“It’s not an exam”: popular culture as a mode of comprehensive sex education for youth

by

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Abstract

Sex education in American learning institutions has a longstanding history of serving as a space for political ideology over pedagogy, with this lack of inclusive or comprehensive sex education leading young people to seek secondary sources for information on sexual wellness, including popular culture (Albury, 2013; Bale, 2011; Dawson et al., 2020; McKee, 2011)This thesis analyzes two Netflix original series, *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) as cultural pedagogies to determine how these texts differ from formal sex education messaging as well as previous representations of teen sexuality on television. Findings suggest that these television series take a more feminist pedagogical approach by emphasizing the importance of community, education for the purpose of empowerment, and encouraging critical thinking about current institutions of power. These series are part of a growing body of teen narratives from streaming platforms and these findings suggest that future work should be conducted to examine the platform affordances of streaming services in entertainment education.

Keywords: entertainment education; feminist pedagogy; youth; sex education; representation; television

For Katie.

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee ii
Abstract iii
Dedication iv
Acknowledgements v
Table of Contents vi
List of Tables viii
List of Figures ix
Opening Quote x

Chapter 1. "A yarn ball of aching tubes": contextualizing sex education in America 1
1.1. Introduction 1
1.2. Contextualizing sex education 3
1.3. Representations of youth sexuality on television 5
1.4. Streaming platform affordances of TV ratings 8
1.5. Conclusion 10

Chapter 2. "Ritualized teenage fun": framing *Big Mouth* and *Sex Education*... 12
2.1. Introduction 12
2.2. *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) 12
2.2.1. Synopsis 12
2.2.2. Key characters 13
2.2.3. Reception 16
2.3. *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) 18
2.3.1. Synopsis 18
2.3.2. Key characters 19
2.3.3. Reception 20
2.4. Methodological interlude 21
2.5. Conclusion 24

Chapter 3. "Entertaining and informative, but also not too preachy": The use of critical discourse analysis in Netflix's *Big Mouth* 25
3.1. Introduction 25
3.2. Theme 1: Meta-commentary as a mode of critical thinking 26
3.3. Theme 2: Pedagogical approaches to shame 29
3.4. Theme 3: Feminist negotiation of sex education through masculine lens 32
3.5. Conclusion 35

Chapter 4. "An impossible assignment about female solidarity": *Sex Education* as feminist pedagogy 37
4.1. Introduction 37
4.2. Theme 1: Utopian rewriting of genre 37

4.3. Theme 2: Feminist pedagogical approaches 42
4.4. Theme 3: Specific-yet-inclusive queer sex education 49
4.5. Conclusion 54

Chapter 5. "You can either be an ally or an asshole:" cultural pedagogy as sex education 55
5.1. Introduction 55
5.2. Summary of findings 55
5.3. Limitations of representation 59
5.4. Future research 62
5.5. Conclusion 65

References 66

Filmography 76

Appendix A. Most popular "teenager" TV series per year via IMDb: 2012-2022 81

Appendix B. Except from *The Hugest Period Ever* (00:10:49) 86

Appendix C. Excerpt from *A Very Special 9/11 Episode* (00:06:29) 87

Appendix D. Excerpt from *How to Have an Orgasm* (Altman & Suarez, 2019, 00:23:53 88

Appendix E. Excerpt from *The Shame Wizard* (Quinaz & Moser, 2018, 00:12:10) 89

Appendix F. Excerpt from *Four Stories About Hand Stuff* (Jouhari et al., 2020, 00:00:17) 90

Appendix G. Excerpt from *Re-New Year's Eve* (Ozeri et al., 2021; 00:19:24) 91

Appendix H. Excerpt from *Re-New Year's Eve* (Ozeri et al., 2021; 00:22:18) 92

Appendix I. Excerpt from *The Head Push* (Altman et al, 2017; 00:19:31) 93

Appendix J. Excerpt from *Disclosure the Movie: The Musical!* (Altman et al., 2019; 00:21:38) 94

Appendix K. Excerpt from *Everybody Bleeds* (Galuska & Francis, 2017, 00:14:24) 95

List of Tables

Table 1.1 - Ratings of teen programming on Netflix 8

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 - Correlation of TV-MA ratings and streaming original teenage series 9
Figure 2.1 - Hormone monsters (from left to right) Maury, Mona, Connie, and Rick 15
Figure 2.2 - The Shame Wizard 15
Figure 2.3 - Rita St. Swithens 15
Figure 3.1 - Co-creator Nick Kroll (left) with animated counterpart, Nick (right) 27
Figure 4.1 - Headteacher Michael Groff 39
Figure 4.2 – Still of Regina George from *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) 39
Figure 4.3 - Girls in detention 41
Figure 4.4 – Still from *Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985) 41
Figure 4.5 - Aimee (center) taking the bus for the first time since her assault 45
Figure 4.6 - Headteacher Haddon presenting shame signs at school assembly 47
Figure 4.7 - Students sharing their "shame signs" 48
Figure 4.8 - Rahim hosting a tutorial on anal douching 50
Figure 4.9 - Eric in drag 53
Figure 4.10 - Otis in drag 53

Otis: She's coming over later and I think that I am fully prepared.

Eric: Well, Otis, it's a vagina. It's not an exam.

- *Sex Education, Season 2, Episode 2*

Chapter 1. “A yarn ball of aching tubes”: contextualizing sex education in America

> *How come in all these videos puberty for boys is like the miracle of ejaculation and for girls we’re just a yarn ball of aching tubes?*
>
> - *Big Mouth, Season 1, Episode 1*

1.1. Introduction

According to recent scholarship, young people in America do not feel that their questions and concerns are being addressed in formal sex education (Allen, 2006; Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Bale, 2011; Dawson et al., 2020). Additionally, common critiques of current American sexual pedagogy highlight the lack of diversity in the curricula, often failing to include information for queer and gender-diverse students (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Dawson et al., 2020) or students with differing abilities (Sellwood et al., 2022; Van der Stege et al., 2010). This, in turn, has led to greater reliance on informal modes of learning to fill in any gaps of knowledge, modes such as peer-to-peer learning (McKee, 2012; Natanson, 2022), pornography as a pedagogical tool (Albury, 2013; Albury, 2014; Attwood et al., 2018; Dawson et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2020; Poyntz et al., 2023), and popular culture as a resource for socio-cultural constructions of sex and sexuality (Albury, 2013; Bale, 2011; Dawson et al., 2020; McKee, 2011).

Informal approaches to sex education are by no means new phenomena. However, continuous tension over sex curricula in schools (particularly in an American context), the increasing accessibility of online pornography, and streaming platforms facilitating the ability to make teen-centered television without restrictive parental ratings has increased the ubiquitous nature of this information, suggesting that informal modes of supplementary learning are morphing into primary sources of sex education (Albury, 2013; 2014; Goldstein, 2020; Natanson, 2022). For example, adolescents in states that are most impacted by the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade (such as Utah and Tennessee, namely) have taken to peer-to-peer sex education initiatives to cover more comprehensive curricula such as abortion access and birth control (Natanson, 2022).

It is especially worth noting how online pornography has come to operate as a mode of informal sex pedagogy for youth. Online porn is afforded with unique properties that allow young people to discover areas of sexuality not otherwise taught in school curricula, such as addressing questions about queer sexuality, for example (Albury, 2014; Dawson et al., 2020). However, the intention of porn is to not serve as a digital representation of real, healthy sexuality, and this has inevitably led to potentially harmful misunderstandings of sex, especially with regard to consent, body image, role expectations, and ultimately, rape culture (Albury, 2014; Bale, 2011; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Dawson et al., 2020). The relationship of porn to youth sexualities should be considered as something to be taught in sex education given the role it is already playing as a form of sex education for youth. Attempts to integrate porn literacy into formal education settings have been met with resistance, whether through institutional barriers – such as the legal and ethical risks educators face in speaking about porn with young people (Albury, 2014; Dawson et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2020) – or by how deeply rooted the language of porn is in ideology (Poyntz et al., 2023).

In terms of sex education curricula, youth have increasingly expressed interest in learning more qualitative aspects of sex health, including seeking education about sexual health and wellness outside their own gender (Bauer et al., 2020). Analysis of the data from the National Survey of Family Growth in the United States suggest however, that youth are receiving less formal sex education and having fewer conversations with parents and/or guardians about their sexual health than in the past. Accessible media, including television, short video formats and streaming services naturally fill in this knowledge gap (Kinsler et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2016), making entertainment education a key form of cultural pedagogy in youth sex education today. Unfortunately, recent scholarship on informal information leans primarily towards a harm-based approach to television as pedagogy (Mckee et al., 2015 & Taormino, 2015). This is especially so in the context of the United States.

The U.S.A. has a longstanding history of crossedlines around sex education that has often led political ideology to triumph over pedagogy (Slominski, 2021), which I address this below. Research suggests that when the students' education becomes a secondary concern, they have no choice but to go to secondary sources – such as television – in order to access information. As a consequence, it is vitally important that the representation of young people and sexual health information in young people's

media offers a level of variety and accuracy, given that it now stands in place of learning in many formal learning settings. Unfortunately, television has a history of using shame-based representations, particularly for girls (Smith, 2012), while de-sexualizing homosexuality and queer identities among young men (Bond, 2014). If this is a warning, the rise of original content on streaming services with teen programming pitched for mature audiences (i.e., a TV-MA rating) has created a new range of TV series, some of which explore topics of sex and sexuality in a much more upfront way.

1.2. Contextualizing sex education

In the American context, sex education has a history of being used as an ideological stance for political agendas rather than a pedagogical tool. From its conception, the presence of sex education as a public health initiative and its eventual integration into the public school system has been accompanied by a power struggle over what is to be taught. Sex education proposes a unique pedagogical conflict as it lies at an intersection of social and natural sciences. In 1913, the Social Hygienists (i.e., the medical community) and Purists (i.e., religious communities) joined forces to combat the spread of venereal diseases; the former with the aim of eradicating infection and the latter to abolish prostitution, stating that sex workers were the primary carriers of said diseases (Slominski, 2021) This marked the beginning of what would continue to be a power struggle, not if sex education should be integrated into schools, but whose sex education should be taught. These developments led to the eventual emergence of "abstinence-only" sex pedagogy from the 1960s onward (Lord, 2010; Slominski, 2021). Abstinence-only education, as Slominski (2021) writes, is "the denunciation of sexual activity outside of heterosexual message, including premarital, extramarital, and same-sexual behaviour." (pp. 210). This aligned with the initial goal of the Social Purists: to protect the white, middle-class, Christian family structure. In the 1970s, abstinence-only education continued to grow as the Christian Right gained more power through increased media presence (i.e., televangelism, but most importantly through their political alignment with the Republican Party (Slominski, 2021). This alignment meant that discussions of sex education became a key political platform for politicians to earn votes or to "stoke the culture wars and to advance very different political agendas" (Lord, 2010, pp. 185). The line between science and religion continuously blurred in the eyes of sex education and the lucrative funding options for schools to provide abstinence-only

sex education was incentive enough for individual school districts to follow suit, with one in four teachers teaching abstinence-only sex education by 1999, compared to one in 50 just ten years earlier (Lord, 2010, pp. 167). Edits to the curriculum in reaction to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the late 1980s allowed conversations of sex safe and the distribution of condoms in school, but abstinence was still stressed as the only certain way not to contract the virus (despite the fact that the virus was not exclusively sexually transmitted).

With evidence of comprehensive sex education being most effective dating back to the 1920s (Slominski, 2021), it is without surprise that the continually dominant deliverance of abstinence only did not produce the desired results. “By 2005 the United States had the highest teenage pregnancy rate in any nation in the industrialized world” even while youth were “no more or less sexually active than their counterparts in industrialized nations” (Lord, 2010, pp. 182). Yet there is still little improvement, particularly outside of urban school districts, according to a 2018 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that surveyed schools on a national level for the presence of 20 sexual health topics. The report states that “these results clearly indicate that efforts are needed to ensure teachers have appropriate support to provide young people with the skills and information they need to reduce their sexual risk (CDC, 2019, pp. 56). And while curricula have remained from minimal to abstinence-only in much of the country, studies have shown that youth continue to have a high degree of interest in learning more qualitative aspects of sexual health, including seeking education of sexual health and wellness beyond their own gender (Bauer et al., 2020) that is not satisfied by a harm-based pedagogical approach..

This approach in the United States is has some difference from other countries across the Global North, such as in Canada, for example. Though the model of sex education is not consistent across the country in Canada and by no means perfect, (because education is a provincial jurisdiction), national guidelines outline a comprehensive model of sexual education “that integrates the enhancement of negative outcomes as well as the enhancement of sexual health and well-being.” (Walters & Laverty, 2022, pp. 18). Scholarship conducted by Canadian institutions on youth sex education aligns with these objectives. Bruce (2021) argues that providing children with a more comprehensive form of sex education could enable children who are victims of sexual abuse to acknowledge this mistreatment and be able to report it to an adult. Illes

(2012) suggests that sexual education should be reframed as a form of civic engagement, with public health playing a larger role in the development of curricula with the aspirations of reducing the rate of STIs. Davies et al. (2022) outline the current gaps in sex education that fails to consider students with disabilities (and namely in this study, children with autism spectrum disorder) to be seen as future sexual citizens. Finally, Goldstein (2020) puts forth the integration of porn as pedagogy in formal educational spaces.

However, in the United States,data suggests that television is “by default the primary source” learning about sex education (Kinsler et al., 2019, pp. 644) for the 12-24-year-old demographic. Because of this, it is necessary to determine what information is being given through television, its accuracy, how it is being framed, and who it is being framed for. If television programming is serving as a mode of comprehensive sex education, then how does it inform the language of youth and sexuality? How does it serve as a point of reference for conversations of youth and sexuality? How does it serve as a resource for language for youth and sexuality?

1.3. Representations of youth sexuality on television

Unfortunately, the entertainment-education model of media isn’t always effective. In fact, at times, it has proven to be counterproductive in its intended audience reception (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019). For example, in a pretest-post-test study (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019) amongst 147 adolescent girls aged 14-18 to measure the health literacy effectiveness of the MTV docu-series *16 and Pregnant* (Savage & Freeman, 2009-present) and its subsequent spin-off series, *Teen Mom OG* (Malone et al., 2009-present), results showed that the show “may unintentionally encourage teen pregnancy among some viewers” (pp.180) despite the creator’s intention for the show to serve “as cautionary tales about the consequences of unprotected sex, and the reality of becoming parents too early” (Dolgen, 2011 via Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019, pp. 180). This aligned with other studies (see: Aubrey et al., 2014; Martins & Jensen, 2014; Wright et al., 2013), that found that viewers had a more favourable perception of teen pregnancy after watching the show. An explanation for results could be that the show welcomed a certain amount of celebrity to its subjects, with those who took part in one of their four spin-off serries obtaining the status (and financial gain) of reality tv stardom.

From a content perspective, the show lacks much of the material one would expect from a comprehensive conversation about contraception and family planning. Firstly, the show focuses on teens who are already pregnant, meaning discussions of birth control aren't at the forefront of the narrative. Additionally, contraception does not only prevent pregnancy but the spread of STIs and should not be spoken about exclusively in relation to vaginal sex. A common trope in the show features girls from lower-middle class families, often from so-called, "broken homes" and this too may limit the show's impact across demographics. A "cautionary tale" also functions as a euphemistic term for shame-based spectacles of young girls in precarious situations (with many more social factors in play than highlighted) and while this may be intended to promote fear-induced abstinence.

Shame and sexuality amongst teenagers, more specifically teenage girls, is common when it comes to representations of sexuality. Smith (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of 130 scenes from 34 movies released between 2000-2009 to determine themes in sexual scripting amongst female characters. Findings suggested three main messages: that any female desire must remain unspoken, and those who do vocalize desire are deemed "bad girls" that ultimately face negative consequences directly correlated to their framed promiscuity. More so, this reiteration of sexual conservatism was emphasized across different races and socioeconomic classes. However, a notable difference in representations is that of sexually diverse characters – particularly gay adolescent boys – who are often left de-sexualized in abstinence – centred sex education.

While there have undoubtedly been improvements in the presence of sexually diverse characters in popular culture and youth representation, the overall presence of gay adolescent boys in teen shows is, as Bond (2014) puts it, "sanitized." He writes "that media rarely depict the relational or sexual elements intrinsic to sexual identity. Instead, media pigeonhole [LGBTQ+] sexualities, focusing on the cultural and social aspects of [LGBTQ+] identities." (pp.115). In other words, shows are producing fully-formed queer characters with their own story arcs, but they are not granted storylines that negotiate the sex part of their sexuality (Jenner, 2014). "The lack of sexual talk about [LGBTQ+] relationships or sexual interests could provide sexually questioning adolescents with little information needed to better understand how their sexual feelings fit into their social worlds." (Bond, 2014, pp.114-115).

A noted turning point for queer adolescent characters on teen television was the evolution of the character of Joey McPhee in *Dawson's Creek* (Kapinos et al., 1998-2003). Jack steers away from the stereotypical queer representation of the time, presenting as a masculine, athletic, friend of heterosexual males with storylines that identify him beyond his sexuality. Regardless, there are noticeable differences that he is not given the same space to integrate sex and intimacy compared to (straight, male) title character Dawson Leery. As Jenner (2014) highlights, "…Dawson tends to discuss the meaning of physical intimacy as part of his identity construction. Jack may struggle with the implications of his sexual orientation for his identity, but discourses of how sex may figure into this are excluded by the text." (pp.141). Additionally, further attention should be drawn to the fact that though this character is friends with (or "accepted by") his hetero peers, this is largely the case because he himself has assimilated into a heteronormative culture.

A more recent show, *Glee* (Brennan et al., 2009-2015), was noted as a pivotal moment in the development of more comprehensive LGBTQ+ representations (see: Dhaenens, 2013; Meyer & Wood, 2013; Pullen, 2016), though social and mainstream media have since presented arguments that the show's attempt at equality did not age well and are hence problematic (see: Harbet, 2022; Snyder, 2022). Regardless, during the time of its run, *Glee* (Brennan et al., 2009-2015) was praised for resisting "the idea that growing up gay can only happen through a process of struggle and success or through homonormative assimilation" (Dhaenens, 2013, pp.315). *Glee* is credited with exploring "sexual diversity among gay teens … [that] questions the hegemonic and one-sided discourse of the helpless gay teen victim." (Dhaenens, 2013, pp. 315.). However, the LGBTQ+ characters remained reasonably "sanitized" throughout the duration of the show, with brief talk about sex during the episode The First Time (Aguirre-Sacasa & Buecker, 2011). Mainly, it fails by framing homosexual acts as interchangeable with heteronormative sex and no health information is conveyed to viewers. One reason for the dilution of queer sexuality, and sexuality in general, is less about denying representation but limiting said representation in order to stay within the tv-rating parameters of the desired demographic. While being deemed "appropriate" for the desired age group of viewers was once integral to a series success, the growing popularity of streaming service original series has managed to work around this.

1.4. Streaming platform affordances of TV ratings

As the scope of representation of teenage sexuality in popular culture has evolved to a more comprehensive view on sexuality, it is worth noting that these changes have coincided with the creation of both streaming services and streaming platform original series. While some report that Netflix is focused on providing "clean teen" content (Galuppo, 2020), statistics show that the majority of teen titles on Netflix boast a 17-plus (i.e., TV-MA) rating.

The Parents Television Council (PTC), a "non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment" (PTC, 2020), conducted a content analysis of 255 titles across all teen categories, 95 of which were Netflix Originals. While both films and series were analyzed, for the benefited of this research I have redistributed the percentages to only factor in series, which operate on a television rating system rather than that of the Motion Picture Association.

Table 1.1 - Ratings of teen programming on Netflix

	Teen Titles		Netflix Originals	
Rating	#	%	#	%
TV-G	2	1.0%	-	0.0%
TV-PG	31	15.3%	10	10.7%
TV-14	66	32.5%	30	32.3%
TV-MA	104	51.2 %	53	57.0%
Total	203	100%	93	100%

Adapted from Teen-targeted broadcast TV can be vulgar…but Stranger Things are happening on Netflix, by Parents Television Council, 2020, pp. 5. Copyright 2020 by Parents Television Council.

This trend of mature content for teenage programming is not specific to Netflix; many other popular streaming platforms have begun creating teen-focused shows despite a TV-MA rating, namely HBO Max and Hulu. In an analysis of the top ten most popular series for the past ten years with the keyword "teenager" on IMDb (see Appendix A), the increasing popularity of streaming original series correlates with the increase of TV-MA rated teen series (see Figure 1.1).

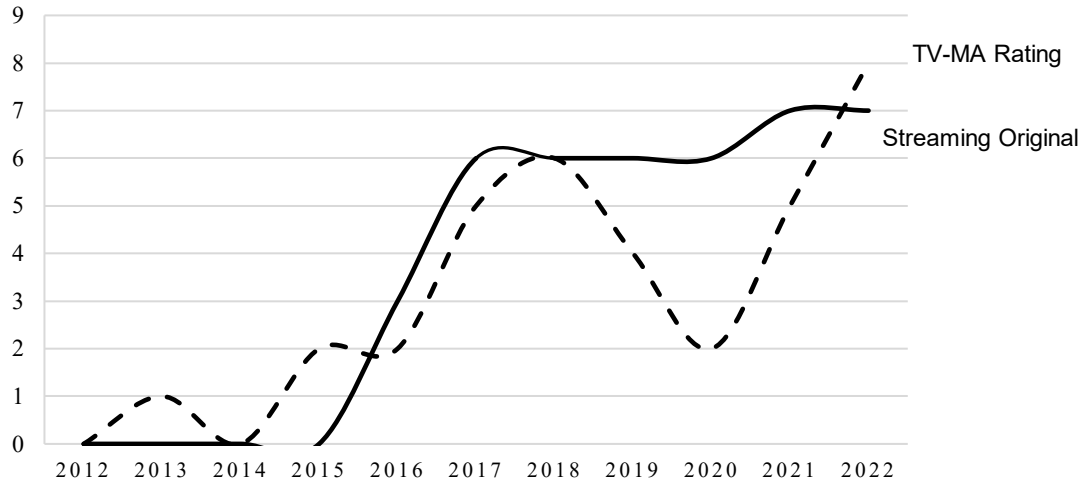

Figure 1.1 - Correlation of TV-MA ratings and streaming original teenage series

This is likely due to the fact that streaming platforms do not abide by the same censorship laws as cable and network television. according to the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996, censorship technology must be implemented in all televisions over thirteen inches (Burns, 1996). While there are certain steps that parents can take to control the accessibility of content to their children: such as parental controls (Sayers, 2022) on the streaming services itself as well as external, subscription-based services such as VidAngel that functions as a filtering extension to popular streaming services (Parents Television Council, 2020). However, these tools are by no means the same level of implementation seen in past censorship efforts. The platform affordances of streaming services therefore allow them to publish what is considered mature content focused to younger audiences, as it isn't automatically filtered out of sight from their key demographic.

It is challenging to speak of the shift in adolescent television representation without discussing the impact that HBO's *Euphoria* (Levinson, 2019-present) has had on the genre. The show is from the perspective of Rue, a teenage girl who recently returned from rehab due to a drug problem she developed upon her father's death. She falls in love with a transgender girl named Jules, struggles with her mental health, and provides insight to the audience on the private lives of her peers. Though well received for the show's portrayal of the realities of addiction (Siegel, 2019), it has also received backlash

for its graphic sex scenes and full-frontal nudity primarily with teenage characters. The first two episodes alone shows a graphic rape scene of a transgender girl by a much older man, a sex scene involving choking, and close to 30 penises in a boys' locker room, which was allegedly scaled back from a proposed 80 (Miller, 2019). Critiques were voiced beyond groups of concerned parents to the greater public that felt unsettled over the show creator Sam Levinson's (a 38-year-old male) continued writing of nearly pornographic sex scenes with teen characters. Regardless of this, the show has been a big success, Zendaya winning two Emmy's for her portrayal as Rue (the first for a portrayal of a teen character as a lead in a drama series) and is currently one of HBO's most successful show of all time, second only to *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019) (Garrett, 2023). However, Netflix originals series, such as *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) are using this increased content space to provide a more comprehensive look at youth sexuality.

Big Mouth (Flackett et al, 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) both hold a TV-MA rating, meaning that they are not technically meant for teen audiences, but their presence on a streaming platform makes them more readily available for young people, so much so that the co-creator and star of *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) acknowledged that many young people watch their show despite it being deemed unsuitable for people under 17 (Netflix, 2020). The status as adult-only shows allow these series to address issues of puberty and sexuality without having to consider the language and content for the sake of remaining in a certain rating.

1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how the long-held tradition of American sex education prioritizing politics over pedagogy by focusing has abstinence-only education has failed to address young people's questions on sexual health, leading to an increased reliance on informal information sources, like television, for answers. Unfortunately, past iterations of teenage sexuality on teen-based narratives have proven to be shame-based and exclusive of sexual diversity, possibly in order to obtain certain ratings to remain accessible to their targeted age demographic. However, the platform affordances of streaming platforms have allowed series developed directly for the medium to provide more mature content whilst still remaining visible to younger audiences, leading to an increase of teen scripted television that holds a TV-MA rating.

While this mature rating has enabled some series to draw more on explicit content for the purpose of shock value, they have also enabled a space to speak about sex to young people in very candid ways. Series like *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), both Netflix original series, use these affordances to provide a source of comprehensive sex education to a degree that was not possible before. Furthermore, these shows extend beyond what is often considered entertainment-education, i.e., providing information via scripted entertainment. These series do not only provide information to their viewers, but also provide a deep commentary onto current issues that relate to young people and sexuality while proposing their own pedagogical stances that offset institutional learning structures and promote a more critical viewer. The effectiveness of these series is perhaps best demonstrated by the high amount of praise and condemnation that they have received since their creation.

Chapter 2. "Ritualized teenage fun": framing *Big Mouth* and *Sex Education*

Otis: [School dances] are an appropriated American tradition that celebrate sexism and peddle an unrealistic portrayal of romantic love…

Maeve: Agreed. Ritualized teenage fun sucks.

- *Sex Education, Season 1, Episode 7*

2.1. Introduction

Sex Education (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) and *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) feature vulgar language, sexual themes, nudity, and explicit sex scenes. However, both series use this "vulgarity" for learning opportunities, rather than to shock audiences like some of their TV-MA teen counterparts. Instead, they use this mature language and content to create a space that provides insight and, at times, resources on current issues of sex and sexuality that young people may face. This pragmatic vulgarity has led to a successful following for each show, along with harsh criticisms from various parental organizations. Prior to providing analyses of these texts, I will introduce the shows with their synopses, respective receptions, and key characters.

2.2. *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present)

This show is middle-aged people playing masturbating children with big feelings!

- *Big Mouth, Season 5, Episode 7*

2.2.1. Synopsis

Big Mouth (Flackett et al., 2017-present) focuses on the friendship between Nick Birch and Andrew Glouberman, two middle school boys in Rochester, New York as well as an ensemble of their peers. Although the series takes place in the present day, it is inspired by the childhood friendship of co-creators Andrew Goldberg and Nick Kroll, the latter of whom voices upwards of twenty characters on the show (including his animated counterpart), who were preteens in the early 1990s. Along with Goldberg and Kroll, the

show is co-created by Jennifer Flackett and Mark Levin, a married couple and Goldberg's former employers. The show premiered in September of 2017 on Netflix and was renewed for a sixth and seventh season in April 2022, with the sixth season premiering October of 2022. The friendships amongst the creators - as well as much of the cast– serves as an important element to the show, as stories and characters are not only drawn from Kroll and Goldberg's adolescence, but from many of the cast and crew, both as former teens and current parents of teens (92NY, 2018; Shattuck, 2017; Turner & Kamenetz, 2020). However, Kroll clarified that the candor between the characters is more "aspirational" than their own adolescents, saying (92NY, 2018, 00:11:20):

> It felt like it was an opportunity for us to either have the conversations that we didn't have when we were kids and hopefully give kids some platform and vocabulary to talk about the things that are going through to let people know, and kids know, that they are not alone going through this that it's happening to everybody and hopefully that takes some of the crushing either shame or embarrassment off of this really tricky period of life.

The show is perhaps most recognizable by their efforts to anthropomorphize puberty and a variety of emotions, such as anxiety, depression, love, shame, and hate, all of which are the central to their own spin-off show, *Human Resources* (Flackett et al., 2022-2023), also on Netflix. While *Human Resources* is about the lives of these anthropomorphizations, in *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present), these characters only exist in association to Nick, Andrew, and their peers. For the benefit of this research, I will outline the key characters in the series pertinent to my analysis as well as discuss the history of mixed reception that the series has received.

2.2.2. Key characters

The show centers, as previously mentioned, around preteens and best friends Nick Birch and Andrew Glouberman, who are inspired by co-creators Nick Kroll and Andrew Goldberg's real-life childhood friendship. Nick is a late bloomer who grows increasingly insecure as his peers around him continue to mature. Nick lives with his older siblings, Leah and Judd, his overly-sex-positive, extremely supportive parents, Diane, and Dr. Elliott Birch, and his imaginary friend – the ghost of Duke Ellington – who lives in their attic. Nick is intent on appearing cool to his peers and is often unaware of the privilege he holds being from a wealthy family with supportive and understanding parents. Andrew, however, is antithesis of Nick.

Andrew is an early bloomer, and therefore tall, hairy, and chronically horny as emphasized by his hormone monster, Maury. His father, Marty, often refers to Andrew as a “freak” or “pervert” and his overly anxious mother doesn’t provide much reassurance either. As a result, Andrew frequently battles with feelings of shame and often worries that he’s secretly an awful person.

The boys have three main girl peers. Jessi Glazer is the boys’ childhood friend and Nick’s on-and-off crush (and for a brief moment, girlfriend). She is the first girl to be assigned a Hormone Monster, Connie, which causes her to become particularly rebellious when her parents’ divorce after her mother is caught having an affair with a woman. Jessi is temporarily relocated to New York City with her mum but moves back in with her dad and his new (pregnant) girlfriend, Caitlin after she suffers from depression and anxiety brought on by the move. Second, Missy Foreman-Greenwald is a bi-racial girl who leans towards the geekier side and prides herself on being an informed, responsible citizen. She is also Andrew’s girlfriend at the beginning of the series, and then his crush. Finally, Lola Skumpy is a wannabe it-girl whose aggressive nature (further emphasized by the fact that she is voiced by Kroll, a 45-year-old man) keeps her from forming genuine friendships. As the series evolves, we learn that Lola lives alone, as she has an absent mother and has never met her biological father. As a result, Lola spends a lot of time by herself and often relies on the Internet for any personal questions she may have.

These characters are further developed by the main anthropomorphizations of the series, Hormone Monsters (Figure 2.1). Hormone Monsters are hairy, hooved, horny (both in body and in mind) beings that speak mainly in sexual innuendos and expose the characters raunchiest, most invasive thoughts to the audience. While they begin as an intrusive presence to each preteen, they evolve to form allyships with the characters and serve as an advisor (although still, at times, a hinderance). Maury and Connie are the main hormone monsters, but the characters of Mona and Rick gain a presence as the series evolves. “Colleagues” of the Hormone Monsters, such as Lovebugs, Depression Kitty, and Tito the Anxiety Mosquito. The main colleague/nemesis of the Hormone Monsters are shame embodied as shame wizards. The main Shame Wizard (Figure 2.2) has a consistent presence throughout the series, with his mother and specialist in female shame, Rita St. Swithens (Figure 2.3) making an appearance in season six but

remaining a regular character on the series spin-off, *Human Resources* (Flackett et al., 2022-2023).

Figure 2.1 - Hormone monsters (from left to right) Maury, Mona, Connie, and Rick
Still from *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) episode Horrority House (Altman et al., 2020)

Figure 2.2 - The Shame Wizard
Still from *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) episode Smooch or Share (Rubens & Moser, 2018))

Figure 2.3 - Rita St. Swithens
Still from *Human Resources* (Flackett et al., 2022-2023) episode Bad Mummies (Correia & Salyer, 2022)

2.2.3. Reception

Big Mouth (Flackett et al., 2017-present) has received both praise and condemnation for its uncensored approach to puberty. Overall, the series, and its subsequent spin-off, has been a success, with over 50 million households watching over 1 billion hours of *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Human Resources* (Flackett et al., 2022-2023) (Dillo, 2023). However, a common critique of the former by conservative parental group is that the show's animation is misleading in that it appears as if it is kid friendly when it is not, and has potential to attract a younger audience (Dittman, 2018; National Decency Coalition [NDC], n.d.; Parents Television and Media Council [PTMC], 2021). The organization Defend Young Minds – which provides parents with tools to help their children "reject pornography" tells parents in a blog post to "prepare to be disgusted" by the show's content and accuses it of "desensitizing the public and sexualizing children for amusement" (Dittman, 2018). The article then links to a petition brought forth by the National Decency Coalition (NDC) for Netflix to remove the show from its catalogue. The NDC is an American groups that aims to "maintain long-held and traditional standards of decency" by combating the "health crisis and easy accessibility of Internet pornography" and aims to do this through "education, evangelism, activism, and public policy." (NDC, n.d.). They released a concise analysis to encourage people to sign this petition. The analysis also points to yet another petition from the ultra-conservative website GoCitizen that has received over 100,000 signatures. They write that *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) is a "vulgar retelling of puberty. It will include everything from nocturnal ejaculation, crude depictions of menstruation, discussions about the normalcy of homosexual sexual acts, and a number of other horrors…" (GoCitizen, n.d.).These critiques are addressed within the show itself, which will be further built on in Chapter 3.

In addition to addressing any critiques in the show, the creators and actors have taken steps in correcting any wrongful representations. On June 24, 2020 – in the midst of Black Lives Matter protests set off by the murder of George Floyd in the United States, the actress who originally voiced Missy, Jenny Slate, stepped down from the role based on the fact that she was a white woman voicing a bi-racial character. Though this was commented on directly in the show (see Appendix B and Appendix C) Slate eventually announced via her Instagram that she would be stepping down as the voice of Missy, acknowledging that she was "engaging in an act of erasure of Black people"

(Slate, 2020). The show is said to have encourage other adult animated series to follow suit (Rao 2020a), such as *Central Park* (Bouchard et al., 2020-present)*, The Simpsons* (Brooks et al., 1989-present), and *Family Guy* (MacFarlane et al.,1999-present). Since the last episode of season four (released December 2020) onward, Missy has been voiced by Ayo Edebiri, a Black American comedy writer and actor.

These changes came out about a year after the show faced additional critiques of how they approached bisexuality. The show made a public apology after receiving backlash from fans on referring to bisexuality as "so binary" when explaining the difference between bisexuality and pansexuality (Lewis, 2020). Co-creator Andrew Goldberg released an apology on Twitter (Goldberg, 2019) on behalf of the show, saying:

> We missed the mark here with this definition of bisexuality vs. pansexuality, and my fellow creators and I sincerely apologize for making people feel misrepresented. Any time we try to define something as complex as human sexuality, it is super challenging, and this time we could have done better. Thank you to the trans, pan, and bi communities for further opening our eyes to these important and complicated issues of representation. We are listening and we look forward to delving into all of this in future seasons.

Initial critics of these issues, particularly that of LGBTQ+ representation, state that the show was able to redeem itself by its fourth season with the story arc of Natalie, a transgender girl who comes out to her summer camp friends, as well as providing a space for queer youth to have identities beyond being the token gay kid (Lewis, 2020). Their ability to remain in dialogue with their viewers (both on screen and off screen) has provided the show to not only redeem itself from wrongdoings but also speak to those wrongdoings in a larger contexts within the show, such as Slate pointing out through Missy's dialogue that she should not be voicing a mixed-race character.

While the positive reviews of the show have touched on its humour, much of its praise has been focused on its ability to address these previous missteps as well as cover difficult topics in sex education that some deem better than school curriculum (Carleton, 2018). One journalist called the show "the queer childhood I wish I had" (Dunst, 2019) while another referred to it as "the sex ed class I wish I had" (Saxena, 2018). Many reviewers admitted that the crudeness of the show is not for all viewers, and that they do sometimes cross a line (Silver, 2017; Stuever, 2018) but others claim that that is exactly what puberty is (Saxena, 2018). Nick Kroll spoke to young people

watching the program, pointing out that “there’s definitely other, worse, disgusting versions of the things we’re talking about on the Internet that your kids have access to that are a lot less responsibly made than what we’re doing.” (Netflix, 2020, 00:01:26). Kroll admitted that they did not intend for the primary audience, saying (O’Brien, 2022, 00:20:32):

> I think after the first season came out, we realized [that] kids were actually going to watch the show…As time has gone one we’ve [gotten] much more serious about how we write it: how we think about it emotionally, but also being responsible with the facts and things [that] we’re talking about.

This sense of responsibility about how and what writers put in the show is indicative of the potential influences of cultural pedagogy. It is also a sentiment that is shared with the creator of another Netflix series*, Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023)

2.3. *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023)

> *A lot of shame comes from old-fashioned views on sex. Sadly, schools have taught a lot of people to feel ashamed of their identities and bodies. The cycle continues today.*
>
> - *Sex Education, Season 3, Episode 7*

2.3.1. Synopsis

Netflix’s *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) focuses on the life of 17-year-old British teen, Otis Milburn, who is having anxieties about entering the world of sexuality despite his mother, Dr. Jean Milburn, being a renowned sex and relationship therapist. Otis is an introverted kid, spending the vast majority of his time with his best friend, Eric. However, all this changes when outsider (and Otis’ crush) Maeve witnesses Otis give insightful sex advice to a struggling peer and gets the idea that they should open a for-profit, secret sex clinic at their school. Maeve and Otis proceed to get intertwined into the personal lives of their peers, leading to an ensemble of classmates eventually working together to provide the support and comprehensive sex education they feel like they aren’t receiving at school.

Written and created by Laurie Nunn, an English playwright-turned-screenwriter, the show premiered on Netflix in 2019 and announced in June of 2023 that their upcoming fourth season, set to release in fall 2023, would be their last (it is worth noting

that the fourth season of this series will not be included in this analysis, due to the timing of its initial release). Nunn admits to drawing from her own experiences and what she wished she had learned in high school sex education, as well as drawing from popular American teen series and film, both aesthetically and by paying homage to classic scenes of the genre (Nicholson, 2020). When explaining the inspiration for the show Nunn (2023) wrote: that her and her fellow writers “wanted to make a show that would answer some of the questions we all used to have about love, sex, friendship, and our bodies. Something that would have helped our inner teenagers feel a little less alone.”

To do this, Nunn aimed to focus the show on themes of friendship, stating that “the platonic relationships are very important in the show. I think that we should have more messaging in the world that says that great friendship and chosen family are equally important to romance or finding the love of your life.” (Bonos, 2021). Nunn’s approach to these conversations amongst friends have allowed difficult conversations to be had without sounding like a lecture of using scare tactics and focuses on the wellness of the adolescents rather than what they’re doing (Rao, 2020b). Fans of the series have taken to social media platforms such as Twitter to praise the show’s approach to representation, both of underrepresented topics to an ensemble who show a diverse set of bodies, race, sizes, abilities, sexualities, etc. but are part of storylines aside from their status as minorities (Dominick, 2020). With these friendships being at the forefront of the series, it is important to understand how each character relates to one and other.

2.3.2. Key characters

The series focuses on Otis Milburn, an awkward, sensitive, 17-year-old boy who has a knack for providing sex advice despite himself being a late bloomer. Along with Otis is his best friend is Eric Effiong, who is first generation Nigerian-English. As the series progresses, Eric begins to negotiate how different areas of himself (his homosexuality, his heritage, etc.) play into his identity as he grows up. Otis (with Eric by his side) starts an underground sex clinic with Maeve Wiley, a moody, chronically apathetic, feminist killjoy who spends most of her time ghostwriting student essays for cash. As the series develops, we learn that she lives alone in a trailer park and supports herself financially, since her mother is in-and-out of her life due to a drug addiction. Maeve is framed as the “loner,” yet she has a secret friendship (which quickly becomes public) with Aimee Gibbs, who is a member of the in-crowd before she “dumps” them for

Maeve. Aimee is bimbo-esque from a wealthy background, but after she is sexually assaulted on public transit, her disposition on life begins to change. Aimee and Maeve's friendship (like Otis's and Eric's) is very aspirational, and a stark contrast to Aimee's previous relationships with the in-crowd.

The head of the in-crowd is Ruby Matthews, who is snobby and unapproachable. Her minions/friends are Olivia Hanan and Anwar Bakshi, both of whom tend to parrot her every move. Other noteworthy students are Rahim, a French and sexually liberated student, Jackson Marchetti, who is Head Boy and the star athlete, and friends with Vivienne Odusanya, the school's most ambitious student, and Cal Bowman, a non-binary American transfer.

In terms of teachers, most are framed as repressive to the students, except for the band teacher Mr. Hendricks and the English teacher, Ms. Sands. At the beginning of the series, the school's Headteacher is Michael Groff, but after he is let go the schoolboard brings in a young woman named Hope Hadden. Though Hope first appears to be a more approachable Headteacher, her strict nature and cruel tactics soon take over the school.

Overall, these characters have been well received by critics and audiences alike, with many of the actors gaining notoriety from the show and continuing on to be cast in many highly-acclaimed film and television series. This is not to say, however, that the show is without controversy or critique.

2.3.3. Reception

Sex Education (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) has received critiques from the some conservative parental organizations that are petitioning to remove *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) for the explicit nature of their candid conversations as well as by has conservative media outlets for its content,with one journalist calling it a "thinly veiled attempt to force a young audience into swallowing a liberal pill." (Pratt, 2019). Aside from ideological critiques one critic noted that the show's utopian quality is not as aspirational as it is impossible, since it does not provide contextual sources of conflict that real youth face – such as political tension and other worldly events (Berlatsky, 2021). Also similar to *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) the series has reported a high level of

viewership, with over 40 million views within the first month of its premiere and its third season debuting at number one on the Netflix charts (Porter, 2019; Tassi, 2021).

Unlike *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present), the series has not received the same amount of consistent backlash. This is most likely because it does not risk the same sort of attraction to younger viewers based on the age of the characters and that it is not animated, which are two often cited issues with the concept of *Big Mouth* (Dittman, 2018; NDC, n.d.; PTMC, 2021). Furthermore, the characters being in their later teens makes conversations of sex seem more hegemonic to current rhetoric than those same conversations between pre-teen characters.

2.4. Methodological interlude

Thus far, I have outlined the background, synopses, key characters, and overall reception of two Netflix original series: *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023). While this is important contextual information, it will not be the main focus of each analysis. I have selected these series to analyze the extent to which they intergrate feminist pedagogical tools into entertainment education. To do so, I look to the narrative structures of each series. By narrative structures, I mean, the storylines covered in each series, including the dialogue as well as the characters involved. Additionally, though not a focal point of each analysis, the aesthetics of the series will be drawn on as they relate to providing certain temporal elements to each show that inform the narrative structures. In these structures, I will utilize Simon and Gagnon's (1984) sexual scripting method to identifying feminist pedagogical tools as outlined by Shrewsbury's (1997) work on feminist pedagogy as well as Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional conception of discourse as it relates to feminist critical discourse analysis.

Simon and Gagnon's (1984) sexual scripting theory was initially developed in hopes of proposing an approach for thinking about human sexuality "in ways that are responsive to both the sociohistorical process and the necessary understandings that preserve a sense of individually experiences lives" (pp.53). They offered the notion of scripts as metaphors "for conceptualizing the production of behaviour within social life" (pp.53). The scripting of sexual identity operating on three levels: cultural scenarios,

interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. For the benefit of this analysis, “scripts” refers to the narrative structures of each respective series, as previously defined.

Cultural scenarios are broad, collective understandings that don’t necessarily apply to all individuals. Cultural scenarios are of particular importance to adolescence, as “the major cultural scenarios…tend to be almost exclusively drawn from requirements of adolescence and young adulthood” (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, pp. 59). In both series, cultural scenarios are often used as the main catalysts for the storylines and character development. Meaning, protagonists often negotiate the collective understandings of what it means to be a young person: whether that’s dealing with the expectations of being a student and a friend, or being of a certain gender, race, sexuality, or economic class.

Interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts are more subjective. Interpersonal scripting allows the individual to to shape “the materials of relevant cultural scenarios into scripts for behaviour in particular contexts” (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, pp.53). In other words it allows the individual to customize cultural scenarios as it relates to their own realities. Finally, intrapsychic is a it is the “ordering of images and desires that elicit and sustain sexual arousal” (Simon & Gagnon, 1986, pp.97), or, how these scripts inform the individual of their own sexual preferences or desires.

In addition to Simon & Gagnon’s work (1984;1986), I will be drawing on Frith and Kitzinger’s (2001) work that combined sexual scripting theory with Edwards’s (1994) concept of script formulations, i.e., that most individual speech is informed by sociocultural factors that provide a formulaic approach to scripting. The authors warn that “script formulations are commonplace in people’s talk, and when they crop up in those parts of talk collected by psychologists and labelled ‘data,’ they are often treated unproblematically as evidence for some underlying regularity ‘behind’ the talk” (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001, pp.228). They write that the “shift from script theory to script formulations changes how we read qualitative data” to attend to how people “actively construct sex as scripted, and to the interactional effects of their so doing.” (pp. 228) The integration of discursive practices in sexual scripting theory is further outlined by Beres (2013), in order to consider the relationship between scripting and power. Adding discursive approaches to sexual scripting theory aligns my use of scripting, with the critical discourse framework of Norman Fairclough (1995)

Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse is a method of critical discourse analysis that aims to present "connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations […] which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts" (pp.97). Similar to sexual scripting theory (and indicative through its name), this form of analysis is conducted on three levels: description, interpretation, and explanation. *Description* refers to the analysis to the content of the text itself (i.e., textual analysis); *interpretation,* refers to an analysis of how these texts were made (i.e., processing analysis). Finally, the *explanative* dimension sets to analyze the texts relation to society at large (i.e., social analysis).

As evidenced in what follows, *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) use a series of discursive practices and devices to comment critically on the hegemonic ideology of youth and sexuality in the United States. The goals of critical discourse analysis coincide with the goals of sexuality studies and gender studies, since they are all concerned with critically approaching dominant discourses for the sake of social justice (Lazar, 2017; Motschenbacher, 2017). Across the analysis of scripts and discourses, I will also draw on feminist pedagogy to guide my work.

Feminist pedagogy embodies an ethics of care in its teaching that not only highlights but relies on the benefits of thinking for the collective wellbeing of the group rather than the autonomy of the individual (Millner, 2019). Shrewsbury (1997) writes that "at the core of feminist pedagogy is a re-imagining of the classroom as a community of learners where there is both autonomy of self and mutuality with others" (pp. 170). Shrewsbury (1997) further argues that there are three concepts that are central to the goal of feminist pedagogy: empowerment, community, and leadership. Feminist methods efforts to reimagine discourses of power is also seen in how research is produced, with more of an emphasis on creatively presentation research, often as storytelling (Dupuis et al., 2022). Therefore, drawing on these series as an appropriate place to instill feminist pedagogy is fitting to the aims of feminist methodology.

In summary, in this research, I will apply elements of Simon and Gagnon's (1984) sexual scripting theory to determine the presence of feminist pedagogical tools in *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023).To do so, I will draw on Shrewsbury's (1997) core concepts of feminist pedagogy –

empowerement, community, and leadership – in addition to Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis as it relates to disassembling patriarchial power structures.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the synopses, characters, and reception of two Netflix original series: *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al.,2019-2023), as well as provided a brief methodological interlude to introduce the theoretical groundwork for this research. Though these shows are part of a growing number of teen-centric narrative series to hold a TV-MA rating, their use of explicit content differs from other series of the same genre. While many series use mature content for shock value, both *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) use their TV-MA ratings to speak about sex and sexual health in a very candid manner.

This candor has led to critiques and even calls for cancellation from groups that feel that these series either oversexualizes children (see: Dittman, 2018; National DC, n.d.; PTMC, 2021) or aggressively push liberal agendas (see: Pratt, 2019). The shows themselves work to combat this rhetoric, in basing much of their conversations about young people and sexuality being unjustly rooted in shame. While *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) does so in their storylines, *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) employs a high degree of meta-commentary and speaks directly to the concerns raised by viewers about the show. This meta-commentary is not only consistent with the genre of adult animation (Feyersinger, 2011; Moritz, 2021), but also comments on different power structures media and institutions rely on to maintain a hegemonic view of youth and sexuality.

Chapter 3. "Entertaining and informative, but also not too preachy": The use of critical discourse analysis in Netflix's *Big Mouth*

> *Do you have some sort of skit we can watch that would be entertaining and informative, but also not too preachy?*
>
> - *Big Mouth, Season 2, Episode 5*

3.1. Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Netflix original adult animation series *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) has been both praised and condemned for its provocative-yet-honest take on puberty and early adolescence. Praise for the show extends beyond its content to the way they have addressed their own missteps, such as recasting the voice actor to match the race of a biracial character or releasing a public apology in response to backlash on their representation of bisexuality (Goldberg, 2019; Lewis, 2020; Slate, 2020). With the show being animated, showrunners are able to address potential areas of critique (such as recasting a character mid-series) thanks to the medium. This medium also enables them to discuss puberty in a much more abstract manner.

By being an animated show, *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present), is able to use these embodiments creatively to explore the abstract emotional and physical "state" of puberty in a way that allows viewers to see inner dialogue and provide social commentary in an upfront, straightforward. I would like to highlight three key themes that highlight how *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) uses its status as an "adult" animated series as a cultural pedagogical approach to sex education that differs from both past representations on television as well as in institutional sex education. Overall, the series uses its potential as cultural pedagogy to highlight discourse on youth and sexuality, educate against (rather than with) shame, and introduce narratives where young boys participate in conversations of systemic misogyny.

3.2. Theme 1: Meta-commentary as a mode of critical thinking

Much of the show's comedy relies on the presence of meta-commentary to its animated form, which is a popular tool in the genre (Feyersinger, 2011; Moritz, 2021). The series' use of meta-commentary is reminiscent of Fairclough's (1995) concept of three-dimensional critical discourse analysis which functions on a descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory level. According to Fairclough (1995) this critical approach to discourse analysis sets to highlight relationships amongst texts and power structures which often go unseen and "whose effectiveness depends on this opacity." (pp. 97). The show's self-critical discourse analysis intends to unveil the level of opacity that conversations of young people, sex, and media rely on.

On the descriptive level, the show functions in ways that are similar to uses of meta-commentary in the broader genre of adult animation. Characters refer to the passage of time in seasons or episodes as well as addressing inconsistencies, such as all the clocks showing different times in the school, the voice of a character has been recast, and questioning why a character is always wearing the same clothes. For example, at one point Jessi tells her Hormone Monster, Connie, that she only has four fingers, adding "but that's pretty standard animation stuff." (Quinaz & Moser, 2018 00:10:53). Sometimes they comment on the scripting of the show, such as when Nick apologizes to Jessi, taking complete responsibility for his actions and a characters says, "I bet a woman wrote that line." (Ozeri et al., 2021; 00:24:18).

The series moves to an interpretive level mainly due to its frequency in which it discusses its status as a Netflix original series. Characters will ask if Netflix is allowed to show a dirty image or if they need to say certain things for "Netflix legal" (Appendix D) or try to persuade others into subscribing to Netflix but the scene being cut off by a blank screen with a "scene redacted" caption when one character begins to offer their Netflix password to another in lieu of purchasing a subscription (Appendix E). The show goes as far as to mention the creators by name and comment on their relationships (Appendix F) to one another (for reference, of the four co-creators, two are married, two are childhood best friend, and one is a former assistant of another) or that the production is running out of money when they do a clip show.

At one point, in the season five finale, co-creator Nick Kroll is placed within the show to speak to his animated counterpart (see Figure 3.1), as well as other characters that he voices, having a conversation with his animated younger self (Appendix G) and addressing the fact that many think another character he voices (Maury, Andrew's Hormone Monster) is commonly thought to be played by a different actor (Appendix H).

Figure 3.1 - Co-creator Nick Kroll (left) with animated counterpart, Nick (right)
Still from *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) episode Re-New Year's Eve (Ozeri et al., 2021)

The series also seemingly comments on other Netflix Original Series, from drawing characters from other series into the show, or commenting on the reception of other youth-focused narratives. In season 3 Maury says, directly to the camera: "No teenager should kill themselves, even though it makes for captivating programming." (Altman & Suarez, 2019; 00:23:55). This is likely a reference to another Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why* (Golin et al., 2017-2020), which removed a graphic suicide scene from its first season (Bernstein, 2019; Hines, 2019) the same year that this episode was released. However, much of the critique remains on the show itself. The show mainly comments on its risqué nature by mentioning the areas of critique they may receive in a larger sociocultural context. In the last scene of the first season, The Pornscape (Ozeri & Moser, 2017), the following exchange takes place between Maury, to Andrew and Nick, who are based on the younger selves of co-creators Nick Kroll and Andrew Goldberg (00:25:09) :

Maury: Look, I know this all seems embarrassing now boys, but maybe one day you'll look back on this time fondly. And perhaps, even make something beautiful out of it.

Andrew: What, like a show about a bunch of kids masturbating?

Nick: Isn't that basically just, like, childhood pornography?

Maury: Holy shit, I hope not! I mean, maybe if its animated we can get away with it, right?

This self-awareness is consistently prevalent in the episode, The Planned Parenthood Show (Altman & Francis, 2018), which is a compilation of skits that aim to be "entertaining and informative but also not too preachy" (00:01:27), which they state as a "fine line [they're] trying to walk" (00:02:02). At one point, a character states her pro-choice viewpoint very clearly, to which Nick (who, again, is voiced by co-creator Nick Kroll) states that he's going to get Twitter comments about this episode that will be "mean, and threatening, and weirdly personal." (00:18:41). At the end of the episode, the characters come together in a *Saturday Night Live*-esque conclusion, with their teacher speaking to the audience, thanking the liberal elite "for their awesome agenda" (00:24:45) continuing to say "You guys rocked it. You convinced us to do an episode on Planned Parenthood, even though so many people are gonna be furious at us for doing it."

In the first chapter, I briefly outlined the history of sex education in the American context, namely its long prioritization of politics over pedagogy and its use to create moral panic in order to win the votes of the Christian Right. The American sex education structure has seemingly had ulterior motives since the early involvement of the church, or "social purists" (Slominski, 2021) to present day radical bills being proposed by politicians , such as Florida's call to ban the talk of menstruation in schools, or their equally controversial "don't say gay" law, which bans any discussion of queer sexuality or gender diversity up to grade 12 to further their own presence. I revisit this because I believe that the contrast between this opacity and the transparency enabled in *Big Mouth*'s (Flackett et al., 2017-present) meta-commentary is one worth highlighting.

The consistent meta-references to its medium (animation), platform (Netflix), and content (sexually explicit material and young people) are important structural elements of

the show because it allows creators to comment on ethical critiques of the series as well as remind viewers that these characters and this world exist exclusively in a narrative space. This commentary reminds viewers that these are not children, but animations of fictional children that are voiced by adults. No child is speaking these lines nor are they experiencing these storylines, and the show acknowledges they run the risk of being perceived as unethical, hence the comment of getting "away with it" if the show is animated. Furthermore, commenting on the critiques of the show by mentioning that they might receive angry tweets or backlash strengthens the show's point of view and ideological stance on the matters they cover. Acknowledging their critiques allows the show to make the viewers aware that they know that certain demographics have deemed them unacceptablel but have decided to do these stories and cover these topics regardless.

Big Mouth (Flackett et al., 2017-present) frequently reminds its viewers of its context: from the creators' inspiration and its relationship to Netflix, to acknowledging critiques on the show and even addressing them directly (such as when the voice of Missy was replaced in later seasons). The shows willingness to offer information on factors that influence the show is a pedagogical approach that is not seen in the American institutional sex education system, such as *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) suggesting that the "liberal elite" convinced them to do a show on Planned Parenthood while the relationship between politics and curriculum in formal sex education is not only seldom discussed but framed in a way to neglect its influence. This transparency is an important element of the series, as it often preaches that honesty and communication are essential. Particularly when dealing one of the most consistent enemies: shame.

3.3. Theme 2: Pedagogical approaches to shame

The show is most defined by its creation of Hormone Monsters, which are meant to serve as anthropomorphizations of puberty, enabling students to "talk" to their hormones. In the opening scene of the series, Andrew is visited by Maury (his assigned hormone monster) during class, to which Andrew says: "Go away. You are not real. You're just some hormone monster that my brain created." (Kroll et al., 2017; 00:00:36). Similarly, Jessi tells her Hormone Monster Connie that "all you do is make me sore, and hairy, and bloated and like, want to cry all the time." (Altman & Francis, 2017; 00:02:27).

The presence of Hormone Monsters in particular presents another unique opportunity in framing puberty and, to a certain extent, sex education. The dialogue between characters and their Hormone Monsters rejects the idea of puberty being something that "happens" to kids as if they are passive recipients, but rather a relationship with themselves that they can learn to control, and at some point, benefit from. As the show evolves, the characters seemingly gain better control of their hormone monsters, with them often working as allies, often against other anthropomorphic figures, namely, the Shame Wizard. Where previous representations of teen sexuality on television as well as the abstinence-only approach to formal sex education have used shame as a pedagogical tool, *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) takes the opposite approach by placing it into their cultural curriculum as something that can be combated through education.

The concept of exploring shame developed in the second season of the series when creators decided that the Hormone Monsters needed and enemy (92NY, 2018). This allowed the Hormone Monsters and their assigned characters to work together instead of in conflict, as seen in much of the first season. For the remainder of the series, shame is framed as being:

1. More "corrosive" than embarrassment (92NY, 2018, 00:03:22)
2. Strengthened/informed by outside influences,
3. A lifelong struggle, and
4. Occasionally merited

The creators and writers of the show drew on different resources, namely the TED Talks of Brené Brown and determined that "shame is instead of you've done a bad thing, you are a bad thing." (92NY, 2018, 00:03:22). Drawing this operational line between shame and embarrassment is important within this context, as the show essentially builds on a universal understanding that preteen-hood is an inherently embarrassing time in one's life. In the first season alone there is a near constant presence of embarrassment, but the narratives in which the Shame Wizard enters are different. For example, the character of Jessi does not feel shame when she gets her first period on a class field trip and manages to brush of her first encounter with the Shame Wizard after she gets caught shoplifting. However, when she overhears her mother blaming her father when they catch Jessi trying weed, the Shame Wizard makes

another, much more invasive, appearance that causes Jessi to become depressed This helps clarify to viewers that while embarrassment is a form of temporary discomfort, prolonged feelings of shame can impact one's psyche in a much more invasive way.

While shame is framed as an internal battle, it is also presented as a feeling that is influenced (and often times, caused by) outside sources. The series often shows feelings of shame being planted by comments from others or based on cultural influences (advertising, wellness blogging, and pornography being amongst the examples in the show). This suggests that shame is not necessarily built from a lack of self-confidence or the inability to filter outside influences but is more so the product of a symbiotic relationship between a multitude of factors. Therefore, shame is highly individualized and contextual rather than an anticipated response to cultural pedagogy. Unfortunately, the contextual nature of shame also makes it highly adaptable, and therefore a lifelong struggle.

Being a lifelong struggle, the show warns that there may be times where feelings of shame are merited. Every storyline featuring the Shame Wizard resolves with him being "defeated" by the characters, however, it is clear that this victory is only temporary. In the episode, Vagina Shame (Altman & Jardim, 2022), the host and expert in women and shame, Rita St. Swithens, concludes the episode by saying that "shame doesn't just go away. It adapts and comes back stronger than ever." (00:25:27). And finally, within this constant evolution, there are some situations in which shame is merited and at times productive. The example of merited shame in the series is brought forward when Jessi and Missy get into a fight after Jessi takes over Missy's new affinity group and fails to acknowledge so when Missy confronts her. Jessi sees herself solely as the victim in this conflict, but the Shame Wizard shows Jessi the situation from Missy's perspective because "sometimes shame is so very appropriate" (Ozeri & Francis, 2021, timestamp needed). Jessi realizes that she was not receptive to Missy's feelings and goes to apologize. This aligns with the rest of the overarching evolution of the characters' relationships with their emotions (which are presented as anthropomorphizations) in which they learn to co-exist with their feelings and learn to negotiate between productive and unproductive thoughts.

The character that must work to understand shame the most is Andrew, as shame plays an integral role in the evolution of his character since he is privy to both

embarrassment and shame. A source of shame for Andrew are his intrusive thoughts often instigated by Maury, particularly when he fears that they may make him a bad person or make the girls in his class feel uncomfortable, which leads to many instances in which a boy must negotiate his feminist understandings within himself.

3.4. Theme 3: Feminist negotiation of sex education through masculine lens

While this show does centre around the friendship of two boys, it covers an extensive amount of topics that are often framed as female-specific issues: such as periods, vagina shame, sexual assault, and more. More so, these topics are not solely covered by the female characters but are collective conversations that span across gender, grades, and even generations. While this does present the possibility of these narratives being read with a tone of male saviourism,yet the ways these plots often play out negates any possibility that the male characters are seen “saving” their female counterparts.

A focal character in many of these storylines is Andrew who, as a reminder, is an awkward, chronically horny early bloomer who starts the series by being constantly tormented by his Hormone Monster, untimely erections, and the Shame Wizard. Most of Andrew’s shame roots in his puberty status leading him to make questionable choices motivated by puberty with his conflicting conscious making him worried that he is a bad person. Despite this, Andrew remains an integral part in the show addressing traditionally female-oriented cultural pedagogies, such as sexual assault, double standards, and rape culture.

The show features two episodes in particular that focus on themes of sexual assault. In episode eight of the first season, The Head Push (Altman et al., 2017) takes place at a high school house party where Andrew and then-girlfriend Missy witness an older classmate try to coerce Nick’s older sister, Leah, into giving him a blowjob. In the tenth episode of the third season, Disclosure the Movie: The Musical! (Altman et al., 2019), the school puts on a play of the 1994 movie *Disclosure* (Levinson, 1994), which, is about a woman who frames an employee for sexual assault. Their teacher-turned-director Mr. Lizer refers to it as “an exploration of the dangerous times that we men are

now forced to navigate" (Altman et al., 2019; 00:06:53). Andrew then witnesses his classmate Lola being groomed by Mr. Lizer.

In both episodes, Andrew is quick to come forward as a witness to these incidents. In, The Head Push (Altman et al., 2017), he is quick to express his shock to Missy before going with her to tell Nick about what they saw (Appendix I). Witnessing this exchange, Leah decides to out Daniel as a "head pusher" to the entire party via charades, to which Andrew, along with Missy, corroborate her story. Similarly, after Andrew unsuccessfully addresses Lola in Disclosure the Movie: the Musical! (Altman et al., 2019) Andrew goes to Jessi to express concern and seek advice, saying: "I kind of need a female opinion here, because I think something weird is going on with Lizer and Lola" (00:21:12) then going with Jessi to confront Lola saying: "Lola, we think what he did to you was wrong. (00:21:50)."

Having Andrew play an active role as a solution seeker in narratives about sexual assault is noteworthy, based on how he is characterized throughout the rest of the show. Andrew is introduced to the audience as a boy who consistently fails to control his hormones (i.e., Maury) leading to nearly every aspect of his life being sexualized in some way. Overall, Andrew is the personification of the outdated sentiment that "boys will be boys" and a character trope that is often removed from any narratives addressing sociocultural issues surrounding sex, much less sexual assault. In the beginning of the series, Andrew is controlled by Maury in a way that frames him as an innocent "victim" of puberty. However, as the series progresses, we see Andrew enter into a negotiation with Maury and challenge certain thoughts, as well as exercise some agency over his actions. This negates the concept that adolescent boys are passive beings that cannot be productive participants in counteracting rape culture. More so, Andrew is never framed as a hero or saviour in any of his actions, even being denied his suggests title of "King Feminist" by Jessi (Appendix J).

Jessi's immediate decline of considering Andrew as "King Feminist" is worth emphasizing, as it suggests that while Andrew's participation as a solution-seeker in narratives on sexual assault provides an additional layer onto these conversations, it does run the risk of Andrew coming off as the classic white male saviour trope while committing these heroic interventions and "saving" his female classmates from their assailants. The aforementioned comment follows what is arguably the storyline that

leans the most towards Andrew serving as a male saviour. After confronting Lola about her assault, Andrew goes to Jessi despite Lola telling Andrew that she was okay. This simple reminder to both the character and the audience that this small act of voicing his concerns to Jessi does not make him a saviour or guiding force in feminism within the show, nor does it forgive any wrongdoings or missteps that he has done before. More so, said missteps are another aspect that allow Andrew to participate in these conversations without serving solely as a male saviour.

In participating in these conversations, Andrew often fumbles and shows his lack of knowledge on each subject. In Everybody Bleeds (Galuska & Francis, 2017), Jessi is forced to confide in Andrew when she gets her first period on a field trip to the Statue of Liberty. When Jessi tells Andrew that she got her period he vomits in response. Then, when she asks him to find hygiene products at the gift shop, he claims that they had none and opted for a commemorative 9/11 towel over a New York Yankees pennant since he prefers the New York Mets (Appendix K). He does not come to Jessi's aid by taking charge of the situation; in some cases, he makes the situation worse (such as giving Jessi a towel to use as a pad). However, he does repeatedly ask Jessi if she is okay, listens to her requests, and at the end offers her his sweater to conceal the bloodstain on her shorts. In this instance, Andrew's lack of knowledge presenting Jessi with additional challenges, yet his good intentions and empathy make Jessi feel supported. Andrew negates the possibility of being a saviour due not only to these stumbles, but the fact that in some storylines, he starts off as the villain.

The show also deals with more nuanced themes of the relationship between toxic masculinity and systemic misogyny, in which Andrew must question his role in these conflicts. In the episode, What is it About Boobs? (Galuska et al., 2018), "boob fever" strikes the school when a classmate seemingly developed breasts overnight. Jessi tells Andrew that the boys' obsession with breasts is making the other female classmates, particularly their friend Missy, feel insecure about being flat-chested. He tells Maury that he doesn't "want to make girls feel weird about their bodies" (00:15:28). By the end of the episode, he addresses Missy, saying: "I just want to apologize if I made you feel weird…Our bodies, they're changing. And if the way boys look at girls makes you uncomfortable, then I'm sorry." (00:23:56).

However, in the episode Girls are Angry Too (Adams et al., 2019), Andrew initially takes an opposing position against the girls when the school enforces a sexist dress code, stating: “well, I do feel out of control all of the time and I think I’m going to use that as an excuse for my actions” (00:09:51). The girls decide to do a “slut walk” to protest the dress code and Andrew lashes out at them, when in reality Andrew’s anger stems from his crush Missy choosing to date a different classmate over him. Andrew takes to the internet to rant about girls when he is invited by a man to meet up with others who share his views. Andrew goes to said meeting and soon realizes that he is in a room of neo-Nazis. Andrew admits to Nick that he’s been acting poorly due to Missy dating another boy, saying “it made me so angry, and I thought that I was the victim, but now I think that maybe I’m the asshole!” (00:25:21). Andrew operating initially as a contributor to the problem in these respective episodes allows for a narrative in which boys are held responsible for their role in feminist issues and rids the episodes of the risk that Andrew will have a saviouristic role in the storylines.

While including male voices in conversations of systemic misogyny points towards an improvement in how women’s health and safety is framed within cultural pedagogy, the show lacks a sense of fluidity that reflects current youths’ approach to gender. This does perhaps, however, align with the age of the characters, who are perhaps at the beginning stages of questioning their own gender identity. Regardless, queering lines of gender fits well with the “in between-ness” that cultural pedagogy represents. Meaning, if cultural pedagogues is to exist in a space between culture and pedagogy, then the content and delivery must also be willing to do the same.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how the Netflix original series *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) makes use of the meta/temporal spaces privy to animated series to put young people in dialogue with their own emotions via the characterization of puberty in the form of hormone monsters. More so, the series uses meta-commentary as a way of highlighting the power of opacity in institutional sex education as well as other media texts, encouraging viewers to engage critically with the series itself.

In addition to commenting on cultural pedagogy, the series also contributes a pedagogical point-of-view by utilizing its platform to discuss topics that are often

underrepresented in institutional learning. The goal of this learning aims to more personal successes, such as encouraging honesty and support amongst peer networks. This is displayed by educating against shame rather than educating with shame as well as creating narratives in which male characters serve as empathetic allies to their female counterparts rather than approaching matters in a saviourist role. In this sense, the pedagogical approach taken by *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) is suggestive of a more feminist approach to sex education, which is indicative of a relationship-centric approach to sex education. This is further reinforced by similar themes in another Netflix original series, *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023).

Chapter 4. "An impossible assignment about female solidarity": *Sex Education* as feminist pedagogy

> *"I gave them an impossible assignment about female solidarity. They won't finish for ages."*
>
> - *Sex Education, Season 2, Episode 7*

4.1. Introduction

Sex Education (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) exists in a world of constant in-betweenness that adds a certain amount of surrealism to the show. The letterman jackets and high school dances fit well within the American concept of high school, yet the show is undeniably set in Britain. The show appears to be set in present day, with characters discussing current reality television and communicating primarily through smartphones, yet the outdated cars, fashion, and modest use of said technology suggest an older era is trying to be conveyed. The content provides the essence of an after-school special, yet storylines indulge in classic teen narrative tropes, making the characters more dynamic as a result.

The series has been praised for its realistic portrayals of sex, as well as addressing relatable topics to its audience. Yet, while the content of the show is relatable, the execution is not, making viewers wonder if these are lessons that can be applied in the real world (Berlatsky, 2021), or if this notion of young people exercising agency and empathy amongst themselves is pure fiction. Perhaps the best way to frame the ethos of this show is by calling it a utopian rewriting of the genre. And while this can make the solutions proposed in the series appear otherworldly, it is worth noting how *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) both uses and produces (or uses and then *re*produces) cultural pedagogy around young people and sexual wellness.

4.2. Theme 1: Utopian rewriting of genre

The use of repetition in character tropes and cliches is a dominant strategy in teen narratives; in order to convey the supposed universal experiences of adolescence, they must be reiterated. Or, as Driscoll (2011) writes:

> “The central idea of adolescence on which it depends must be relevant to an already recognized category of experience. Teen film works largely by telling us things we already know about characters and situations that we are presumed to instantly recognize.” (pp. 83).

Where *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) differs, is that though it initially appears to be repeating highly recognizable characters and situations, it then rewrites them in a way that comments on and critiques the impact of these tropes on what messages can be conveyed, and how those messages are potentially harmful.

In season one, for example, conflict builds until the school dance, as is the case in many classic teen films. The dance is very often a space of grand romantic gestures, which is what one student, Liam has been attempting to do to ask his crush, Lizzy, to the dance. He tells Otis that though Lizzy initially said no that she may change her mind if he does something romantic, such as bake a cake or write a love letter. Otis is quick to suggest that if he’s already asked and said no, then the answer is no. Liam does not take this advice and attempts to make yet another grand gesture at the dance to impress Lizzy who (still) shows no interest in him. Otis is then able to comfort Liam while still reminding him that he cannot force Lizzy into liking him back. In this instance, the series builds on the teen dance setting being the climax of the film and suggests that the notion of repeated grand confessions of love is not romantic nor endearing but actually a form of harassment. And while these themes draw on narrative recognizable to teen films at large, the series also draws on specific teen films for influences.

In season two, episode seven, the show references two teen movies: *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004), and *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985). Firstly, when Headteacher Michael Groff’s wife asks for a divorce after speaking with Dr. Milburn, Michael goes into the school and photocopies pages from her notebook containing students’ confidential information and then throws them into the hallways for everyone to read in hopes of framing Dr. Milburn for the act. Both narratively and aesthetically, this is comparable to the film *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004), in which the head mean girl, Regina George, commits a similar act. An establishing shot in this episode shows Dr. Milburn coming into the school after the incident to see her notes scattered in the hallway (Figure 4.1) visually aligns with the shot of Regina George also standing in the hallway, admiring the notes that she has released to the public (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.1 - Headteacher Michael Groff
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season two's Episode 7 (Nunn & Taylor, 2020)

Figure 4.2 – Still of Regina George from *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004)

In *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004.), teenagers – particularly teenage girls – are often likened to wild animals, one example being in the musical adaptation of the film with a song titled "Apex Predator" (Weed & Henningsen, 2018) about the school's mean girl, Regina George. Regina introduces the Burn Book early in the film to the newest member of their clique. The Burn Book is a collective scrapbook where Regina and her friends (the titular mean girls) write down mean remarks or rumours about their peers. Later in the film, Regina uses these gossip pages to frame her former friends. She forges a nasty page about herself and turns it into the principal, before tossing photocopies around the

school. The student body is then seen physically fighting each other while jungle-esque music plays and the shrieks of fighting girls sounds animalistic. Finally, the school administrator goes to the principal and exclaims that “the girls have gone wild” (Waters, 2004, 01:07:35) In the film, the principal shows a deep amount of concern and empathy and is very proactive in further investigating the case. He, along with other members of the faculty, hosts an assembly of all the girls in the school and has them spend the day trying to bond. In contrast, in *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), the principal is the perpetrator.

While the girls in this series are not immune to conflict or vindictive acts, they are never framed as being catty nor conniving. They seldom enact on elaborate plans to build their own social standing at the expense of others. And when they do, the story plays out as a learning experience in which they admit their wrongdoing and work to support their peers in the end. The “Regina George” of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) is a middle-aged man in a position of power, who, in order to seek revenge on Dr. Milburn for her friendship with his wife, he is willing to out the entire student body’s (whose wellbeing he is technically responsible for) most intimate secrets for his own personal gain. In the series, reframing the actions typically associated with teenage girls is used to re-present many of the “problems” that young girls face as systemic issues rather than character flaws (Berridge, 2011).

Later in that same episode, a group of girls from various social groups all get sent to detention after they are wrongfully accused of vandalism. Their teacher gives them “an impossible assignment on female solidarity” (Nunn & Taylor, 2020, 00:21:04) in which they must identify what unifies them as women. The detention setting and the placing of characters from different social cliques is reminiscent of *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985), they are also both set in the school library where the girls of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) sit casually in the empty space (Figure 4.3) just like in the aforementioned film (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3 - Girls in detention
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season two's Episode 7 (Nunn & Taylor, 2020)

Figure 4.4 – Still from *Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985)

The "rewriting" of this scene in *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) is particularly of interest because they use the set up for the characters to have a very candid conversation about sexual assault. However, this same set up in *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985) is where sexual assault occurs. At one point in the film, the "rebel" character, Bender, is hiding under a desk where the "prom queen", Claire, is seated. Through Bender's perspective, the audience sees up Claire's skirt and reveals her

underwear to which he then proceeds to stick his head in between her legs before she clamps her legs shut in protest.

In 2018, during the height of the #MeToo Movement, Molly Ringwald, the actress who played Claire (as well as many other John Hughes's protagonists), penned an essay for *The New Yorker* reflecting on the presence of sexual violence in this film. She acknowledges that said scene is a portrayal of sexual assault, but continues, writing that "Bender sexually harasses Claire throughout the film. When he's not sexualizing her, he takes out his rage on her with vicious contempt…It's rejection that inspires his vitriol." (Ringwald, 2018).

The ability to propose such rewrites is in part due to *Sex Education*'s (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), as if on some sort of adjacent timeline. In this timeline, the past "wrongs" of the genre are "righted" through alternative narratives. Unrelenting signs of affection are called out as harassment, institutional leaders are deemed much more vindictive than teenage girls, that students from opposite cliques can easily, and readily be there to support one another by sharing their own experiences. The aesthetic in-betweenness of the show no doubt provides a sense of surrealism that opens up a space in which classic media texts can be reworked. But, if the utopic feel of the content is derived from the emphasis on students using communal experiences as learning opportunities and emphasizing feelings as they relate to education, the world of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) is not simply a utopian rewriting of the genre as much as it is a feminist utopian rewriting of the genre.

4.3. Theme 2: Feminist pedagogical approaches

> Empowering strategies allow students to find their own voices, to discover the power of authenticity. At the same time, they enable individuals to find communion with others and to discover ways to act on their understanding. Empowering classrooms are places to practice versions of a feminist world, confronting differences to enrich all of us rather than belittle some of us.(Shrewsbury, 1997, pp. 169).

I would like to open this section by using this quote from Shrewsbury's (1997) work to set forward the goals of feminist pedagogy. *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) draws on these notions by highlighting the presence of peer networks and emphasizing communal experiences as learning spaces in the show. The very concept in the show is that one student, Otis, provides on-demand sex education to his peers, based on his insight from being raised by a sex and relationship therapist. While he is said to be the "expert," he is still a classmate, negating the adult-student power dynamic that is commonly seen in institutional learning settings . But as the show progresses, all of the students evolve into a network of support, whether it be Otis asking a student for a different perspective, or other peers providing information and support. Support is often displayed in acts of unity, whether it be speaking about shared experiences of sexual assault or offering embarrassing secrets to comfort a peer. Part of the show's utopian (read: feminist) ethos is the radical concept that if given the space, young people can be sources of information and easily empathize with one and other. Though these feminist pedagogical themes are entangled deeply within the ethos of the show, I would focus on one story arc per the aforementioned core concepts: empowerment, community, and leadership.

When a graphic photo of her vagina is sent around the school, Ruby asks Maeve to find out who sent the photo before her identity is revealed online. Though Ruby has bullied Maeve in the past, Maeve agrees to help her and enlists Otis to help as well. When Maeve begins to aggressively question a suspect that has been proven innocent, Otis asks Maeve why she's taking this so seriously. Maeve admits that she received the hurtful nickname of Cock Biter four years ago after she refused to kiss a boy, saying that "this kind of thing sticks. And it hurts, and no one deserves to be shamed, not even Ruby." (Ali et al., 2019, 00:21:12). They soon find out that it was Ruby's friend, Olivia, who sent it as revenge for Ruby's constant criticisms. At the school assembly the next day, Headteacher Groff addresses the photo. After people begin to speculate that it is Ruby, Olivia stands up and claims that it is her vagina in the photograph. Quick to follow, Maeve stands up and says the same, followed by various classmates (including students who don't have vaginas) before Ruby finally stands up and also claims "it's my vagina."

The collective action taken at the assembly is not only a heartwarming example of youth serving as a community against institutional figures of power, but a thicker, deeper sense of community as seen in Maeve, Olivia, and Ruby's interactions in the

episode. Up until this point in the series, Ruby is the first (and only) person to address Maeve using the nickname Cock Biter and yet, Maeve is able to empathize with Ruby's problem regardless of their relationship and commits to helping her. Similarly, though Olivia is the one who sent the photo because she has also been victim of Ruby's bullying, she is the first to claim the photograph as herself, shouting "that is my vagina in the photograph" (Ali et al., 2019, 00:44:15) with the second person standing up being Maeve. This leads to Ruby finally standing up, grabbing Olivia's hand, and saying "it's my vagina." I reiterate the progression of the story in hopes of better framing how the order of events resulted into empowering Ruby to take ownership (though, in a more symbolic sense) of her vagina, after the entire student body mocked its appearance all week. It is through the combined actions of others that she is able to feel empowered as an individual. These combined actions of others are an integral part of empowerment and draws on the next concept: community.

In season two of the series, Aimee is sexually assaulted on the bus when a public masturbator ejaculates onto her jeans. She tells her best friend, Maeve, who insists that they file a police report. Though Aimee does go with Maeve to the police station, she continues to ensure both the officers and Maeve that it wasn't a big deal, saying that "it's basically like he sneezes on me" (Goodhart, 2020, 00:15:42). As the season progresses, the fallout of the assault becomes increasingly worse for Aimee: she dodges any physical touch with her boyfriend, she refuses to take the bus (opting to walk great distances instead), until eventually she begins to see hallucinations of her assailant in the school halls.

Aimee finds herself in detention with Maeve, as well as schoolmates Ola, Olivia, Lily, and Vivienne (all from varying social cliques) after being wrongfully framed for vandalism in the girls' locker room. Ola (Otis's former girlfriend) and Maeve (who has feelings for Otis) argue over him while tears start to well in Aimee's eyes, shouting "stop fighting over a stupid boy!" (Nunn & Taylor, 2020, 00:30:03). Maeve asks why she is crying, and she says, "because I can't get on the bus." The girls gather around her, and she tells them what happened, and they each respond with a different story of sexual assault or harassment that they've encountered. After detention, Aimee admits that she feels angry at her assailant, so Ola takes all the girls to an abandoned junkyard where Aimee smashes things and they all cheer before joining in. The next day, all of the girls surprise Aimee at the bus stop to ride to school with her. Aimee initially hesitates to get

on the bus, to which the driver asks if she's coming or not. Maeve tells the bus driver to wait for her and ensures Aimee that "it's just a stupid bus." (Nunn & Taylor, 2020, 00:47:18). Aimee gets on the bus and the girls sit on either side of her, keeping Aimee safe in the middle (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 - Aimee (center) taking the bus for the first time since her assault
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season two's Episode 7 (Nunn & Taylor, 2020)

As previously mentioned, the resemblance of the detention scene from *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985) - where sexual assault and harassment takes place - being rewritten into a safe space to talk about sexual harassment/assault is noteworthy to the feminist utopian rewriting of the genre. However, what occurs after detention is an example of the reconceptualization of community that feminist pedagogy aims to achieve, one "that includes the autonomy and individuality of members who share a sense of relationship and connectedness with each other." (Shrewsbury, 1997, pp. 171). As a community, the girls not only encourage Aimee to lean into her anger or to face her fears taking the bus, they participate in her anger and in facing her fears. Most importantly, they face Aimee's assault not claiming to know exactly how she feels but drawing on their own individual experiences to make her feel supported and less alone.

It is worth noting the presence of communal anger when the girls take to smashing things in the junkyard. Past representation on teenage girlhood (and womanhood at large) discourages the presence of anger and rage as a reaction to any systemic misogyny (Brüning, 2022), framing instances of sexual violence as a personal

problem rather than a social issue (Berridge, 2011). Seeing women, particularly a group of young women, share in a communal anger towards the social issue of sexual violence (versus the personal problem, that is) leans to a postfeminist portrayal of girlhood. One which Brüning (2011) – drawing on Ahmed's (2010) notion of the feminist killjoy refers to as the feminist joykill, stating that:

> This conflation of the postfeminist girl and the feminist killjoy recognizes sexism and patriarchal power structures as a continuous threat, the fighting of which becomes her primary mission. Whereas women have historically been discouraged from displaying anger and aggression, the joykill's expression of anger expression of anger […] is articulated as a legitimate reaction to sexual violence. (pp. 679)

Being able to process anger as a community, in the feminist pedagogical sense, opens up a space for joy to exist alongside anger (and fear, and sadness). However, Brüning (2011) does disclaim that this is "hollowly diverse feminism" and "thus racialized as white" (pp. 667), due to its perceived intersectionality failing to fully consider the degree in which race informs both experiencing and surviving sexual violence. This coincides with critiques of the show that state it fails to consider a variety sociocultural and socioeconomic issues (Berlatsky, 2021). Though the girls in the scene are racially diverse, as well as from varying classes, none of this is considered in their conversation of sexual assault. For example, when Aimee (who comes from a wealthy family) tells her parents about the assault, they buy her a car and she begins therapy (which, presumably, costs money). However, in order to enforce community necessary for feminist pedagogy, groups need to emphasize similarities while honouring differences "to enrich all of us rather than to belittle some of us." (Shrewsbury, 1997, pp. 169). In order to enforce an empowered community, there must also be a focus on embodying feminist leadership.

Just as feminist pedagogy is not exclusive to feminist issues (Mitcho, 2016), feminist leadership is not exclusive to the female gender, but is "[t]he embodiment of our ability and our willingness to act on our beliefs" (Shrewsbury, 1997, pp. 71). For the majority of the series, Jackson is the school's Head Boy (aka student body representative). In season three, Jackson strikes up a friendship (and eventual romance) with Cal, a nonbinary American exchange student, that causes him to become more questioning and resistant to enforcing gender roles at school. The new and rigid head teacher, Hope, therefore, replaces him with his overly ambitious best friend, Vivienne,

who Headteacher Hope knows she can manipulate based on her desire to attend a good university.

After a series of misadventures, namely, Cal refusing to wear the “girls” uniform, a student Lily publishing an erotic alien story in the paper, and a boy named Adam taking the blame for an embarrassing bathroom incident on a school trip, Hope enforces a new form of punishment by forcing these students on stage and giving them signs that state their “wrongdoings” to wear all day (Figure 4.6). When Cal begins to read their sign out loud in assembly, Jackson is quick to stand, yelling “this is fucked up” (Wilkey & Mapfumo, 2021, 00:18:2). After, Jackson goes to Vivienne saying that they should try and change things, to which Vivienne states that she doesn’t have the privilege to do so. Hope asks Vivienne to speak as head girl at the open house of the school’s rebranding (what was once Moordale Secondary is now Sparkside Academy), but Vivienne learns that she’s only been asked to do so because she is a Black woman, and it will look good for the press. With that, Vivienne, Jackson, and Cal gather the student body and devise a plan to take a stand.

Figure 4.6 - Headteacher Haddon presenting shame signs at school assembly
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season three’s Episode 6 (Wilkey & Mapfumo, 2021).

When Vivienne takes the stage at the open house, she announces that Jackson will be reclaiming his role as Head Boy (Cal, who is assumed to be part of this plan, has been locked in a classroom by Hope for wearing the “boy” uniform). Jackson and Vivienne present a video made by the student body where they discuss how harmful

shame-based learning can be (meanwhile, Cal attempts to break free by crawling through the vents). Then, Vivienne presents the school choir to sing their new anthem (a cover of “Fuck the Pain Away” by The Peaches) as Jackson, Vivienne, and the entire student body put on their own “shame signs” stating embarrassing facts about themselves (Figure 4.7), rip of their uniforms to reveal street clothes and start dancing. Halfway through the song, Cal falls through the ceiling the proceeds to flip Hope off before joining in with their classmates. While every adult in the room appears to be horrified, two teachers (Ms. Sands and Mr. Hendricks) cheer the students on, Mr. Hendricks exclaiming “Those are my kids! You’re my kids!” (00:27:06).

Figure 4.7 - Students sharing their "shame signs"
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season three’s Episode 7 (Goodhart & Mapfumo, 2021)

Vivienne and Jackson’s response to how their peers were treated is an example of “a willingness to act on [their] beliefs” (Shrewsbury, 1997, pp. 71) and thus within the realms of feminist pedagogical definition of leadership. Jackson is quick to object Hope in the initial assembly by exclaiming “this is fucked up!” (Wiley & Mapfumo, 2021, 00:18:27), but further shows his willingness to act against this event by encouraging others (alongside Vivienne and Cal) to offer their own “shame signs” and states that “[t]he world is changing, and young people have had enough. So, if you agree that communication and empathy are better tools than silence and shame, then join us by asking your school for better.” (Goodhart & Mapfumo, 2021, 00:23:52). Additional roles of leadership in the scene are of the two teachers, Ms. Sands and Mr. Hendricks, who as educators, automatically serve in leadership roles. In this scene, they show that a

feminist pedagogical tool of both embodying and acting on leadership is fostering leadership onto others by providing spaces for them to do so.

I would like to highlight, that the three student leaders of this protest – Vivienne, Jackson, and Cal – are three of the four core characters that are Black (the fourth, Eric, was in Nigeria when the initial incident occurred), and Cal faces the additional systemic marginalization from identifying as non-binary. This therefore runs the risk of reinforcing rhetoric that BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth are more socially engaged not because they want to be, but because they have to be. Cal, for example, is shown throughout the entire season questioning and acting against Hope: from refusing to adhere to wearing the "girls" uniform, to protesting the enforcement of boy/girl binary into sex education. Though Cal is one of the initial three students that receive public shaming (for not wearing the "correct" uniform), they are quick to act out against this too. While the other two students wear their signs quietly, Cal's sign has flipped their sign around and written "your bias is not my problem" in capital letters. This points to the advanced level of self-advocacy that queer youth must adopt, as they must serve proactively in their own sex education. Cal's constant questioning of the gender norm is one of the many ways that this show presents the need for a specific-yet-inclusive form of sex education for queer youth.

4.4. Theme 3: Specific-yet-inclusive queer sex education

The series, from the very beginning, is very inclusive on its portrayals of sex, going against previous critiques of queer representation in teen television that sterilizes queer characters into supporting roles, such as "the gay best friend." More so, the show goes beyond showing more inclusive sex to highlighting gaps in current sex education for queer youth. The show offers many instances in which queer youth have a specific need for knowledge or resources that cannot be drawn from heteronormative sex education.

As mentioned, Cal is a dominant voice in highlighting these missing spaces, but also serves to fill these spaces when possible. Alongside Cal is another nonbinary student called Layla, who is much less confrontational than Cal and thus often concedes to any direction they are given whether it serves them or not. The last episode of the third season opens with Layla binding their breasts using Ace bandages. Their chest,

arms, and back are indented and bruised from this practice, yet they opt for an even tighter bandage than the one they've been using. Later in the episode, Layla is seen following Cal into the washroom and asking for their help. Towards the end of the episode, Layla is seen trying on a compression top while Cal tells them about the dangers of binding with Ace bandages, saying that they can "restrict breathing severely" (Nunn & Mapfumo, 2021, 00:44:17).

Another character that highlights the need for queer-specific education is Anwar, a gay teenage boy who is part of the in-crowd. Being that his best friends are both female, Anwar knows very little about hygiene related to anal sex and when he gets a boyfriend, he is too embarrassed to admit that he doesn't know. Anwar goes to Otis for guidance on how to anal douche. Otis, not knowing anything on the subject, goes to his friend Rahim, who draws visual aids on a chalkboard (Figure 4.8). Eventually, Anwar speaks with Rahim directly, who says that if he's not ready to talk about douching with his boyfriend, then he's likely not ready to be having sex.

Figure 4.8 - Rahim hosting a tutorial on anal douching
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season two's Episode 6 (Goodhart & Taylor, 2020)

Anwar does speak to his boyfriend, who is very understanding and the two start to have sex. One day, after trying a flavoured condom, Anwar's face breaks out into a rash. Unfortunately, it is the same day that Hope launches a dated (and homophobic) sex education curriculum which leads Anwar to believe that his rash is a result HIV/AIDS or syphilis. A teacher suggests that Anwar speak to someone at a sexual health clinic.

The sexual health clinician asks Anwar if he uses condoms during sex, to which he says yes because “every film I’ve seen with a gay person ends with them having sex and dying of AIDS.” (Lim & Mapfumo, 2021, 00:32:00), to which she provides the following information:

> So long as you and your partner, or partners, are practicing safe sex, getting tested regularly, you’re very unlikely to contract HIV. And there’s a medication now called PrEP that protects people from contracting HIV if they are engaging in frequent casual sex in situation that might be putting them at high risk. And for those who do contract the virus, there’s medicines now that enable them to live a long and healthy life, and even get to the stage where the virus is undetectable, which means it can’t be passed on to somebody else.

While anal douching and HIV/AIDS are not exclusive to male-on-male sex, nor is binding a reality for all nonbinary people, they are all examples of how institutional forms of sex education, even those that claim to “acknowledge” homosexuality and gender diversity, rely on a system that was built to (at best) exclude LGBTQ+ youth, if not shame or condemn them into heteronormative learning. This is why, as indicated by these examples, queer youth often rely on each other (or in Anwar’s case with HIV, outdated media) as information source. And yet, while the aforementioned examples show instances of queer-specific sex education, this series simultaneously exemplifies how queer and hetero/cis youth are united in experiences and can serve as emotional support for each other’s identity development. This is most prevalent in the main friendship of the series between Otis and Eric.

Otis and Eric, from a demographic point of view, are polar opposites. Otis is a cis, straight white male who’s raised in an upper middle-class family with a very open-minded mother. Eric, is a gay, is first-generation Nigerian-British, and leans more towards lower middle class. Though Eric’s parents are supportive of him living as a gay male, their upbringing in a country that has criminalized homosexuality make them concerned for his safety.

Regardless, Eric and Otis display a male friendship of two men with differing sexualities who are able to bond with their similarities and honour their differences. Together, they speak about anything from crushes and heartbreak to masturbation and porn without either one of them needing to lessen who they are for the sake of the other. This was very much a conscious decision on the show creator, Laurie Nunn’s, part, said

that she "…really wanted [Otis's] friendship with Eric to feel like an antidote to some bromance storyline we've seen in the past. They take the piss, but they also love each other, and accept each other for their differences, and are able to be vulnerable with each other." (Nunn via Nicholson, 2020).

While this may seem like the bare minimum in terms of standards for friendship, it is comparatively different to the (very) limited roster of straight-gay male friendships in teen television. In chapter one, I drew on Bond (2014) and Jenner's (2014) work on the sanitization of queer characters on television (i.e., they are queer, but anything that relates to their queerness is omitted), the latter using the example of Joey and Dawson's friendship in *Dawson's Creek* (Kapinos et al., 1998-2003), in which Dawson is straight and Joey is gay. To review, Jenner (2014) argues that "…Dawson tends to discuss the meaning of physical intimacy as part of his identity construction. Jack may struggle with the implications of his sexual orientation for his identity, but discourses of how sex may figure into this are excluded by the text." (pp. 141).

This is where Nunn's construction of Otis and Eric's friendship shows an evolution in male, particularly males of differing sexualities, friendships. In *Dawson's Creek* (Kapinos et al., 1998-2003) Joey's sexuality relates more to the identity development of Dawson than to himself; he is Dawson's gay best friend, someone to serve as a catalyst to Dawson's identity development rather than someone who builds his own. Eric, on the other hand, is Otis's best friend, who happens to be gay. And as two fully realized characters, there is a fully realized relationship that considers how their similarities and differences inform their friendship.

For example, in season one, Otis and Eric go to see a showing of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Mitchell, 2001) in drag of the main character as they do every year (Figures 4.9 and 4.10), agreeing to meet at the bus stop. When leaving, Otis's mother, Jean, sees him and says "you look fabulous…have fun!" (Ali et al., 2019, 00:09:28). Eric's father, Abeo, on the other hand, sees his son leaving and says "you can't go out dressed like this. Go and change…Put a coat on. It's not safe." (Ali et al., 2019, 00:08:50). How the respective parents respond to their sons drag isn't only indicative of their own upbringings, but also frames the act of being in drag for their child.

Figure 4.9 - Eric in drag
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season one's Episode 6 (Nunn et al.,2019)

Figure 4.10 - Otis in drag
Still from *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) in season one's Episode 6 (Nunn et al.,2019)

Whilst walking around in drag, Eric seems constantly on edge whereas Otis is completely comfortable. Otis does not see any threat to walking around in this costume, however, Eric does, and does get assaulted when a group of men initially mistake him for a woman, proceeding to punch him, spit on him, and call him homophobic slurs. It's not only the outcome of the friend's respective days, but also how Otis fails to see Eric walking alone in drag as potentially dangerous, that reminds viewers that they do indeed have differences and those differences do indeed present potential issues.

As the season progresses, Eric struggles with his identity, dressing "straighter" after his assault and acting violently at school to the point of suspension. At the school dance, Eric decides to arrive in Nigerian-inspired drag. Otis apologizes to Eric and they reconcile their friendship by sharing a dance, Eric dipping Otis dramatically as other students cheer on. Both boys continue to have their own experiences in life, one as a

straight-white male, the other as a black-gay male, but are able to provide support for each other without claiming to know each other's experiences.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined how the Netflix Original Series *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) attempts to rewrite the genre of teen narratives by literally rewriting famous teen narratives to critique previous discourse or by mimicking famous film aesthetics. This is done, partially, to the series temporal feel, with much of the mise-en-scene suggesting various eras and cultures simultaneously, allowing the show to operate on an adjacent timeline and therefore opening the possibility of rewriting pre-existing texts.

Additionally, this "in between-ness" aligns with the feminist pedagogical standpoint that the show embodies, acknowledging the importance of emotion and context in addition to knowledge in the formal sense. The cultural pedagogy of this show reiterated Shrewsbury's (1997) core concepts of feminist pedagogy: empowerment, community, and leadership. It also takes an important stance in reinforcing the importance of peer networks as well as providing inclusive sex education without excluding marginalized students from broader conversations of identity development.

Overall findings suggest that both *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023 and *Big Mouth*'s (Flackett et al., 2017-present) use critical commentary and temporal timelines establish comprehensive sex education via feminist pedagogy. However, this temporality also runs the risk of limiting representation by omitting important context that are a part of current adolescent American's lives.

Chapter 5. “You can either be an ally or an asshole:” cultural pedagogy as sex education

> *The girls are going through something right now, and you can either be an ally, or asshole…*
>
> - *Big Mouth, Season 3, Episode 2*

5.1. Introduction

Though *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) differ in much of their aesthetic choices and humour, the themes discussed in each analysis present key similarities that stand in contrast to dominant pedagogical practices in school curricula. However, neither series directly addresses the role that current politics, such as limited access to abortion or ongoing debates on gun control, play in young American’s upbringings, nor do they fully embody the role that technology plays in youth identity formation. Regardless, what sex education issues are addressed in *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) can be read as forms of entertainment education that offer feminist pedagogical tools. As with all representations, there are limitations that suggest areas for development, as well as further research into the platform affordances of streaming series as they relate to these findings.

5.2. Summary of findings

In Chapter 1, I outlined sex education pedagogy in the American context, noting how the lack comprehensive sex education in school settings has led to young people relying on informal learning resources (such as internet pornography, peer-learning networks, or popular culture) to have their questions answered (Kinsler et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2016). This is continues to be true in a post-Roe landscape, with curriculum censorship, particularly for sex education, now at the forefront of many conservative platforms to restore “family values” of the Christian Right (Brown, 2022; Khazam, 2022; Reynolds, 2023). Current examples include Florida’s Don’t Say Gay bill that bans all talk of sexual diversity through to grade 12 (Burga, 2023) or banning conversations of periods up until the sixth grade (Cineas, 2023). Unfortunately, this is in

alignment with a long history of the repression of sex education in the American context, where politics has been prioritized over pedagogy (Slominski, 2021). This differs from other countries in the Global North, such as Canada, where most scholarship argues that the *absence* of comprehensive sex education is dangerous. Research argues that providing comprehensive sex education can help young victims of sexual assault come forward (Bruce 2021), calls for viewing sex education as a form of civic engagement (Iles, 2012), as well as diminishing ableist curricula (see: Davies et al., 2022) in addition to developing lessons on porn literacy (Goldstein, 2020).Though by no means a perfect system, comparing the mindset of Canadian sex education to that of the American school system further emphasizes the importance of reading representations of teen sexuality in popular culture as potential educational texts, since schools are failing to provide comprehensive sex education when compared to the rest of the Global North.

Past research suggests that representations of teen sexuality on television, especially for teenage girls, is most often delivered using shame-based narratives (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019; Smith, 2012). Examples being the MTV docu-series *16 and Pregnant* (Savage & Freeman, 2009-present) and its spin-off series *Teen Mom* (Malone et al., 2009-present), whose approach of featuring heavily pregnant rather than providing information on preventing unplanned pregnancies has proven to glamorize teen motherhood to its intended demographic (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019). Additionally, the limited representation of queer adolescent characters is often sanitized, meaning that their sexuality has not being given the same space in negotiating their identity as their heterosexual counterparts (Bond, 2014; Jenner, 2014). One key example of this is on *Dawson's Creek* (Kapinos et al., 1998-2003), in which the titular character (who is heterosexual) uses his sexuality to inform his identity while his gay friend, Joey, is not granted the same luxury (Jenner, 2014).

Representations of youth sexuality are evolving, however. The influx of new and original series on streaming platforms that have a TV-MA rating suggests the ability to create more "mature" content while still remaining accessible to a younger demographic. This has led to some depictions of adolescence that aim to shock above all else, such as generous amounts of full-frontal nudity and overly-graphic depictions of sexual assault (Miller, 2019), leading parental organizations to voice concern over the oversexualization of young people (Dittman, 2018; NDC, n.d.; PTMC, 2021). At the same time, it has also

enabled programming to speak about issues pertaining to youth with much more honesty.

In Chapter 2, I presented two notable series, Netflix Original Series *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) that use their TV-MA status to inform rather than shock. Additionally, I provided a methodological interlude that outlines the use of Simon & Gagnon's (1984;1986) sexual scripting theory to determine the presence feminist pedagogical tools (Shrewsbury, 1997) and Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional concept of discourse to serve as counter-narratives to the Americacn school system's approach to sex education.

In Chapter 3, I highlighted how *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) uses attributes often associated with adult animation (Feyersinger, 2011; Moritz, 2021) to candidly reflect on the challenges of preteenhood. Most notably, the series uses metacommentary to reveal how the hegemonic understanding of young people and sexuality relies on a certain level of opacity for its impact. The metacommentary is present in in a variety of ways, such as having characters comment on the fact that they are animations, referencing passages of time in seasons and episodes, as well as more sociocultural commentary on how the show's risqué nature fits within society's larger concept of youth and sexuality. Additionally, the series uses metacommentary as a teaching tool to manage shame or to have male characters negotiate their role in what are often considered female-centric problems, such as sexual violence. Overall, the series serves as the antithesis to conservative sex education programs by frequently critiquing how schools fail to talk to young people about sex . On the other hand, *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) uses a host of storylines to explicitly or implicitly point out flaws in past representations of adolescent sexuality that tend to be heterosexist, white-dominant, ableist and homogamous in film and television.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I drew attention to how the temporal feeling in *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), creates a space for common tropes and clichés from the teen film genre to be rewritten from a feminist utopian perspective. This feminist perspective is included in their pedagogical viewpoint, which highlights the benefits of fostering learning spaces in which young people can feel empowered through a sense of community. The sense of community also enables marginalized groups, such as queer youth, to be bonded with all peers whilst still acknowledging that they have unique

educational needs when it comes to sex education. Overall, the temporal feel of the show allows this in-betweenness to make space for a necessary feminist intervention in the genre of teen narratives and mainstream sex education pedagogy. Additionally, it allows the series to propose new ideological standpoints that negate patriarchal power structures. The same can be said for the critical metacommentary used in *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present). Both technique work to reveal and undermine power structures, whilst creating space for sexual identities and experiences usually excluded in entertainment education in American media.

Both shows employ feminist pedagogical tools by providing counternarratives to hegemonic discourses of youth and sexuality in the United States by using rhetoric around the genre, whether it be directly through dialogue or more subtly by drawing on narrative or aesthetic parallels. Instead of "protecting" youth from discussions of sex, these shows make clear that young people are already having these conversations . The Christian Right relies on this political discourse of "protecting youth" to use school-based sex education as political leverage to gain and maintain followership (Slominksi, 2021). Both series counteract this by talking about sex with a level of candor that is absent from usual rhetoric. They also show how conversations about sex with youth are often deeply ideological. This suggests that there is an absence of neutral language when speaking about the socio-cultural elements of sex education in a pedagogical sense (Poyntz et al., 2023). Pointing out these discourse also enables the shows to emphasize sex education as a lifelong learning experience.

Each show provides information on sexual wellness or identity often not covered in school curricula, such as safe anal douching in *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) or attempting to destigmatize resources like Planned Parenthood in *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present). However, there is a heavy emphasis on sex education being a personal, lifelong learning experience in both series. Many of the shows' resolutions are based on honest communication to combat shame and feeling a sense of agency over one's own sexual health. This is not to say that education cannot provide such outcomes. This suggests that learning outcomes for sex education differ from standard curriculum-based subjects, such as math or English, and focus more on individual learning outcomes. The goal for sex education then becomes for students to feel a sense of agency over their own sexual health and identity. This agency is achieved by employing feminist pedagogical learning outcomes that aim to benefit the

individual as well as the learning community at large, by disabling patriarchal learning methods that rely on concealment, exclusion and power.

In terms of community, both shows focus on friendship and comradery over romantic relationships. In these communities, diversity is addressed, as Shrewsbury (1997) writes, “to enrich all of us rather than belittle some of us.” (pp. 167). The balance of specific-yet-inclusive sex education is present in much of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023). For instance, Eric and Otis’s friendship, displaying the benefits of queer-specific sex education, providing updated rhetoric around HIV/AIDS, as well as providing information on the dangers of binding with tensor bandages. In *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present), this inclusivity is present in Andrew’s participation in many female-centric issues, such as sexual harassment or menstruation. With these stories, viewers are able to see examples of allyship that exists between complicity and saviorism. Meaning, individuals outside of marginalized groups can participate in addressing injustices without overshadowing marginalized voices in the process.

5.3. Limitations of representation

Much of the benefits of these shows come from the temporal elements, such as meta-commentary in the case of *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) or the aesthetic in-betweenness of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) that allow space for these stories to become a fertile ground for instilling feminist pedagogical methods into entertainment education. Yet, as Berlatsky (2021) critiques of *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), these utopian settings do not consider many real-world factors that young people must navigate, particularly in the American context. Perhaps most obviously, both shows do not emphasize the importance of technology in young people’s lives. While each respective series does have their young characters using cell phones and current technology, they do not highlight the integral role that current technology – particularly social media – plays in young people’s identity formation and interpersonal relationships (Byron, 2020). More importantly, however, since these shows exist in their own American-adjacent setting, they neglect to include current events directly in their narratives that inform the contemporary American adolescent experience.

For example, both shows outline the process of getting an abortion as well as how politically charged this procedure can be, with heated arguments over Planned

Parenthood's services or dodging religious protestors upon entering the facility. Yet both series neglect the increasingly challenging aspect of access to abortion, particularly for teenage girls, in which some states require parental consent for the procedure. While managing the stigma of having an abortion is a longstanding issue that many must face, the increasing restrictions are making the access to said procedures a much more prevalent problem in the lives of young people, particularly of young girls. It is worth noting that both series premiered prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade in fall of 2022 and therefore are assumed to be in a setting where regulations on abortion fall under federal jurisdiction. However, even when under federal jurisdiction some state laws required parental consent for underaged patients to receive an abortion, making access abortion for young people an increasing, but by no means new, issue in a post-Roe America.

One film by the streaming platform HBO Max, called *Unpregnant* (Goldenberg, 2020) outlines the specifics of these challenges. A teenage girl named Veronica must travel from Missouri to New Mexico in order to get an abortion without her parents' consent. The film is written using the road trip motif common in buddy comedies, with the protagonist begging her former best friend, Bailey, to take her since she doesn't want to tell her current friend group. In order to get this procedure, Veronica must plan a route that gets her there and back in one weekend so as not to raise any suspicion, as well as find someone who has a car and is willing to drive her, figure out a way to fund the trip (including the procedure), and acknowledge the risks of two teenage girls travelling alone. These extra steps may not fit the criteria of sex education; however, they are becoming increasingly important in the lives of young people and thus should be considered when speaking about the realities of getting an abortion in the United States.

Another harsh reality of American adolescence that may not directly translate to sex education is the presence of gun violence at school. In both *Big Mouth* (Flackett el al., 2017-present) or *Sex Education* (Nunn et al, 2019-2023) there is no conversation of gun violence or school shootings. There are many possible reasons for this, such as not wanting to include such disturbing and potentially triggering storylines or wanting to focus more on issues directly related to sexual health. Regardless, the United States leads the world in instances of school shootings (Grab & Rose, 2018), with an estimated 100,000 students in grades 7-12 having experienced a school shooting since 2020 (Cox et al., 2023). Moreover, one study found that in a sample of 29 male school shooters in

the United States, 15 of them were rejected romantically in the time leading up to the event (Farr, 2019). This is likely to impact relational aspects of sex education, which young people have expressed interest in learning (Bauer et al., 2020), and could potentially benefit being explored in both entertainment education and school curricula.

In terms of current representations of gun violence and adolescence, HBO Max has also produced two texts – one series, one film – that comment on the subject. The first is a short-lived series called *Generation* (Barnz et al., 2021) about a group of diverse, aggressively Gen-Z teenagers living in California. In the second episode of the series, the students go into lockdown. In one class, students go through the motions of locking up the classroom and hiding as if it is daily practice, some rolling their eyes or sighing in annoyance. A clock times the duration of the lockdown and students in the classroom begin to reminisce over similar instances they've experienced, bonding by making light conversation with each other, and having a minor jump scare when one student pops open a bag of chips. The lockdown resumes for the rest of the episode and no resolution is provided, leading viewers to believe that it was a false alarm. Additionally, the lockdown not being resolved also suggests that it is not an important part of the narrative, making it feel like a common occurrence for these students. In many ways, the scene is set up similarly to the *Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985), as if active shooter lockdowns have since replaced weekend detentions.

Another film, *The Fallout* (Park, 2021), is about the trauma of surviving a school shooting. The film follows a girl named Vada, after she experiences and survived a fatal school shooting. She strikes up an unlikely friendship with a girl that she hid with during the lockdown, and together they support one and other in attending classmates funerals, talking about the event, and eventually trying to return to their normal activities . The film highlights how peers form a communal support network, helping each other in ways that others – such as parents, siblings, professionals, etc. - are simply not able to. This film is self-described as a coming-of-age film and what one critic considered to be "the first defining movie of Gen Z" (Oakes, 2021), which points to how school shootings in the US have become synonymous with growing up.

Being a teenager in America has long been a dangerous experience. However, American adolescence is becoming an increasingly dangerous with an influx of physical violence, political turmoil, and corresponding crises in mental health (St. George,

2023).With teens being directly impacted by ongoing political debates before being old enough to vote, they rely purely on adults' perceptions of their realities to enforce any change. While some of these issues, such as abortion, directly relate to themes of sex education, there are also nuances (such as accessing abortions) and seemingly unrelated issues (such as the omnipresence of gun violence in school life) that are becoming intrinsically laced with how we define the current generation of American teens. Therefore, any representation of adolescence that is aiming to provide any sort of comprehensive insight on issues impacting young people must acknowledge the politically charged context in which they exist.

5.4. Future research

Findings align with previous scholarship in both feminist pedagogical studies and entertainment education in the sense that they reinforce entertainment education as a suitable model for sex education (Saucier et al., 2022; McKee, 2017) and present many feminist methodological tools in their narratives (Jones, 2011; Kolenz & Brafaman, 2019). While this research has been conducted primarily for the purpose of identifying feminist methodological tools in cultural pedagogies, findings are also indicative of other areas of research and support the growing interest in researching streaming platforms as modes of entertainment education (Pluta & Siuda, 2022).

Educational entertainment has proven to be successful in initiatives for sexual and reproductive health, particularly in reaching minorities that often feel underserved in traditional sex education by creating characters that are meant to represent them (Saucier et al., 2022). It is also worth highlighting that entertainment education is generally more accessible and viewers may be less suspicious of any hidden agendas that may have been experienced in past, more formal modes of sex education. Another benefit of the diversity of characters is that it naturally provides the "education of some for all" model, as various storylines allow viewers to relate to some whilst still acknowledging the importance of intersectionality in sex education. Entertainment education is also much less restricted by institutional barriers than traditional sex education, with informal learning contexts that allow producers to deliver content directly to the viewer as well as have access to a wider audience. Therefore, it is easier to include current, and perhaps more provocative content in a timely matter, as compared to the steps in getting the same information included in school curriculum.

One benefit (or to some, drawback) of entertainment education is that producers of entertainment take a more audience-centric approach in developing their content, tailoring information and language to demographics that are expected to consume said texts (McKee, 2017). In an audience-centric approach to developing texts, specific interests of targeted demographics are considered more, in addition to the language used and the amount of context provided (McKee, 2017) This is present in many storylines of *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023), such as providing education on menstruation from the perspective of a preteen girl, or having an adolescent boy provide relationship advice in lieu of his mother, who is a sex therapist. The limitations of this approach, however include that entertainment education may prioritize entertaining over educating and thus can be undermined by commercial instinct (McKee, 2017).

That being said, an audience-centric development of texts does suggest a more feminist ethics of care approach, as it highlights the importance of context and relationality (Richardson & Langford, 2022) and focuses on "specific needs rather than abstract principles" (Millner, 2019, pp. 172). Furthermore, the use of humour in both series fits with a feminist pedagogical model of sex education that Kolenz & Branfaman (2019) refer to as a "feminist pedagogy of laughter" The goal of humour in feminist pedagogy as sex education is three-fold: "to defuse discomfort around stigmatised topics and identities; to build inclusive temporary communities that enhance anti-oppressive learning; and to disrupt violent and oppressive norms about sex and bodies." (pp. 569).

Much of this humour, particularly *Big Mouth*'s (Flackett et al., 2017-present) use of metacommentary is used to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies of young people and sex. This critical approach is similar to what Jones (2011) refers to as a postmodern discourse of sex education (as opposed to a conservative, liberal, and critical discourses). According to Jones, a postmodern discursive stance on sex education makes use of: "Multiple perspectives on issues and knowledge are taught, and a critical deconstructive approach is taken such that the hegemony or discursive truths/assumptions of any given time or culture are revealed." (pp. 159).

Postmodern discourses, by this definition, have been considered difficult to employ from a pedagogical perspective (Ollis, 2017). However, this postmodern perspective lends itself well to the goals of feminist pedagogies. As exemplified by many

narratives in these series, employing feminist pedagogy to sex education can lead to young people evolving into more critical citizens that continually deconstruct hegemonic texts that they may encounter. This suggests that perhaps when determining how to operationalize this “postmodern discourse” into sex education, a feminist standpoint may offer pedagogical tools.

Overall, these findings suggest a need for further research in the development of feminist methodologies in the field of entertainment education for youth and sexual wellness. However, the fact that both of these series are Netflix original series should not be taken as a coincidence. The increase of streaming original series has aligned with an increase of television shows about teens with higher maturity ratings. One possible explanation is the affordances that streaming platforms create for keeping more mature content available to a wider viewership. Yet, research of these affordances of Netflix, and streaming services at large, remains an emerging topic in the field of entertainment-education (Pluta & Siuda, 2022). Furthermore, the outline of series and films mentioned previously that feature more politically charged representations of American adolescence being from the same platform is worth noting as a potential area of research. Future research in platform affordances of differing streaming platforms should be explored in entertainment-education (Pluta & Siuda, 2022), as well as the use of critical discourse and feminist pedagogical strategies in developing these texts.

I would like to revisit the increased frequency of the TV-MA rating in teen-based narratives. Both *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) hold a TV-MA rating, suggesting that these series are not suitable for viewers under 17. Yet, the content of the show has earned said rating by creating honest depictions and providing clear answers to many of the challenges youth currently face. This suggests that perhaps not all TV-MA ratings are created equally, meaning, that it does not determine the relevance to a specific demographic and is sometimes even a necessary step in prioritizing education over commercialization in entertainment education.

The role that cultural pedagogies play in a post-Roe and post-Covid America for youth is also a developing field. In addition to young people relying on informal information sources for sex education as political policy continues to restrict what is

covered in schools across the country, findings have also indicated an increase in young people's screen-viewing habits post-lockdown (Poyntz, 2023; Salway et al., 2023).

5.5. Conclusion

When framed as a form of cultural pedagogy, series that are about sex education, such as *Big Mouth* (Flackett et al., 2017-present) and *Sex Education* (Nunn et al., 2019-2023) respond to need for more inclusive sex education and the want of young people to learn more qualitative lessons on sex and relationships (Bauer et al., 2020). These series do so by embodying a feminist pedagogical framework that aims to empower its viewers by equipping them with knowledge and emphasizing the power of peer networks and communal support. This is achieved, in part, by the use of temporal spaces to open and rewrite previous discourses around sex and young people – both from formal and informal sources – and view them from a feminist pedagogical perspective that aims to interrupt patriarchal power structures..

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Appendix A. Most popular "teenager" TV series per year via IMDb: 2012-2022

Release year	Title	TV Rating	Streaming Platform Original
2012			
	Sword Art Online	TV-14	
	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	TV-Y7	
	Lab Rats	TV-Y7	
	Ultimate Spiderman	TV-Y7	
	RWBY	TV-PG	
	Video Game High School	TV-14	
	Violetta	TV-G	
	Wolfblood	TV-PG	
	Puberty Blues	Other	
	Jane by Design	Other	
2013			
	Reign	TV-14	
	Teen Titans Go!	TV-PG	
	Bee and PuppyCat	TV-PG	
	Liv and Maddie	TV-G	
	My Mad Fat Diary	TV-MA	
	In the Flesh	TV-14	
	Danganaronpa: The Animation	TV-14	
	The Michael J. Fox Show	TV-PG	
	Camp	Other	
	East Los High	TV-14	
2014			
	Girl Meets World	TV-G	
	Black-ish	TV-14	
	Faking It	TV-14	

	Red Band Society	TV-14	
	Finding Carter	TV-14	
	Camilla	Other	
	Tidsrejsen	Other	
	Jennifer Falls	TV-PG	
	Romeo and Juliet	Other	
	Marvel Disk Wars: The Avengers	TV-PG	
2015			
	The Magicians	TV-14	
	Scream: The TV Series	TV-14	
	Skam	Other	
	Bunk'd	TV-G	
	F is for Family	TV-MA	
	The Testament of Sister New Devil	TV-MA	
	The Coroner	TV-14	
	Star vs. the Forces of Evil	TV-Y7	
	Best Friends Whenever	TV-G	
	Nature Cat	TV-Y	
2016			
	Stranger Things	TV-14	Netflix
	Stuck in the Middle	TV-G	
	Bordertown	TV-MA	Netflix
	Bizaardvark	TV-G	
	Man with a Plan	TV-PG	
	Voltron: Legendary Defender	TV-Y7	Netflix
	The Get Down	TV-MA	
	The Disastrous Life of Salki K.	TV-14	
	The Real O'Neals	TV-PG	
	ReLIFE	TV-14	
2017			
	Riverdale	TV-14	

	Big Mouth	TV-MA	Netflix
	13 Reasons Why	TV-MA	Netflix
	*The End of the F***ing World*	TV-MA	Netflix
	Snowfall	TV-MA	Hulu
	Atypical	TV-MA	Netflix
	Runaways	TV-14	Hulu
	Andi Mack	TV-G	
	OK K.O.! Let's be Heroes	TV-Y7	
	Me, Myself, and I	TV-PG	
2018			
	Titans	TV-MA	HBO Max
	Cobra Kai	TV-14	Netflix
	Elite	TV-MA	Netflix
	Derry Girls	TV-MA	
	A Discovery of Witches		
	Deadwind		Netflix
	Insatiable		Netflix
	Grown-ish	TV-14	
	On My Block	TV-14	Netflix
	The Bureau of Magical Things	TV-G	
2019			
	His Dark Materials	TV-14	
	Euphoria	TV-MA	HBO/HBO Max
	The Umbrella Academy	TV-14	Netflix
	Nancy Drew	TV-14	
	The Society	TV-MA	Netflix
	Dollface	TV-MA	Hulu
	Anohibia	TV-Y7	
	Merli: Sapere Aude	TV-MA	
	High School Musical: The Musical: The Series	TV-PG	Disney+
	The Politician	TV-14	Netflix

2020			
	Warrior Nun	TV-MA	Netflix
	Stargirl	TV-PG	
	Locke & Key	TV-14	Netflix
	Outer Banks	TV-MA	Netflix
	Never Have I Ever	TV-14	Netflix
	Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous	TV-PG	Netflix
	The Owl House	TV-Y7	
	The Hardy Boys	TV-PG	
	The Wilds	TV-14	Prime Video
2021			
	The Sex Lives of College Girls	TV-MA	HBO Max
	Gossip Girl	TV-MA	HBO Max
	Arcane	TV-14	
	One of Us is Lying	TV-MA	Peacock
	Invincible	TV-MA	Prime Video
	Reservation Dogs	TV-MA	Hulu
	Star Trek: Prodigy	TV-Y7	Paramount+
	The Great North	TV-14	
	iCarly	TV-PG	Paramount+
	Elves	Other	
2022			
	Chainsaw Man	TV-MA	
	The Bear	TV-MA	
	Lookism	TV-MA	
	The Midnight Club	TV-MA	Netflix
	Blue Lock	TV-14	
	The Summer I Turned Pretty	TV-14	Prime Video
	All of us are Dead	TV-MA	Netflix
	Heartbreak High	TV-MA	Netflix
	First Kill	TV-MA	Netflix

Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin	TV-MA	HBO Max

Source:
https://www.imdb.com/search/keyword/?keywords=teenager&ref_=kw_ref_yr&mode=advanced&page=1&title_type=tvSeries&release_date=2012%2C2012&sort=moviemeter,asc

Appendix B. Except from *The Hugest Period Ever* (00:10:49)

Missy: Woah! Okay! Oh boy! N-word alert!

Quinta: Girl, "n-word"?

Lena: Man, that's some shit her mom taught her.

Missy: Yeah, she says you're never supposed to say that word.

Lena: *She* can't say it, 'cause she's of the Caucasian persuasion. But you can.

Missy: Oh, no, no. I don't – I definitely cannot.

Quinta: Yes you can!

Missy: [Directly to audience] I promise you, it is not okay for *me* to say that word.

Appendix C. Excerpt from *A Very Special 9/11 Episode* (00:06:29)

Missy: it's just that I'm really struggling with my racial identity right now.My mom's white. My dad's Black. I'm voiced by a white actress who's 37 years old. Ugh! It's all very overwhelming

Appendix D. Excerpt from *How to Have an Orgasm* (Altman & Suarez, 2019, 00:23:53

Andrew: Yes, because no teenager should kill themselves.

Maury: God damn it, you are resilient. It's unbelievable.

Andrew: But they shouldn't!

Maury: Yes, yes, right, right, right. Netflix legal. [To camera] No teen should kill themselves, even if it makes for captivating programming.

Appendix E. Excerpt from *The Shame Wizard* (Quinaz & Moser, 2018, 00:12:10)

Gina: Yeah, we don't have Netflix.

Nick: You don't have Netflix? That's impossible. I mean, from Roku, to Apple TV, to your home computer, Gina, streaming on Netflix has never been easier.

Gina: This Netflix, it sounds expensive.

Nick: You'd think so, but it's not, Gina. And best of all, you get five unique user profiles, or I could just give you my password for free – ['Scene Redacted' comes up on screen]

Appendix F. Excerpt from *Four Stories About Hand Stuff* (Jouhari et al., 2020, 00:00:17)

Maury: I wonder what they're going to do with this episode.

Connie: It says here it's called "Four Stories About Hand Stuff."

Maury: Hand stuff? Like fingering and hand hobs? Oh, we better be in this one, mama.

Connie Yeah! If we're not, then I'm going to have a word with Mark Levin.

Maury: Who's Mark Levin?

Connie: You know! He's one of those four "created by" names at the end of the theme song.

Maury: Four's a lot, huh?

Connie: I heard they're all married to each other.

Maury: Fucking Hollywood!

Appendix G. Excerpt from *Re-New Year's Eve* (Ozeri et al., 2021; 00:19:24)

Nick Birch: So let me get this straight. You're using me and this whole show to work through your own shit from when you were a kid?

Nick Kroll: Well, mine and all the other writers', but yeah, mostly mine.

Nick Birch: What the fuck? Where do you get the gall to create me just to torture me?

Nick Kroll: Great use of the word "gall."

Nick Birch: No, you're the writer, you wrote that line! You're just complimenting yourself!

Nick Kroll: No, we're writing this together right now, you and me. Look, it's blank. What do you want to say next?

Appendix H. Excerpt from *Re-New Year's Eve* (Ozeri et al., 2021; 00:22:18)

Maury: Listen, can I write my own jokes again?

Nick Kroll: No, I don't like saying them.

Maury: Hold on. You voice me?

Nick Kroll: Yeah.

Maury: Oh, bummer! I thought I was Will Arnett.

Nick Kroll: Yeah, a lot of people think that.

Appendix I. Excerpt from *The Head Push* (Altman et al, 2017; 00:19:31)

Andrew: Nick, listen. Your sister was upstairs with some guy in a beanie hat.

Nick: Oh, that's Daniel. Leah likes him.

Missy: Not anymore!

Andrew: Yeah, never again!

Missy: He was really aggressive! He was trying to force her to do something that she did not want to do.

Appendix J. Excerpt from *Disclosure the Movie: The Musical!* (Altman et al., 2019; 00:21:38)

Andrew: C'mon, I don't want people saying, uh, "Andrew's a hero" or, you know, "Andrew, he's king feminist," please.

Jessi: Yeah, no one would ever say that about you.

Andrew: Oh.

Appendix K. Excerpt from *Everybody Bleeds* (Galuska & Francis, 2017, 00:14:24)

Andrew: It was either this or a Yankee pennant and I just felt uncomfortable with you have the Yankees so close to your blessing, cause, you know, "Let's go, Mets."