the idea of promoting awareness around mental health concerns.

Statement of focus

I am analyzing how media, specifically television, depicts mental health and how it influences adolescents of this generation. It distorts their understanding of mental illnesses due to the prior lack of exposure and education on the content. I am specifically looking at

Euphoria and the extreme and inaccurate glorifications of mental health portrayed in the show.

Method

My method for this process began with identifying the lens on which I wanted to focus my research. I chose to explore a social-cultural lens related to mental health in adolescence and college students. My original thoughts related to the idea that individuals should be aware of their mental health before needing to address it. The next step in establishing my method was finding an accurate representation of a time when the media exaggerated and glorified mental health issues. With our current appetite for lewd content, this wasn't difficult. However, I chose to focus on the show Euphoria and a few of the main characters that are suffering from extreme mental traumas. I analyzed their backgrounds and the influences that contributed to their concerning behaviors while taking note of patterns in behavior, context, communication, etc. After establishing my text, I turned to more articles and evidence that supported the claim about mental health depiction in media and how detrimental it is to the understanding and the validity of what it means to suffer from mental illness. The following stages were to determine how television's illustration of mental health influences us as a society.

Theoretical/conceptual lens

I am looking at this show and the media through a social and cultural lens to gauge the most modern and accurate representations of how the portrayal of mental health affects the targeted generations and the overall development of mental health. Looking at mental health in Euphoria through a social culture lens allowed me to take evidence from the public and generate claims about the show's reactions. I didn't want to focus just on the mental ideologies exhibited in the show. I wanted to see how a buildup of these media contents can overwhelm and

overstimulate the progression of accurate mental health discussions (Henderson. Vol 28). I was intrigued to look at these depictions' social aspect, specifically framing them around the influence it has on the targeted generations. Taking Gen Z for example, we have been the product of some very extreme and gruesome television (Manning, vol.20) and have often fallen into the age groups of the characters in the show. This concept of presenting high school students in crisis through the casting of twenty plus year old only adds to the mutation of the understanding of what is "real" vs. what is "reel" (Menon, Vakis, et al.).

This age group was exposed to numerous shows describing what it is like to suffer in this chaotic world. The mentality and unusual comfort with mental health contributed to our experiences with these shows. A primary example of this is the launch of 13-reasons why. This show was released in 2017 and was a milestone for content related to suicide and mental health (Manning, vol.20). The dangers of this are suggested in the article, Celebrity role models and their impact on the mental health of children and adolescents: Implications and suggestions, saying how influential stars on television can be. They often inspire behavior and actions amongst the targeted group, which can lead to detrimental outcomes. We often see this with celebrities in general, but the after-effect of suicide-related content, whether in real life or depicted in media, can trigger a ripple effect of related suicides in society (Menon, Vakis, et al.). This kind of domino effect is a primary example of the media's cultural influences on communities and specific generations. This form of communication is imperative for widespread conversations and acknowledgment of mental health; however, this content can't be the way in which we are educated and or educate our society on mental illness.

Text

The information in Celebrity role models and their impact on the mental health of children and adolescents: Implications and suggestions mentioned a lot about celebrities' roles on their fans and audiences. In Euphoria, there is an enormous fan base for the show and the actors/actresses in it. They have all grown immensely in the social community and have established quite a name for themselves. These people have become significant influencers and role models to many, including adolescents and developing kids (Avg. 17+). Growing up learning these skills and solutions mentioned in the article, a show like this might not have shocked the world the way it did and caused so much commotion. By indulging in the - "undertake value-based education in schools" section, teaching kids how to correctly identify emotions and "positive psychology principles" incorporated into their developmental routine would allow for open and stigma-free emotional discussion.

Popular television and public mental health: creating media entertainment from mental distress. The instant recognition of being able to "reach hard-to-access audiences" instantly struck me with the show, containing so many stories of family trauma that only a handful of individuals can say they endured. However, it still touches on the fact that everyone is dealing with their issues, and you can have no idea. Being able to relate to one of those two is a large portion of the community and personalized the show even more. The depictions of mental health in media and television create characteristics where "dangerousness is underlined with camera angles, lighting, and decoherent music designed to shape fear." This idea shapes a specific stigma around mental health and shapes the community's comprehension of what it means.

Background

I am specifically looking at the first season of Euphoria and its introductory scenes. I am deeply analyzing three characters, Rue, Nate, and Jules, and their portrayal of mental health.

These are just three of the main characters struggling with mental illness in the show, where almost everyone has a traumatic story that's included in the storyline. These three characters show how and why such representations of extreme trauma can negatively impact the viewers if they aren't mentally mature (knowledgeable) enough to understand and process the content (Henderson. Vol 28). The history of their trauma is rooted deeply in some significant social issues our nation faces; however, when we depict a widespread and common theme of teen trauma, preconceived notions and biases can be contrived. This frames individuals with mental health as dangerous, unmanageable, and threatening to themselves and others. Rue, Nate, and Jules all characterize these attributes by being portrayed in the extremes. It is a logical conclusion that people may interpret real mental disorders as severe or scary. But there is a range, and every case is individualized and equally valid.

Rue is played by Zendaya and has her backstory explained in Season 1, episode 1. The scene shows a detailed montage about how and why Rue is in the car getting picked up after a summer in rehab. She overdoes and is left unconscious on the floor of her room, where her sister finds her and calls the ambulance. It goes into depth about her past struggles with depression and her developing relationship with drugs and alcohol. Rue suffers from bipolar, depression, anxiety, and OCD. These are some of the most common mental disorders of our time but aren't as commonly overlapped in such ways. She started on medication at a young age trying to maintain and stabilize symptoms of the illness but was often left unsatisfied with the results of prescribed medication. We see this quite frequently in health care today, specifically when dealing with how to treat a mental disorder medicinally. As she grew older, she continued with various prescribed drugs supposedly supposed to help. As if this is not enough trauma for one character to start with, her father grew very sick, and he was also getting various prescribed medications. As Rue and her father spent time together, she began experimenting with the drugs

he was taking. He shortly ends up passing away, and Rue develops a chronic drug addiction to pills and other relief sources. Her story only progresses throughout the series, along with the challenges she's facing and faced with. The show does an excellent job of including moments of growth and progression in her journey to combat these conditions. However, she spends an equal if not greater amount of time depicting moments of weakness.

Nate, played by Jacob Eldori, faces issues with his masculinity, homophobia, and aggressive behaviors. His trauma stems from his relationship with his father, which is explained in the introduction of Season 1, episode 3. The scene briefly summarized the background of Nate's dad and his struggles with aggressive behavior. Sexual violence and predatory acts. Nate is a product of this behavior and struggles with his sexuality, aggression and anger, and deeply rooted insecurities with his masculinity. The scene depicts vivid visuals of Nate finding his father's secret collection of child pornography, with an increasingly larger amount of male relationships. This influences his obsession with his masculinity and his homophobic ideologies. Nate found this material at an age where his cognitive development was forefront and in a critical state; with this intense exposure and little context to what he was seeing, his influences on his behavioral and developmental outcomes later in life were impacted. This kind of knowledge and material often has these extreme effects on children in a developmental era, and the looser we are to broadcasting such content in our everyday lives, mental stimulation of this content is going to respond in concerning ways. Nate's case is obviously a very extreme portrayal of content exposure and "daddy issues." Still, with the provocative content that overwhelms the media, the high chances are that younger and younger children are being exposed.

Jules, played by Hunter Schafer and a transgender woman in the show and real life, introduces her trauma and background in Season 1, episode 4. Jules' first look into her past and childhood trauma was how her abusive, alcoholic mother treated her during her self-discovery

and transition. She was forcefully sent to a rehabilitation clinic in hopes of altering her perspectives on life, but with little to no regard for how this made Jules feel or how this controlling mannerism may influence Jules's decision-making later. Her parents soon separated and got a divorce. Jules now primarily lives with her father in California (where the show takes place), who is supportive and constantly working on repairing their relationship. The trauma with her mother around sexuality and open disregard of Jules' self-discovery insinuates the generational gaps of acceptance and openness to non-heteronormative identities. Many individuals lack the support and approval from society (or parents), diminishing their ability to explore their identities. These stunts in the progression of queer life and gender equality are reasons for mental instability and enrich the narrative of these conservative ideologies.

All these characters exhibit extreme trauma and mental health concerns in the show. This goes beyond the three characters included in my research; however, it extends to the idea that they are trying to convey that people all around us are struggling. Establishing the effects of mental health and the role it can play in your daily life is essential. Still, when depicted in such extreme and continuous manners, the validity of mental illness, in reality, is distorted.

Conclusion

Being a part of the targeted generations and exposed to such intense content with minimal context has impacted the ways many community members and I understand mental health. With revolutionary shows such as Euphoria and 13 Reasons Why children and adolescents need better awareness and understanding of what mental health means and looks like before basing all their knowledge on television shows. Younger and younger children are getting exposed to this sensitive content which can be emotionally triggering and disruptive to the cognitive and behavioral well-being of these young minds. It can be impactful in deeply individualized ways,

so addressing content ahead of time in educational settings could be very beneficial to the way we perceive and understand sensitive content.

The content itself isn't necessarily the whole issue; it is vital to have shows like these to spread awareness and entertain. However, if this is the content we choose to support, indulging in proper preparation for viewing such content is necessary. Trying to change and fix the multibillion-dollar industry of Hollywood and cinema is presumptuous and more so out of our control than changing the ways in which we educate ourselves, our children, and our students; it is as simple as adding accurate and inclusive discourse around the topic of mental health to our daily lives. Topics of our well-being should be addressed in the curriculum used to educate individuals on how to be their best and most successful selves throughout all the years of required schooling.

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