



Exhausting Beauties, Fashion Faux Pas, and Sartorial Rights. How Fashion Shaped the Self-definition of Gen X, Y, Z? A Case Study of *Euphoria*, *Girls*, and *Sex and the City*

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Abstract. The article focuses on fashion consumption patterns emerging from prominent TV series that have created generational fandoms. Three series (*Sex and the City*, *Girls*, and *Euphoria*) representing the three most important generations (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) present in contemporary US society and global popular culture highlight the most mainstream contemporary fashion attitudes. Based on a deductive approach-based thematic analysis with focus on the semantic role of the dress played in the visual narrative, the research considers how fashion is used in building characters and their fashion- and clothing-culture-related values. The analysis concludes that the most important features of the generational fashion attitudes are as follows: materialist individualism for generation X, irony and anti-fashion for generation Y, and psychological coping mechanism for generation Z.

Keywords: generation theory, fashion consumption, popular culture, consumption attitudes, TV series

Introduction

From time to time, we witness the emergence of iconic cultural product creators and expressions of fashion fandoms (Lavery 2021, Butchart 2016, Bug 2020). From *Funny Face* to *Matrix*, from *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulin*, the examples are countless, and there is no more eloquent contemporary illustration to this than HBO's TV show, *Euphoria*.¹ *Why Has Shock TV Show Euphoria Became Such a Drag?* (Horton 2022), *Cult Teen TV* (Nicholson 2022), *A Creative Triumph* (Deggans 2022), *Euphoria Fashion Goes beyond the Show*

1 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: <https://tinyurl.com/27yj9jhn> (last access: 05.11. 2022).

(WSJ Staff 2022), *How the Beauty of Euphoria Changed Fashion as We Know It* (Magliocco 2022) – these are only a couple of titles quoted from journal articles referencing the show. The looks of the series created so many challenges on social media that it was often read as an expression of generation Z's clothing culture. The generational approach was stimulated by the first moments of the show's first episode, where the protagonist, Rue Bennett, played by Zendaya, introduces us in her autobiography by self-narrating her birth on 11 September 2001. As the protagonists of the show are her schoolmates, the high school drama identifies as a coming-of-age story of zoomers (Katz 2021).

Between 2012 and 2017, another young adult drama, called *Girls*,² shared the same generational (life)style-defining role as *Euphoria* and became famous for showcasing the clothing choices and fashion consumption of millennials. In this case, the protagonist, Hannah Helene Horvath, was an elected voice of her generation not by a narrative argument but by self-description. She defined herself in the pilot episode as someone who might be “the voice of my generation – or at least a voice. Of a generation.” A coming-of-age TV drama as well, *Girls* adopted an intriguing generational attitude willing to be a millennial response to the iconic and controversial TV series *Sex and the City*,³ framed as a post-feminist drama of Generation X women working in high-profile jobs in New York city around the millennium. The three series played a somehow similar role for Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z (McCrindle et al. 2014) in the USA and influenced the global tendencies of fashion and global visual culture in a generational manner. The article uses the three generational signifiers in a seemingly essentialist manner, yet, as it will be underlined later, the three concepts have a rather operational value, given their recurring use in popular culture and everyday life.

The following arguments highlight what is so specific about the clothing culture of *Euphoria* by arguing that if we grasp the particularities of its fashion behaviour, we will arrive in a new clothing culture – adapted to an era defined by permanent crisis (in economy, in global physical and mental health politics of environmental issues, and, finally, in geopolitics). At first, we will demonstrate how and in what sense *Euphoria* can be read as a form of contemporary Zeitgeist, and by contrasting *Euphoria* with the culturally equally important series characteristic to millennials, *Girls*, and to Generation X, and with *Sex and The City* (SATC), we will outline a possible reframing of contemporary fashion attitude driven by new forms of fashion consumption. The comparison between these three, highly influent TV series will be made according to narrative categories as follows: the nature of storytelling and the seriality of the three shows, aspects of genre,

2 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: <https://tinyurl.com/3h5t5nev> (last access: 05.11.2022).

3 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: <https://tinyurl.com/y3etx94h> (last access: 05.11.2022).

the main characters, and the ways in which fashion and clothing became a tool of their profiling. Secondly, a short introduction will be made into generation theory and into the characteristics attributed to generations X, Y, and Z, with a special focus on attitudes towards fashion and clothing. And, finally, in the last subchapter of the article, we will focus on the fashion consumption highlighted in each series in order to define the clothing patterns of the three generations profiled in the shows.

Euphoria, Girls, Sex and the City. Three Generations in Popular Culture

SATC is one of the scholarly most cherished TV productions. Its popularity and the influence it had on lifestyle and fashion made it an exemplary case study for understanding the conflicting issues of (post-)feminism in late capitalist societies regarding issues of sexuality, friendship, and everyday material culture (fashion and consumerism) (Arthurs 2003, Gerhard 2006, Grant–Nash 2015, Akass–McCabe 2004), for creating a typical landscape of the postmodern metropolis (Richards 2010), for TV fandom analysis, and for local-regional differences of the reception of a global entertainment product (Yuang 2007). As for *Girls*, the reception focused on the love and hate relationship that audiences had with the show and on issues of authenticity (Woods 2015), post-feminist sensibility (Nash–Whelehan 2017), and representations of millennial culture (Crossley 2015, Blessing–Wezowiczki 2015). As for *Euphoria*, the academic discourse was mostly interested in the social media reception of the show connected to issues of substance abuse (Kaufman et al. 2021) and in the creation of a new discourse on sexuality and especially transsexuality (Macintosh 2022, Masanet et al. 2022).

Considered in a comparative perspective, *Euphoria*, *Girls*, and *Sex and the City* are only similar by their pop cultural influence; however, their differences are more striking when read in line with the visual, narrative, and production tendencies of their respective period of release. A dark teen show on drug consumption and constant sexual exposure (*Euphoria*), a satiric-realistic narrative monologue on the difficulties of young adults living with permanent anticipatory anxiety (*Girls*), and short, funny, sitcom-like glimpses into the glamorous yet hard life of the first generation of successful women (*SATC*) – these patterns have almost nothing to share. Yet the three narrative givens represent well the mainstream lifestyle of the three generations present nowadays in Western work cultures and illustrate how popular culture has darkened after the millennium, how the genres have shifted from comedy to dark drama, and how the on-screen most visible generation has become younger and younger. While the characters of *Sex and the City* were in their thirties, the *Girls* struggled with finding their life path in their

twenties, and, finally *Euphoria* focuses on burnt-out teenagers. Issues of mental health deepened and hardened with the younger and younger characters. Despite those differences, the role played by the importance of fashion and clothing in the life of the protagonists never faded away, and despite the new visual codes, it kept its quintessential function in their self-definition.

Euphoria is a TV show made by Sam Levinson based on an Israeli franchise with two seasons for the moment, interested in the daily problems related to drugs, violence, and sexuality of a group of high school students in California. The series premiered in 2019, and the second season was screened in early 2022 when the Russia–Ukraine war started and became a symbol of generation Z’s social media protest against war and violence (Klee 2022). The main character of the show is Rue Bennett, who has a long history of drug abuse caused partly by a mental disorder of unknown nature and augmented by the early death of her father. While all the show’s characters have a detailed psychological profiling, Jules is another central character standing out from the school community – given the role they play in the protagonist’s life (a transgender character played by a transgender model, Hunter Shafer, celebrated as a first accurate mainstream representation of a non-binary person on TV; Allen 2019). Jules is a newbie to the community of Euphoria High and involved in a dark and dangerous relation of sexual harassment and physical violence with the father of the school’s alpha male, Nate. The narrative structure of the show mixes the logic of series and serial structure. Each episode is connected to the others by the same storyline of Jules’s harassment, Rue’s drug addiction in the first season and her deeper and deeper involvement in drug trafficking, and a story of catfight between the two most influential girls of the school in the second. Yet, the larger storyline belongs to a serial – the narrative logic of a series pops up, as the beginning of each episode is the life-story of one character with the role to highlight and deepen the main drama. The first season had an individual story at the beginning of each episode, while the second season played with the expectations of the viewer and included only two character stories due to the fact that, as Rue is the narrator and as her conscience is so often blurred by the consumed substances, she is not able to deliver a story in each episode. This approach opened the possibility of a flow-like narrative structure. The narrative complexity was completed by a visual style different in the two seasons and said to be an interpretation of Gen Z’s visual self-representation in social media (Derschowitz 2022). The first season adopted a highly nostalgic 90s and 2000s disco glam style, while the second one addressed the trend of analogue image making and its burnt-out aesthetics. All these features highlight a quest for this generation’s obsession with authenticity, present in the showrunner’s interest in giving voice to the experiences of its characters. Hunter Shafer is known to be Levinson’s consultant in building Jules’s storyline, and she contributed to the writing of the season-independent episode filmed during the

pandemic and focused on Jules's character (*Fuck Anyone Who's Not a Sea Blob*, 2021). According to those features, the show is considered to be a "drama" using elements of crime, horror, and thriller.

The show has two other central aspects that enabled its success story as a generational Zeitgeist drama. On the one hand, the screenplay uses music as an immersive experience, characteristic for Gen Z's musical consumption: the show worked with the most important contemporary artists in developing an original soundtrack (Labrinth, Dominic Fike, Lana Del Rey). On the other hand, Heidi Bivens as costume designer and Doniella Davy as make-up artist created the looks of the show and invented the visual style that was appreciated by the show's audience as something very close to its own consumption patterns. Bivens, who is a late Gen Xer by birth,⁴ worked with Angelina Vitto (a zoomer herself) and casted a lot of well- and lesser-known brands for building the wardrobe of the characters. In the reception of *Euphoria*, the names of the stylists were referenced as many times as the names of the showrunners, writers, and cinematographers (Ottenberg 2022).

As moral panic plays a major role in the reception of *Euphoria*, *Girls* was a show that "people love to hate" (*The Take* 2022). This show is also an HBO original developed by writer and director Lena Dunham, whose social media presence was surrounded by controversy at the time. The show was considered to be too white and too middle-class, and Dunham, the daughter of an influential New-York-based painter (Carroll Dunham) and a media artist (Laurie Simmons), was accused of nepotism. However, it cannot be denied that Dunham's work had a major global influence, and the way in which its creator navigated cancel culture remains a powerful example of millennial opinion making (Hawkman 2017). In 2013, Dunham was included on the *Time*'s list of the 100 most influential people in the world. Two Gen X executive producers left their fingerprint on the show, Judd Apatow and Jenni Konner. Apatow, whose name has become a brand name for realistic comedy mixed with romance and open discourse on sentiments and affects, and Konner, who self-labelled herself as a feminist TV writer, both played a legitimizing role in the show's success story.

Girls, screened between 2012 and 2017, had six seasons (a total of 62 episodes) and profiled four main female characters in their twenties looking for purpose and self-definition in New York. The main character, played by Dunham, Hannah Horvath, was an aspiring writer who went through all the possible miserable jobs of the creative industries a youngster could have in the previous decade in a global metropolis. As a reference to *SATC*, the show adopted the sitcom format of the iconic four and added to the cast three other characters: Marnie Michaels played by Allison Williams, Jessa Johansson played by Jemima Kirke, and Shoshanna

4 Here and in the following lines, we will use the generational descriptors in line with the mainstream definition of USA's generations. Cf. Dimock (2019), McCrindle–Wolfinger (2014).

Shapiro played by Zosia Mamet. Even though there are parallelisms between these characters and the characters created by Darren Star (the creator of *SATC*), Dunham's personages outstayed by their self-absorption and co-dependence, their relationships lacking both the security and the glow of mutual, unpraised support present in the former series. The narrative structure of *Girls* is the one of a classical series, with a coming-of-age storyline, meeting the protagonists at the beginning of their journey through the workplace and leaving them at the beginning of a new, very vague phase of their so-called adulthood. Practically, the show highlighted how hard it is for millennials to take life-defining decisions (finding their dream job, a lifelong partner, getting pregnant, accepting death, etc.), how they struggle with the plurality of choices, how the positive neoliberal message of "you can be whatever you want" became a threat and a burden for them. In this sense, *Girls* enters the tradition of the unusual coming-of-age stories of Judd Apatow's comedies from *Superbad* (2007) to the *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Knocked Up* (2007).

The show's costumes were designed by Stacey Battat, a high-class costume designer and long-term collaborator of Sofia Coppola. What is interesting about *Girls* in opposition to *Euphoria* is that the latter show's visual style has nothing outstanding and can be labelled as realistic. Two elements need to be highlighted. The realistic framing of the visual narrative met the language of body positivity in the making.⁵ Dunham's body in the series became the symbol of the millennial struggle with the unrealistic body standards of mass and social media. While the show addressed issues of everyday nudity, realistic body representation, we constantly witnessed the self-labelling and self-criticizing inner voice of the characters addressing their bodies. As sartorial choices are concerned, *Girls* worked with the difficulties of building up a wardrobe suitable for the adult life and played with on-the-edge outfits far from the glamorous and always well-put-together looks of *SATC*.

Sex and the City is a show that is very difficult to address given its spectacular cultural influence (Evelina 2022, Akass–McCabe 2004). Screened between 1998 and 2004, the show contributed to the understanding of post-feminist female condition and highlighted the complex role played by consumption in the identities of people living in late-capitalist societies. Watching *SATC* in 2022, after the pandemics, with a war situation in a neighbouring country and with the imminent possibility of a global energy crisis, became a very escapist and nostalgic

5 From the aughts, body positivity movements have become mainstream, highlighted by the publication of psychometrical research such as the Body Appreciation Scale from 2005. According to the scientific literature, the components of a positive body image are: body appreciation, body acceptance and love, broadly conceptualizing beauty, adaptive body investment, inner positivity influencing outer demeanour, and protecting filtering. In the case of *Girls*, we have examples for almost all components; only the inner positivity influencing outer demeanour is missing. For these categories, see: Daniels et al. (2018).

activity leaving a bittersweet impression of unrealistic white and upper-middle-class glamour and first-world-problem criticism. Yet we need to remind ourselves how liberating the show was by addressing and creating the visual and discursive ideology of post-feminism. Four female characters were the protagonists of the show, all of them having a professional identity defined by the most coveted jobs of late capitalism. Carrie Bradshaw played by Sarah Jessica Parker was a journalist who wrote a column on the sex life of New Yorkers and managed to maintain quite a high life standard from her columnist salary; Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) built a lawyer career and became a partner at a famous law firm in NYC; Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) worked as a PR professional with celebrity clients; finally, Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) had a job in the creative industries, being the curator of a commercial and competitive art gallery.

The show was created by Darren Star based on a book by Candace Bushnell, iconic author of the chick lit genre. Compared to the drama urge of *Euphoria* and to the realistic-sentimental comedy of *Girls*, *SATC* was deeply defined by the classic sitcom genre, and the twenty-something to thirty minutes format was rarely substituted with longer episodes (the series finale – s6, episode 20 – was the only one with a length of 45 minutes). In this case, the narrative structure preferred the serial format at the beginning of the show (during the first season) – each episode had an independent storyline linked to the subject of an article prepared by the protagonist. At the beginning, the show had a very social scientist vibe, as Carrie Bradshaw conducted a lot of interviews in order to obtain data on the sex life of her co-citizens, and the interviews framed the private life of the four main characters. What is more, the three other women were introduced in the storyline as subjects of Carrie's investigation; their role as BFFs⁶ became clear as the show advanced. The serial-like logic entered the show with the leading male character, Mr Big, whose nickname became the symbol of the dating expectations of Gen X women. The main narrative arc of *SATC* was built on Carrie's and Mr Big's relationship, and from the second season the serial structure faded away behind the personal life events of the four main characters.

This evolution from serial to series implied a stronger connection with the romcom visuality, the raw and handheld-shot first season gained more glamour and classiness with the second season. As the names of Bivens, Vitto, and Davy became synonyms with *Euphoria*, Patricia Field, the costume designer of *SATC*, managed to have a label name in the industry due to the show (Soo Hoo 2018). Field comes from the sixties' tradition of self-curated fashion shops (she owned a store in 1966 in Greenwich Village), and she was asked to work on the show by Sarah Jessica Parker whom she met during the shooting of *Miami Rhapsody* (1995). As the costume designer of *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *SATC*, she is the stylist of high-fashion-profile TV and movie productions of the Y2K.

6 BFF is a common abbreviation for "best friends forever".

The interest in finding the most influential fashion brands of the period was as important in her case as in the case of Bivens's and Vitto's, and, practically, Field invented Manolo Blahnik's, Jimmy Choo's, and Prada's cult, which became synonyms for *SATC*.

While playing with former narrative traditions and as examples of narrative complexity, the three shows have the common ambition to build ambiguous characters with a strong psychological profile. As part of this profiling, sartorial choices and consumption patterns are created for the characters based on the professional work of the most coveted costume designers of the industry. As costumes, fashion, and dresses play a similarly important role in all three cases, we can proceed to the description of each generation based on the method of literature review and to finally highlight their fashion attitude as reflected in the three series.

Profiling Generation X, Y, Z

A question of relevancy can be raised to the previous arguments: how a comparison between three generations can be accurate when the life stage at which they are presented is quite different? How can we compare Gen X persons in their thirties to Gen Y characters in their twenties and Gen Z people in their teenage years? Further, in what sense can such general labels as the ones of the three generations have a heuristic value? The answers allow us to easily get to the subject of this subchapter. As many authors underline this, there is a serious difference between the coming-of-age processes of those three generations, and the self-awareness of adulthood comes at an increasingly younger age, while financial self-support gets more difficult to attain (Savage 2007). As concerning the use of the generational labels, we will gather a couple of arguments in the following, yet it is to mention above all that the media coverage of the series used the generational labels as their main frame of understanding.⁷

These affirmations need to be contextualized within the confines of generational theory, a social scientist approach to the contemporary living population that became very popular and whose mainstreamization raised a lot of questions concerning its applicability. The theory of the generations considers that groups

7 Edmunds, Joshua. 2022. Generation Z's Cultural Comment: *Euphoria*. *The Daily Targum* 10 February (<https://tinyurl.com/32kjr8kr> (last access: 05.11.2022)); Li, Shirley. 2022. The Gen-Z Drama That Launched a Million Memes. *The Atlantic* 3 March <https://tinyurl.com/2s36yt8x> (last access: 05.11.2022); Wright, Jennifer. 2017. Why *Girls* Made Us Hate Millennials? *New York Post* 8 April <https://tinyurl.com/mubuw6jf> (last access: 05.11.2022); Shinfuku, Kristi. 2017. With *Girls*, Lena Dunham Created and Destroyed a Millennial Reality. *Consequence* 10 February <https://tinyurl.com/bdh332z5> (last access: 05.11.2022); Cf. the reddit thread *Sex and the City Belongs to Gen X (Apparently)* <https://tinyurl.com/3kaw8vc3> (last access: 05.11.2022); Silva, Belisa. 2020. How *Sex and the City* Shaped a Generation. *Swaay* 18 February.

or cohorts of people born and living in the same period (who have the same age) and the same geographic location, experiencing similar sociocultural processes share or tend to share similar ideas and attitudes because of the similar experiences and problems they encounter. The generation length in western societies is in the high 20s and can reach 30 years. The importance of the generational affiliation was addressed in its complexity for the first time by Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist in 1923, who argued that the historical events of a given period leave their imprint on the population's psychological character (Mannheim 1952). The idea of the generational differences was connected to the theory of repeating cycles and applied to the American history in the 90s by William Strauss and Neil Howe. They consider that the dynamic of generations is due to the fact that people from different cohorts attain a new life stage in a non-overlapping way and the differences in meeting new experiences creates a cyclic pulsation (Strauss–Howe 1991).

Even though generational theory was criticized because its negative labelling effects and its lack of empirical basis, the term's operational value gained in strength due to everyday use and presence in popular culture. Given the fact that the aim of this analysis is to identify generational patterns in the three above-mentioned series, we will adopt a seemingly simplistic approach to the three mentioned generations. However, we need to underline that generations are not homogeneous, as a lot of local versions, subgroups and sub-cohorts fragment each category. Yet, as the reception of the three TV shows used the general concepts of X, Y, and Z, we use the terms as a reference to this constructed meaning.⁸

In the USA, Pew Research Center produced a large amount of data used to define and profile the generations present in contemporary American society.⁹ In our argumentation, those categories have an unbiased analytical value as they were used in journalistic texts and on social media platforms to characterize the three above-presented shows. Within the confines of this article, we agree with the heuristic value of those terms not in an essentialist manner but accepting their representational, labelling, and constructivist value. As the three shows were produced in the US and the media discussion was framed by categories concerning the US society, this article uses the generations identified in contemporary American society.

According to the mainstream definition of USA's generations, Gen X are people born between 1960 and 1979, who experienced radical political transition, a political discourse constantly shaped by the republican/democratic opposition, global geopolitics defined by the cold war and whose education and values were

8 For a critical, empiricist introduction in the theory of generational differences, see Parry–Urwin (2017); for a critique of the empirical approach and a return to the validity of the theory, see Lyons et al. (2015); for a reflection on the constructed nature of the concepts, see Eyerman (1998).

9 For those data, see: <https://tinyurl.com/73bwkrv9> (last access: 05.11.2022).

defined by capitalism and meritocracy. The Gen Y, or millennial generation was born accordingly between 1980 and 1994 defined by a period of extreme globalization linked to the end of the cold war, a relative economic stability in their childhood, and the emergence of the Internet, the social media, and the conflicting opinions of techno-optimism and techno-pessimism. And, finally, Gen Z, or the Zoomer generation, born between 1995 and 2010, became the first generation of digital natives shaped by social media, mobility, and the idea of multiple realities driven by an increasing sense of ecological and economic crisis (Dimock 2019, McCrindle–Wolfinger 2014¹⁰). Compared according to their values, Gen X and Gen Y share an interest in the individual, Gen X persons being individualist, competitive, and materialistic, while individualism at Gen Y manifests in self-orientation, a harsh questioning of the core social values, and a globalist take on contemporary society. Compared to them, Gen Z has no interest in self-definition and values an undefined ID; they appreciate dialogue and community above all, with a preference for realistic approaches. Those behaviouristic values translate to status-oriented consumption for Gen X (interested in brands, cars, and luxury products), to experience-oriented consumption for Gen Y (they prefer festivals and travels and are interested in flagships which can deepen the experience of a brand and not in the products per se), and, finally, to ethical and unique, unlimited products for Gen Z (enabled by Web 3.0 technology) (Francis–Hoefel 2018).

The four decades in which we are interested in this article (1990–2020) coincide with the expanding globalization of the fashion industry when fashion creation underwent a process of extreme mediatization and the fashion designer's work was highly influenced by processes of brand management, brand communication, and fashion marketing (Pedroni 2013). *SATC* showed how the economic value of fashion had grown exponentially by the end of the 90s and that while fashion consumption became a major component of one's identity, concerns regarding the industry's influence on global geopolitics started to emerge. In this golden era of fashion consumption, the label of the "fashion victim" was not considered to be a threat yet, as yuppie culture legitimized over- and hyper-consumption. Consumers of Gen X looked for powerful brands that showed the social value of a person incorporated in a brand name. The seminal role that fashion, interior design, and material culture played in this period was highlighted in episode 9 of season 6 of *SATC* called *A Woman's Right to Shoes*, where the issue of the reproductive rights was not linked to a political-legal debate but transformed into an issue of lifestyles and a powerful argument against single shaming. In this episode, Carrie's Manolo Blahniks are placed on the same level as the other characters' kids as a symbol of the economic and social investments of a single character. It is utterly important that the right to shoes does not apply to any kind

10 With a special focus on Australia, McCrindle and Wolfinger's book gives a global overview on the different local/cultural versions of generations present in the world.

of shoes but exclusively to Manolos. The logic of competition and the economics behind a wardrobe full of expensive clothes define how this generation approaches fashion and has interest only in luxury brands. Charity shops and second-hand clothing are present in two-three scenes during the show, but they are only there in the case of Carrie, the economically less stable character, who has the most exquisite fashion choices between the four characters.

The value of consumption and fashion labels decreases in the case of millennials (Yadav et al. 2019). In this case, self-expression outgrows the importance of the brand name. DIY clothing experiences, unusual and ironic combinations define the clothing culture of millennials. The urban subcultures of this generation from hipster to normcore are all attitude-based: there are no trendy brand names or dominant clothing items in those wardrobes, while an ironic attitude towards wearing whatever we have seen already in a satirical, anti-fashion-like manner singularizes clothing culture. The fashion experience of this generation was the most interested in pushing fashion to its limits by taking back the most ordinary clothes that the street culture ever invented and transforming them into coveted trendy garments. In the endless processes of self-questioning of millennials, everyday looks are as conflicting as identity issues: a character can have a very well-put-together, preppy look one day and look like an outcast the day after. These shifts between social roles are not even defined by the everyday duties – they are in accordance with only one thing, the person's present psychological attitude. Satire, irony, and a suspicion towards expectations linked to status dressing define the clothing culture of this generation. The depreciation of status dressing causes a strong interest in expressing political activism by fashion and clothing.

The fashion choices of gen Z are like a synthesis of the previous two fashion attitudes mixed with a stronger sense of activism and a mainstream attention towards sustainability. The interest of zoomers in brands and luxury items is as strong as in the case of Gen Xers mixed with a steady need for creativity and authenticity characteristic for millennials – which creates a demand for professional-looking unique clothes produced by brands acting for a cause and having an eco-conscious manifesto. Even if it looks like a fashion heaven, zoomers' fashion consumption is the most ambivalent among all. Their conviction that only eco-conscious and socially responsible brands are to be trusted pairs with a growing consumption of fast and hyper-fast fashion clothing (Stringer et al. 2022, Deeley 2021). Considered to be the most pragmatic generation in this trio, there is no brand fetishization in their case, and the irony behind millennial clothing culture seems meaningless to zoomers. As millennials struggle with self-definition, Gen Zers consider that an undefined identity leaves room for a lot of interesting experiences and personas during a human lifetime. And from here emerges a highly self-conscious clothing culture interested in the mediatic power of our dressed bodies and an interest in brands that manage to redefine the human body.

Table 1. *A comparison between Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z based on attitudes towards consumption and self-definition*

Zoomers	Millennials	Gen X
Self-awareness	Self-growth	Self-expression
Pragmatism	Irony	Competition
Professionalism	Creativity	Materialism
Status and identity	Identity and status	Status
Undefined identity	Self-questioning	Meritocracy

Source: Francis-Hoefel (2018)

In order to grasp the presence of these realities in the three TV shows, we will apply a deductive approach-based thematic analysis with focus on the semantic role of the dress played in the visual narrative. As the three shows encompass a large set of visual material (94 episodes for *SATC*, 62 for *Girls*, 19 for *Euphoria*), the analysis focuses on only one character from each show, the one whose fashion choices were the most copied in social media and the most reflected in the visual narrative. In the case of *Girls* and *SATC*, the choice is obvious, as Carrie and Hannah Horvath are the narrators of the story, and their sartorial experiences are the most highlighted. However, in the case of *Girls*, Hannah's style is not the most visually compelling one (Jessa, Shoshanna, and Marnie all have a more interesting fashion path than hers), yet the importance that self-reflectivity plays in the case of millennial fashion attitudes justifies the choice of Hannah as a representative voice of her generation. In the case of *Euphoria*, the question of representativeness needs another methodological framing: in this case, Rue is the master voice of the series, even if her interest in fashion is faded by her interest in drugs, love, and all those substances that can make life bearable for her. The show's most outstanding visual style belongs to Jules, and the social media reception of her outfits justifies her choice as the sartorially representative character of the series. Jules was the most copied and most discussed character of the show on social media.¹¹ In the analysis of the three characters' fashion behaviour, we will focus on four issues, highlighted by research on fashion attitudes: (1) the visual style or urban subculture represented by the character, (2) the attitudes towards clothing in general, (3) the attitudes towards the body, and, finally, (4) the attitudes towards labels, brands, and shopping.

11 Cf., for ex., an interview with Hunter Shafer on those issues: Shattuck, Kathryn. 2019. Enthralled by 'Euphoria'? Hunter Schafer Knows Why (It's Because of Her). *New York Times* 7 July. <https://tinyurl.com/mtey596m> (last access: 05.11.2022).

How Sartorial Choices Build a Character?



Source: compiled by the author via Pinterest¹²

Picture 1. *Three outfits representing the characters of Jules, Hannah, and Carrie (from left to right)*

The only thing that Carrie Bradshaw, Hannah Horvath, and Jules Vaughn share is their ambition to find an authentic lifestyle good enough to bring happiness to them, while they all link somehow the concept of a fulfilled life to creative work. Fashion is not necessarily a component of this project for Hannah, a writer who completely neglects the fashion system, and her ambition to do so is the central element of understanding her fashion attitude. For Carrie, a writer herself, being fashionable is the most important element of her self-definition – fashion is the main object of desire, as important as romantic love, the ultimate goal of a successful life. For Jules, the stakes are different, as their ambitions are exactly in fashion creation, in reframing the fashion system in a manner that allows them to express their identity through a sartorially undefined body.

12 From left to right: <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/322007442108189986/>; <https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/511580838896593796/>; <https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/302515299940533538/>. (URLs last accessed on 05.11.2022)

Carrie Bradshaw practically adapted all the trendy visual styles of her époque: from the preppy ensembles required by the socially powerful jobs that women could attain to the boho-chic outfits of the creative industries, everything was present in her wardrobe. The two key components of her fashion attitude are trend-consciousness and the sense of mix and match. For Carrie, fashion and dress are a form of investment: she often claimed choosing shoes over food and housing projects. The material value of the wardrobe is a form of social and economic success, just as valuable as cars, housing projects, and expensive travels are for the other characters. The interest in fashion goes hand in hand with the interest in shopping and labels: as the famous alliteration of the first *SATC* movie suggests, labels and love are the two components of a happy life. Brand loyalty, brand awareness, and fetishization of labels such as Manolo Blahnik, Prada, Dior, etc. are the key components of a clothing culture where possession is the most important way to express a character's interest in fashion.

According to this system, the body needs to be like the body of catwalk models and must reflect a certain sexual and sexualized ideal: with every feminist ambition of the show, Carrie's body echoes the struggles of a female body acting for and against the male gaze. This ambivalence of Carrie's fashion attitude contributed to the conflicting interpretations of the show as both a feminist manifesto and a product of capitalism's consumerist repression of women (Arthurs 2003).

Hannah Horvath's interest in dress is shaped by anti-fashion and all the fashion subcultures that were framed by the sense of criticizing the fashion system. She adopts even the punk aesthetic for a moment, yet her styles are formatted by normcore, hipster and indie anti-labelling, preppy style, athleisure clothing, and a lot of DIY sartorial projects (Narbona 2021). As the interest in finding the authentic self is the most important for these characters, all fashion choices prove to be already experienced, not authentic enough for the characters. In the eighth episode of the first season, Hannah and her boyfriend, Adam, both wear an iconic pair of pyjamas, a similar unisex one-piece, cream sleeper with buttons on the front. These pieces of clothing used in the house and outside are a complete negation of the fashion system and the expression of the need to reinvent our relationship to clothes. In this attitude, there is no room for shopping, there are no labels, there is no social status, no power dressing, and there is no sexualized presence of perfect bodies. However, Hannah arrives to this fashion attitude at the most comfortable moments of her existence, when her co-dependent relationship with Adam is reassuring enough to act according to her deepest convictions. At other moments, she proves that she still has a huge wardrobe, invests her first considerable salary in a window-shopped designer dress, and spends a lot of time inventing unusual patterns and combinations. Labels and brands are not important for this type of sartorial culture: their presence is due to the generation's attempt to seek the recognition of Gen X, in a power position at the workplace. As possession and the

economic value of the dress is important for Gen X, for Gen Y clothes start to be an issue of storage and identify as garbage. The reinvention of our attitudes towards female and human bodies was the most important component of the show. Hannah's body was read in the critical reception of the show as the most iconic element of Dunham's message. An average female body with its normal features (small tits, a belly, a couple of kilos over the ideal body size, etc.) was in the premier plan of the screen at countless moments of the show and shaped the way of millennials through the democratization of the ideal body image of the show-business and the fashion industry. The male gaze in this show proves to be as childish and ironic as the self-reflection of women on their own body (Grant-Nash 2017).

In the case of Jules, we know less about their fashion attitudes, as their fashion choices are only present as visual stimuli and as a reflection of Jules's image in the eyes of the other characters. The most important feature of their physical appearance is its mesmerizing nature: the physical presence of the character is outstanding in every situation, and the visual framing of them identifies with a vision, a dream, an illusion – a surreal experience. The visual style of their outfits brings together elements from various Gen Z subcultures from the nostalgic Y2K outfits and the spectacular pastel Goth make-ups and theatre-costume-like accessories to the visual consciousness of the e-girl/e-boy aesthetics. The character was seen in a lot of difficult psychological situations through the show, and their outfit is never damaged by their mental condition (in *Girls* and *SATC*, the lack of interest in the creation of an outfit is always connected to the mental health of the character): Jules's looks are always very thoughtful and thought-provoking as if dressing up were their coping mechanism. When the identity politics of their body and existence are always in question, creating a vision of their body allows the character to experience a sense of wholeness. The search for uniqueness is present in every outfit worn by the character: even though labels are not as present as in the case of *SATC*, there is no room for the negation of the fashion system either. A strong fashion-, style-, and label-consciousness defines the looks of the character as if the whole history of human dress would be their playground. Even though the DIY and maker influence is as present in Jules's case as in Hannah's, their outfits are always professional, well-polished, and lacking that sense of childishness that was so present in the case of millennials. The body of the character was shown in many circumstances, letting the viewer identify its features, yet these visual frames never enabled a sexualizing approach, and the invention of the unique visual style of the narrative gave back the character its own self-reflecting voice. Simultaneously, in the case of other characters, the menace coming from the idealized bodies of the media industries remained a similarly important influence as in the case of *SATC*. *Euphoria* highlights well how the body-shaming discourses of the pre-millennial generations came back in the case of zoomers and how conflicting the body discourses of contemporary social media are.

Table 2. *A comparison of Gen X's, Gen Y's, and Gen Z's fashion culture based on the three TV shows' thematic analysis*

	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Visual style	Baddies Eclecticism E-girl, e-boy Pastel Goth Y2K DIY	Normcore Hipster and indie Preppy Athleisure DIY	Preppy Boho-chic Casual chic
Attitudes towards clothing and dress	Self-expression Identity politics and psychological coping mechanisms Authenticity	Self-expression Irony Rebellious negation of the fashion system	Self-expression Social status Self-rewarding consumption Mix-and-match
Attitudes towards labels and brands	Search for the uniqueness Seeking difference Consciousness	Window shopping ironized No interest in labels and brands Shared wardrobes Lack of interest in possessing material goods	Window shopping Fetishization of labels Possession Materialism
Attitudes towards bodies	Anti-labelling Screen-mediated bodies Workout and diet culture Ideal body shape imposed by the fashion industry	Anti-labelling body types and sizes Democratization of the ideal body Against the erotic and sexual discourse of the female body Nudity	Workout and diet culture Ideal body shape imposed by the fashion industry Sexualized body Rejection of nudity

Conclusions

The aim of the article was to identify how the three most representative TV shows of the three demographically most present generations in contemporary society showcased the generational attitude towards fashion, dress, and body. The three selected shows, *Euphoria* for Generation Z, *Girls* for Generation Y, and *SATC* for Generation X, were identified by the media as mainstream voices of the respective generation. The analysis pointed out how the serial and productional logic evolved from classic sitcom-like genres to thriller and drama in developing televisual coming-of-age stories. Even though the theory of generations has its defaults, within the confines of this analysis it proved to be helpful as an operational tool of analysis, as the three above-mentioned shows were framed

as popular cultural representations of the three generations on traditional and social media platforms. In the case of the three generations – as a literature-review-based analysis pointed out –, fashion is linked to identity politics defined by a strong sense of individualism. Even with the arrival of shared wardrobes, fashion stays a tool of differentiation. Yet, individualism means different things to the three respective cohorts: it means self-expression for Gen X, self-growth for millennials, and self-awareness for zoomers.

The fashion attitudes reflected by the three TV shows were highlighted by a thematic analysis focusing on the three sartorially most important characters of the shows, Carrie Bradshaw for *SATC*, Hannah Horvath for *Girls*, and Jules Vaughn for *Euphoria*. The thematic aspects considered were the visual style of the characters, their attitudes towards fashion and clothing, labels and brands, and bodies and body images. In conclusion, for Gen X, fashion stays a status symbol and is linked to economic success, and the material value of luxury goods plays an important role in identifying with the fashion system. The mix-and-match technique is the most valued and authentic fashion attitude towards a fashion system that still has the power to impose ideal body types – because for Carrie fashion can also feed you. For Gen Y, the rebellious attitude towards the whole fashion system became mainstream and went hand in hand with the devaluation of labels, of ideal body types, and of the whole idea of possession and investing in material goods. In this case, ironical DIY fashion projects and attitude-based subcultures characterized the show's fashion discourse. Hannah highlighted it as such: "They put me in a box and now I'm suffocating." With Gen Z, we can witness the creation of a conflicting fashion attitude where rebellion against the system, the extreme valuation of uniqueness is present, as well as a need to conform to ideal visual codes imposed by media and creative industries. Because, as Jules said it: "Real life is such a letdown."

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