

Luna and Euphoria as Turning Points in Contemporary Trans Discourse



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Introduction

In January 2020, in the early hours of New Year's Day, Dustin Parker becomes the first reported individual to have lost his life to anti-transgender violence this year. In 2019, The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) found that the number of transgender and gender non-conforming people that fell victim to hate crimes in the United States rose to at least 22. As not every single murder is reported, it is likely that this number was even higher. Earlier reports from HRC mentioned that at least 157 people have been killed because of their gender identity in the U.S. since January 2013. Strikingly, 90% of these victims were transgender women. As the "most misunderstood of any identifiable group in existence today" (Biegel 180), trans people, trans women in particular, experience high rates of harassment and violence. Because the hate crimes are most often committed out of ignorance and misunderstanding about trans identity (Kidd and Witten 47-49), media plays an important role in telling the stories of trans people. Although representations of trans individuals have been scarce in the history of literature, television, and film, there has been a significant increase in depiction in recent years. Two of these depictions are analyzed in this thesis: *Luna*, the novel written by Julie Anne Peters and *Euphoria*, the television series written and mainly directed by Sam Levinson. This thesis focuses on these two sources specifically as both can be seen as turning points in contemporary trans discourse. In the broadest sense, a turning point is a moment of change. It is a certain rupture, "a surprising break with routine practice" (Sewell 227) that results in the transformation of a thing or event. In a way, a turning point is the spark needed for something to be set on fire; it is the domino that knocks over a second domino, resulting in a falling row of successive stones. Using this analogy of the domino effect, a turning point sets off a chain of similar events. These events are in turn able to transform

a previous structure or practice. Because structures are always linked to other structures, it is possible for the seemingly small rupture of the turning point to set off more ruptures until it results in “structural transformations – that is structures in cultural schemas, shifts of resources, and the emergence of new modes of power” (Sewell 228). As this thesis will set out to demonstrate, *Luna* has been influential in trans discourse through the small but significant eruption of trans representation in young adult literature that followed its publication, whereas *Euphoria* will likely change the discourse around trans identity in the future by its modern depictions that normalize transness while at the same time gesture toward the endless possibilities of gender and identity. This thesis focuses on these two sources as well as on the notion of transness. Whereas the second and third chapter offer interpretative readings of *Luna* and *Euphoria* respectively, the definition of “trans” and the representations of trans people in media are discussed in the first chapter.

Chapter 1

Representations of Transness

Around the same time the gay liberation movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, the term “transgender” was first introduced (Norbury 3-4). However, it was not until the early 1990s that the word took on its current meaning when Leslie Feinberg published her pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, a text that soon became an influential and defining work in trans discourse. In her pamphlet, Feinberg proposed to adopt the term “transgender” as an alternative for “transsexual,” which was generally used to refer to all gender variant people, also to those who had not undergone gender reassignment surgery or had no desire to do so. These days, most people use the shortened version “trans,” rather than “transgender,” to refer to people who identify differently from the sex they were assigned at birth. Through gender identity, which is someone’s internal identification with one, multiple or no gender, and/or gender expression, which is the way in which someone’s gender is expressed outwardly by means of dressing, speaking, and behaving, trans people dissociate themselves from their birth-assigned sex (Miguel et al. 15). When it comes to trans terminology, Susan Stryker’s definition of “trans” being fluid instead of fixed, of it being a process rather than a permanent destination, of people “cross[ing] over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain gender” (1), seems to be cited the most (Capuzza et al. 10). This definition allows “trans” to be an umbrella term for a diverse group of people who are not in accordance with the gender assigned on the basis of their birth-assigned sex, no matter how they identify, be it trans, non-binary, genderqueer and so on. Although “trans” can refer to a variety of ways in which individuals experience gender, in this thesis it is predominantly used in reference

to Luna and Jules, who both identify as trans women, that is to say, people who were assigned male at birth but who transition to the category of woman by changing their gender identity and/or expression (McInroy and Craig 607). Therefore, it might be helpful to note that “trans” is largely used in a narrower sense here, pertaining to one specific category of the trans umbrella. Yet transness remains an extensive concept, even when it refers to trans women exclusively. There are many ways in which to approach “trans,” for instance, the concept can be explored from a physical angle or one that is psychological, medical, historical, cultural or social. Furthermore, it is likely that (trans) people experience transness differently, which makes the concept personal and subjective as well. Considering its complexity, this thesis works with the following three aspects of transness: (1) Identity; (2) Expression; and (3) Recognition. As briefly mentioned before, identity is understood as the internal manifestation of transness, whereas expression concerns the external manifestation through appearance and behavior. Rather than internal or external, the third and final focal point deals with the perception of others. This recognition is therefore societal, as it considers how trans individuals are perceived (and recognized) by people other than themselves.

Since the 1970s, when the term “transgender” gradually found its way into society, there has been an increase in the representation of trans people in media, especially in the last two decades (McInroy and Craig 607). Literature, television and film feature numerous transgender characters. However, most of these depictions have employed stereotypes by largely representing trans people – trans women in particular – as cross-dressers, criminals, sex-workers or people suffering with mental illness (Capuzza et al. 131; Davis 16-17; McInroy and Craig 607). For instance, in the novel as well as the film adaptation of *Silence of the Lambs*, Buffalo Bill is presented as a mentally unstable cross-dresser who skins her female victims in order to make a

suit out of them, and in “Strip Maul,” an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* that aired in 2012, a transgender character is repeatedly misgendered, named a “transvestite” and depicted as a hysterical and suicidal drug smuggler. Since media is for most people the first and often predominant source where they encounter trans identity, the representation is significant for trans people to identify themselves with as well as for cisgender people to help them understand and empathize better with gender identities that differ from their own (Chiland 68; Cramer and Adams 122; Mason 55). As research has indicated, narratives about stigmatized people, such as the transgender community, have improved the way in which people regard them (Heinz 326-28; Oliver et al. 215-17; Shelley 9-16). Attitudes have been found to change positively when people encounter trans identity through media. For example, a study by Gillig et al. showed that respondents who had seen a specific episode of *Royal Pains* which featured a trans narrative perceived trans people more positively compared to the show’s viewers who had not seen this particular episode (523). Additionally, they found the attitude of respondents who had encountered two or more trans narratives before watching this *Royal Pains* episode to be even more positive. This research suggests that media exposure, and thus encountering trans people, influences and improves the way in which trans people are perceived.

Whether they have been positive or negative, most of the media representations were that of adult transgender characters. In 2015, McInroy and Craig observed that transgender youth were largely absent in film, television and other types of media (607). Even in young adult literature, which often explores issues like gender and sexuality, trans characters were rarely depicted. Out of the 35 young adult novels published between 1998 and 2002 with LGBT content, trans identity was nowhere to be found (Boon and Howard 133-38). Similar reviews of the young adult literature available noted the absence of youth trans narratives up until 2004

when Julie Anne Peters published her novel *Luna* (Cramer and Adams 122; Sokoll 23). As the first young adult novel to feature a trans character, *Luna* changed the discourse around trans people in literature significantly. It introduced transness to a new audience, which is those who read young adult novels. At the same time, its positive depiction of a trans character deviated from the negative picture that was regularly painted in literature, television and film. The novel was nominated for multiple awards and it has won several, including American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults in 2005. It has also been awarded the Stonewall Honor Book in 2005 for its significance in queer literature. According to Putzi, it is *Luna* that made the transgender identity “an accepted, if controversial, segment of the young adult market” (426). She, alongside Alter, argues it opened the doors for many more novels about trans people to be published (430-31). This is underlined by Sokoll who in 2013, after researching and reviewing the young adult literature available, compiled a list of 51 young adult titles that deal with trans characters. However, she notes that only 20 of those titles are easy to get access to (26). Regardless, it shows the significant growth in trans young adult literature that followed the publication of *Luna*. Currently in 2020, a book list on Goodreads contains 301 young adult novels with trans characters. This list is created by readers themselves, which demonstrates their interest in trans novels. It also shows which titles are being read as they are the ones that have made the list. The novel at the top of the list, that is, the one with the most votes, or in other words, the one that is most often named, is *Luna*. This suggests that *Luna* is still being read and regarded as an important title in trans discourse.

Focusing on the small screen, depictions of trans people are rare for the majority of television history (Capuzza and Spencer 214). The first recurring trans character in American television was Linda Murkland in *All That Glitters* in 1977. Although the series ended after only

one season, fashion model Linda was portrayed positively. Then in 2006, *All My Children* became the first daytime television show with a trans storyline, following the coming out and transition of one of its characters. However, most depictions in television have been brief as well as informed by negative stereotypes (Lester 143-54; Miller 131-32; Siebler 83-93). As stated by Capuzza and Spencer, these depictions largely ridicule the trans community “via humor, disgust, fear, alienation, and anger” (215). Even though there has been an increase in the representation of trans characters on the small screen in recent years (Capuzza and Spencer 215), the storylines remain largely one-dimensional in that they seem to equate being trans with transitioning (Siebler 75-76). In television, and arguably in other types of media as well, the depiction of trans characters often relies on them coming to terms with their identity and then (medically) transitioning into a new self. Transition is thus often represented as the climax in these characters’ stories. Whether positive or negative, the stories of trans people have become more common in television. Still, their visibility remains limited. After examining 134 television episodes of 9 television series with a trans character, Capuzza and Spencer found the screen time of those characters to be only 7,6% of each show’s total (221). As Capuzza and Spencer specifically chose series “that are celebrated for being about and featuring transgender characters” (224), such as *Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black*, these results are surprising. Even in these popular shows, the depictions of trans people are minimal. It is Sam Levinson’s television series *Euphoria* that aired in the summer of 2019 that challenged some of the notions raised here. One of its main characters is the trans girl Jules who appears in every single episode. As the love interest of the protagonist of the show, Jules’ storyline is weaved in with that of Rue, resulting in a significant amount of screen time. Furthermore, depictions of her transness are mainly implicit throughout the series. It is represented as being one of the elements that make up

her characterization and storyline, rather than the only. As a character, Jules thus seems to differ from trans characters that braced the small screen before her. Her representation is discussed in the third chapter; The following chapter will first deal with the representation of Luna.

Chapter 2

Luna as a Turning Point

“I got it. I finally got it. The change had to come in me. My acceptance of Luna, my support of her transition, my seeing her as a real person” (Peters 213).

Luna follows a trans girl’s journey of gender, expression and identity. Interestingly, the story is told from the perspective of Regan, the cisgender sister of Luna. Although this results in a second-hand view on what goes on, “it allows cisgender readers a way to empathize both with Regan and Luna” (Cramer and Adams 123). Through the eyes of Regan, a character that represents a gender identity that is normative and therefore easy to identify with and relate to, the reader is submerged in Luna’s world, one they are likely less familiar with. Regan explains what it means for someone to be trans, or at least for Luna. She describes how her sister’s “body didn’t reflect [her] inner image” (Peters 51) and she defines trans terminology, such as “transition” (21) and “pass” (54). Additionally, the novel provides the reader with a brief history of trans people as Regan reflects on what she has learned from Luna. For example, she mentions historical figures Joan of Arc and Abbé de Choisy who are known for exploring transness, whereas she also names more contemporary figures who experiment with gender such as Mick Jagger and RuPaul (68-70). At the same time, Regan highlights her lack of knowledge and understanding on numerous occasions. When discussing gender reassignment surgery, Luna shares her desire to physically change with her sister: “You know that” (70). A surprised Regan wonders: “How could I know that?” (70). At the end of the same chapter, when Luna has voiced her desire to have surgery, she asks her sister: “You understand, don’t you?” (71). After a short pause, Regan

tells her that she understands, even though, in fact, she does not, which the “I lied” (71) in her narration makes clear. And then a few pages later, Regan reflects on how little she knows about being trans (76). All three of these instances are indicative of the sister’s struggle in understanding. This struggle forms an important thread throughout the story as she is trying to make sense of Luna’s transition. As the novel progresses, so does Regan’s understanding. In the end, she turns out to be crucial in explaining Luna’s identity to others. Regan explains to a mutual friend of theirs that “it’s who she knows she is, same way you and I know. It’s instinctive. Natural” (Peters 191). From not understanding at all, Regan now emphasizes how natural Luna’s identity actually is. Through living with her trans sister and letting herself be educated, Regan has shifted into a new mode of comprehension. Even though she has repeatedly told the reader how her sister is “destroying [her] life” (173) and how she is “a black hole in [her] universe” (117), in the final chapter, on the very last page, Regan expresses how “proud” (248) she is to be Luna’s sister and friend. This is quite the change from the first half of the novel, in which Regan regards Luna’s identity as taking up too much space and time. She claims that Luna is “always there, invading, interfering, ruining [her] chances for any kind of ordinary existence” (172). However, at the end of the novel her view has changed. Instead of seeing Luna as an obstacle in her life, she now cannot imagine a life without her: “What am I going to do without you?” (243). Thus, the majority of the novel deals with Regan’s perception of Luna. This results in “recognition” being the focal point that stands out the most. Of course, the first two focal points become apparent as well. As mentioned before, Luna’s identity is made explicit through the narration of Regan from beginning to end. Trying to comprehend what it means for her sister to be trans, Regan navigates trans identity as well as explains it to the readers. Furthermore, “expression” becomes visible in the novel in various ways, although these are at

times a little problematic, which will be discussed in more depth in the next paragraph. Still, “recognition” seems to be the most significant out of the three focal points. As the narrative is told from the perspective of a cisgender person – someone who can be regarded as the “outsider” in a trans girl’s story – who struggles to understand her sister, it is exactly that, understanding, that is arguably the most important theme of *Luna*. By presenting a trans girl as someone who just wants “to be loved and accepted for the person she was inside” (Peters 98), *Luna* conveys the message that trans people are not that different from cis(gender) people. Depictions like these have been found to improve the way in which others, that is, people that are not trans, perceive trans individuals (Gillig et al. 523; Shelley 9-16). Their understanding has been found to expand, as well as their recognition of trans people. Although there seems to be no research that analyzed the impact *Luna* directly had on its readers, it can be argued that the novel’s depiction affected readers in similar ways. The affect might even have been stronger, considering it was the first time for a trans identity to be depicted in young adult literature.

Even though Peters’ novel has been influential in young adult literature for telling a story that has not yet been told before, it has also raised certain problems. Overall, its language around trans people is dated and inappropriate. The word “trannies” (Peters 181) is jokingly used by Regan, which is now considered to be a derogatory term. The novel also uses “sex change operation” (70), for which “gender reassignment surgery” is the preferred term. Perhaps even more problematic is the use of wrong pronouns and the deadnaming (i.e. addressing a trans person by their birth name) that is apparent all throughout the novel. Luna is presented to the reader as Liam, Regan’s “brother who wasn’t a boy” (172). Since her identity is a secret for most of the novel, it makes sense that Luna is addressed as Liam in some occasions. However, even Regan, who is explicitly aware of her sister’s transness, misgenders her sister on a regular basis.

This constructs a narrative in which the meaning of being trans is dependent on physical appearance. Only when Luna expresses her transness actively, and is dressed the part, so to speak, in female clothing, makeup and wigs, Regan uses her chosen name and female pronouns. Therefore, Luna's transness only seems validated or, in other words, recognized when her "expression," the third focal point this thesis works with, matches her identity. At some point, Regan even observes that "it must be horrible ... to have this dual identity" (15). It is true that Luna is pretending to be someone she is not, but to say Liam and Luna are two fully separate identities seems invalid. Even when she is presenting as male, she is still the same Luna she is when she wears a dress and a wig. She does not have to appear female and she does not have to undergo surgery to become female. Of course, she is free to do these things but they do not define her womanhood. Since the novel emphasizes physical change (through clothing, makeup, wigs, and even genitals), *Luna* seems to limit being trans to the body. This idea that a trans person is "trapped in the wrong body" (Bettcher 383) has been infiltrating trans discourse and trans young adult novels for a considerable amount of time (Putzi 424). It has become a trope, especially for female transgender characters, which claims that surgery is the solution to the problems these girls face. *Luna* can only attest to that. Throughout the novel, it is claimed that Luna's "body betrayed [her]" (Peters 51). Moreover, the novel marks the moment Luna undergoes surgery as her "rebirth" (247). In the last chapter, Luna dramatically leaves her loved ones and home town behind to change into a new self. Even though the desire to change is valid, this narrative seems to forget that someone's sex – the state of being male, female, neither, or both – is determined by gender identity rather than genitals (Engdahl 267-9; McQueen 541-6). As Bettcher has theorized, "one has always really been the woman or man that one claims to be" (383). This holds true for Luna as well. At the end of the day, no matter what she is wearing,

whether she decides to undergo gender reassignment surgery in the future or not, Luna is and will always be a woman. When she takes off her clothes at night, washes off her makeup and unpins her wig, she does not take off her womanhood with it. Her womanhood lives within her. It is up to her to decide whether she wants to express her womanhood outwardly, for example through appearance and behavior, but it does not make her more or less of a woman.

Chapter 3

Euphoria as a Turning Point

“Queerness is infinite” (Episode 7, 00:40:34-00:40:36).

Set in a modern-day suburb, *Euphoria* revolves around the lives of seven high school students exploring what it means to be young in “a world of drugs, sex, trauma, and social media” (HBO). Each episode starts off with the back story of one of its main characters (Rue, Nate, Kat, Jules, Maddy, McKay and Cassie respectively), apart from the final episode that breaks this pattern by being set in the present entirely. As the narrator of the show, it is Rue that introduces many of its characters to the viewers. Interestingly, the first main character that is introduced is Jules. Scarcely ten minutes into the first episode, Rue’s voice-over tells: “It was the end of summer ... and Jules had just moved to town” (00:08:37-00:08:50). At the same time the voice-over is playing, the camera moves to Rue who, looking out of the window of her mother’s car, observes Jules ride her bike. Rather than introducing her as a trans character, *Euphoria* presents Jules as the new girl in town. Moreover, it takes three episodes for the first explicit mention of Jules being trans to appear when someone she recently started dating texts her the question: “When did u start transitioning?” (00:15:26). The way in which the series presents Jules is unusual, considering that many trans narratives introduce the character’s identity directly as well as explicitly (Capuzza and Spencer 216-18; Norbury 2-5). Up until the text Jules receives about her transition, *Euphoria* has only hinted at her trans identity. For example, in the first episode the viewer sees Jules inject something in her upper thigh. A close-up of the bottle reveals that the substance she is injecting is “delestrogen,” a form of female hormones (00:20:50-00:20:52).

During this scene, when Jules is in her underwear, a slight bulge can be detected. In the final scene of the same episode, this bulge in her underwear is even more visible (00:51:34). Even though both scenes suggest that Jules has male genitals, it is neither emphasized nor explicitly thematized. These scenes therefore normalize the fact that women can have penises too. At the same time, it rebukes the idea that a trans person has to undergo surgery to become a “real” woman. Another hint appears earlier in the episode, when Jules is swiping through a gay dating app that strongly resembles Grindr, on which someone inappropriately asks the size of “[her] dick” (00:13:56). Even though Grindr is mainly used by gay men who are interested in casual hook-ups, trans people regularly make use of it as well (Lloyd and Finn 162). This sometimes results in inappropriate questions, as Jules experiences here. These examples make clear that several implications about Jules’ gender identity can be detected, especially in the first episode. However, the words “trans” or “transgender” are not part of the script at all. Only the aforementioned “transition” is used in the series, via text message. Jules’ transition becomes most explicit in the fourth episode that begins with her back story. Once again, it is Rue’s voice-over that delivers the message: “By thirteen, she started to transition” (00:07:26-00:07:29). These first ten minutes deal with Jules’ childhood, her difficult relationship with her mom who admitted her to a “fucking psychiatric hospital” (00:03:30-00:03:31) for being depressed, and the link that exists between her depression and the fact that back then she is not able to live as a girl. Strikingly, when Rue tells the viewer that “[Jules] hated her life. Not because it was bad, but because when you hate your brain and body, it’s hard to enjoy the rest” (00:05:34-00:05:41), the camera focuses on a young Jules opening the doors of a bathroom with a sign that reads “boys.” This subtle camerawork underlines the message that the back story of this particular episode seems to convey: That it is hard to grow up trans. As several research has pointed out, this is the

case for a large number of transgender youth (Dietert and Dentice 33-39; Robinson et al. 11-14). Even though Jules' gender identity is affirmed in this episode, being trans is still presented as one dimension of her characterization and story. Instead of reducing her storyline to her gender identity, as trans stories are regularly known to do (Siebler 75-76), Jules is much more than merely "trans." Of course, her identity comprises being trans: Growing up gender-nonconforming has arguably shaped her into the person she is presently. However, being trans is not her main struggle. Just like the other – cisgender – characters of the show, she explores love, through hook-ups and relationships, as well as friendship. On top of that, Jules experiences catfishing, as she is misled by "a person who sets up a false personal profile on a social networking site for fraudulent or deceptive purposes" (Merriam-Webster). Falling in love with, discovering the identity of, and then dealing with this catfish is a substantial part of her story. Contrary to other depictions of trans people, Jules' process of transitioning does not take center stage. Before the actual story of *Euphoria* begins, she has already crossed over from the category of "male" to the category of "female" by means of gender identification and expression. By choosing not to focus on her transition, the series presents her as a girl that happens to be trans rather than a trans girl.

Even though "recognition" can be seen as the most important focal point with regard to *Luna*, this is not the case for *Euphoria*. As Jules is recognized and accepted by virtually all characters except for her mother, it is not central to the story. In *Euphoria*, "expression" is perhaps the most significant aspect of transness. The ways in which she expresses herself by means of fashion, make-up and hair mirrors as well as highlights the person she is inside, or in other words, her "identity." When it comes to her style, the key-words are likely "colorful," "bold," and "unapologetic." Already in the first episode, this becomes apparent. Riding her bike

in a pink tennis skirt and a flower-patterned shirt, wearing a furry bag and platform sneakers, Jules is accurately described as “looking all Sailor Moon and shit” (00:09:06-00:09:09).

Throughout the series, Jules has multiple hair colors, such as faded pink and blonde with black streaks. Make-up wise, Jules experiments abundantly with glitter, colors and shapes. And when it comes to fashion, her outfits are always colorful and unique. In the suburb where the series takes place, Jules seems to stand out the most. There, she is a striking appearance, which is illustrated quite literally in the second episode. In between classes, the camera focuses on Jules who for a few seconds stands still in the middle of a large group of people (00:10:09-00:10:16). The people passing her by are dressed in muted colors, wearing casual clothing. Their outfits are juxtaposed with Jules’ blue and yellow ensemble. Interestingly, the music that is playing during this scene is high-pitched and dreamy. In combination with the camerawork that centralizes Jules, this angelic music adds to the otherworldly presentation of the character. Whereas Jules catches the eye of many people in the suburb, which is emphasized by Rue remarking that she has “never met anyone in [her] entire life like Jules” (Episode 3, 00:27:10-00:27:12), in the penultimate episode she seems to blend in. Visiting a friend from her old school, the electric blue-haired character named TC who identifies as non-binary, Jules surrounds herself with queer people. Getting ready for a party, they first do each other’s makeup and get dressed, which involves an abundance of glitter and (neon) colors. When they arrive at the party, people are dressed similarly to Jules and her queer friends. It is then that Jules becomes one with the people around her, a large conflation of color and freedom. These scenes are distinctly different from the scenes back in the suburb, where Jules feels “claustrophobic” as she tells TC (Episode 7, 00:35-40-00:35-41). It can be argued that in this episode, when she is surrounded by people from the queer community, “her” people, Jules feels free and at home. Through fashion, *Euphoria* thus aims to illustrate that

expression does not only reflect a person's identity, but that it also unites people. At the same time, the series points out how fashion can result in happiness. For Jules, it is a major part of her life; She even wants to study fashion design in college (Episode 7, 00:15:10). And when she is dressed all colorful and free, she seems to be happiest. This is highlighted in the party scene where Jules and her friends experience the feeling of euphoria in a whirlwind of glitter and color.

Euphoria differs from many television series that feature a trans character in that the sexuality of Jules is portrayed as fluid. As the fourth letter in the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) acronym, trans is often conflated with the other three letters. Since the sexuality of a significant number of trans characters is not even mentioned nor explored in the television series they appear in (Capuzza and Spencer 222), the T seems to substitute their sexual orientation. Without romantic or sexual encounters, these characters are rendered to their gender identity, as if T is indeed a sexuality like L, G and B. Of course, there are several trans stories in which the character's sexuality is mentioned and/or explored. However, a large number of these media depictions reinforce heterosexual cisgender norms on their trans characters (Capuzza and Spencer 221-23; Cooper 46-49; McInroy and Craig 614). Even though there have been a few exceptions – for example the (trans) gay Noah in *Faking It* and the (trans) lesbian Louise in *Dark Angel* – the majority of trans characters in television are heterosexual. This is where *Euphoria's* depiction of Jules differs. From episode one through eight, Jules explores her sexuality. In the first episode she hooks up with an older man she has met online, which is something she does regularly as her back story reveals. As mentioned before, she also falls in love with her (male) catfish. Moreover, Jules is dating Rue for a considerable amount of the show. And then in the pre-final episode, she is intimate with Anna, a minor female character. Interestingly, all of these romantic/sexual encounters happen without *Euphoria* labeling her sexual orientation. Rather than

being put in a box, Jules is able to freely explore her sexuality. Herein, the series seems to reflect reality more accurately than other shows in which the transgender characters are depicted as heterosexual. As one of the largest samples of trans and gender-nonconforming people in the United States has demonstrated, most trans people do not identify as straight. Out of the 6546 respondents who filled in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), only 22 percent identified as heterosexual (Herman 184). This means that 78 percent of the respondents identify differently, be it gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual or other.

Conclusion

As this thesis has set out to demonstrate, both the novel *Luna* as well as the television series *Euphoria* are significant titles in contemporary trans discourse. Being the first young adult novel to depict a trans character, *Luna* has paved the way for more novels about trans youth to be published. Through the narration of Regan, who can be said to be a representative of the cisgender audience (confused, unfamiliar, uninformed), Peters' novel shares what it means to be trans with its readers. The fact that a cisgender character steers the story of a trans girl has arguably made *Luna* easier to digest and understand. The novel emphasizes the journey Regan embarks on, which ultimately makes her recognize and understand her sister's gender identity better. Regan's perception of Luna therefore changes from negative at the start of the novel to positive at the end. This narration has arguably helped readers comprehend trans identity as well as perceive it more positively too. However, through the use of certain language and tropes, the novel approaches transness in ways that are deemed problematic now. It seems to equate "trans" with transitioning as Luna is only recognized as a "real" girl when her gender expression matches her gender identity. Furthermore, gender reassignment surgery is presented as the climax in Luna's story as if having female genitals will enhance her womanhood. It is however important to remember that *Luna* was published sixteen years ago. Since then, the way in which trans people are perceived as well as depicted in literature, television and film has evolved significantly. This becomes clear in *Euphoria*, a show that parts ways with certain problematic notions that are regularly employed in media. Instead of focusing on the character's transition, the show presents Jules as a girl who happens to be trans. Her gender identity makes up only a certain part of her complex characterization and storyline. Furthermore, fashion is used as a tool

of self-expression as well as a way for people to connect with like-minded individuals. And finally, the show presents sexuality as fluid, which becomes most explicit in regard to Jules. This seems to reflect the reality of most trans people more accurately as their sexual attraction often deviates from heterosexuality. Whereas *Luna* has been influential in contemporary trans discourse in the past, *Euphoria* seems to be the next turning point. The series does not only normalize being trans, it also celebrates the many possible ways in which gender and sexuality can be expressed. Therefore, this representation feels fresh and promising. As *Euphoria* breaks away from the one-dimensional depiction of transness that has become common in media, the series can be interpreted as a rupture. It might be the domino stone needed to change the way in which trans people will be depicted – and celebrated – in the future. If this is the case, and *Euphoria* will indeed transform trans discourse that has yet to be produced, trans people will hopefully appear more frequently in literature, television and film as well as be depicted more accurately, in all their different forms and hues. Until then, research could focus on a wider range of trans characters; Rather than solely focusing on trans women, it could examine the representations of trans men or non-binary people as well. Additionally, research could interpret more aspects of transness than just identity, expression and recognition. This way, the notion of transness would be examined more extensively. To connect the paper and/or the screen to real life, research could also incorporate empirical data. Reviewing how trans people feel about certain media representations might result in suggestions and improvements for future representations. At the same time, research might introduce transness to respondents who have not yet been exposed to this before, or at least, not to this extent. Positive depictions might even improve the respondents' attitudes toward trans people. Anyhow, as this thesis has established, trans discourse has changed significantly over the last few decades. From the 1970s to the 2010s,

depictions of trans people in media have increased, altered, improved and become more complex. Even though *Euphoria* seems to inaugurate a new era of trans representation, only time will tell whether this holds true. Nonetheless, transness will continue to be depicted on the page and on the screen. There are still many trans stories to tell, many trans voices to be heard, and they deserve their platform.

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