Unpacking gender issues through contemporary serial drama
High school pedagogical approaches to gender and media literacy

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Abstract

This contribution explores the pedagogical potential of using one scene from one serial drama to teach gender issues in a high school context. The contribution is a text-based argument with an overall media literacy approach to teaching gender issues. As pedagogical examples, we present two different series – *Euphoria* (HBO 2019-) and *Rita* (TV2 / Netflix 2012-20) – through two individual video excerpts from the series. These scenes have been carefully selected to highlight how specific gender issues may be scrutinised from just one brief sequence. The scene from *Euphoria* provides an opportu-

nity to analyse *toxic masculinity*, while the scene from Rita presents a perspective that we identify as *banal gender bending*. In conclusion, we highlight how this approach not only provides high school teachers with an opportune way to locate usable excerpts as teaching material; this specific approach also provides an occasion for teachers to turn the classroom around and facilitate students' own search for usable excerpts in and creative appropriation of serial drama.

Keywords: Gender issues, serial drama, media literacy, toxic masculinity, banal gender-bending

In this contribution, we approach complex gender issues in serial drama from a didactic perspective. We focus especially on the didactic potential of serial drama in high school teaching, since young adults in the latter years of high school have acquired the required knowledgebase and reached a level of maturity to be able tackle such intricate topics. As results from the EU project GEMINI have shown, there are major local differences across countries in teaching media and gender[1]. In this article we focus primarily on a Danish context where media and gender are taught in the subject *Danish* (the national language subject), and the elective *Media Studies*. However, we suggest that using serial drama as an educational tool to teach complex gender issues can also work well in other subject-specific contexts though local curriculum adaption.

First, we present the fundamental didactic and methodological principles in teaching gender through serial drama. This includes a presentation of the *GMN Triangle,* i.e. an approach to teaching gender issues (G), media literacy (M) and narrative comprehension (N) to students. The GMN Triangle is an elementary and adaptable pedagogical tool developed in the GEMINI research project (cf. Jacobsen and Hansen 2024). We propose that serial drama may give teachers a less-personal, less-biased position from which to teach prickly gender topics that may give rise to constructive, yet opinionated debates. Secondly, we will show how the GMN triangle can be used as a didactic tool to teach different gender-related concepts. We do this by applying the GMN triangle to selected scenes from the series *Euphoria* (HBO 2019-) and *Rita* (TV2/Netflix 2012-20).

In both cases, representative video excerpts have been included. Lastly, we introduce a final stage where teachers may facilitate students' own creative work with similar material. In all, this contribution demonstrates how the teacher may move from teaching the style and narrative in serial dramas, across pedagogical discussions of gender topics, to more functional pedagogical practices for teaching knowledge about gender issues through practical video production.

In this way, this article is one final step in a research-action process that suggest an action perspective from more comprehensive research material. Action research is, according to Koshy, situation-based, participatory, and collaborative education practices that "involves action, evaluation, and reflection and, based on gathered evidence, changes in practice are implemented," hopefully leading to "the improvement of practice" (Kosky, 2010: 3). Although applied elsewhere, e.g. in healthcare research (ibid.: 2), our focus is specifically practice-change in and through a teaching context. In our case, the *situation* is comprised by the fact that gender studies have become a sensitive topic, and although teachers show a wider interest in gender studies as a topic, they may lack sufficient tools to teach it to high school students (see Spalletta 2024). This exhibits a practical problem that we propose to address by linking to concrete material outside teachers' own fields of experience. Based on overall insights from several focus group and teacher interviews (the research part)[2], we propose systematic integration of popular series in a teaching context to produce what we identify as "a common third" (the action part). Using series as a common reference point can create a safer space for both teachers and students to discuss delicate and sometimes personal matters. For Koshy, action may come in parts, i.e. integrated in minor steps to reach larger result. In our case, we also present three steps that teachers can follow to reach a level where not only teachers can produce their own educational material. Here, students may also be integrated into practical exercises by creating new media materials that can inspire further development of participatory learning practices.

1. Serial drama and gender in high school teaching

In a book on *subject-matter didactics* for teaching media studies in high schools, Mimi Olsen utilises Jens Jørgen Hansen's distinction

between *semantic*, *didactic* and *functional* educational tools (Olsen 2018; Hansen 2010). Semantic tools refer to the material under critical scrutiny in teaching, in our case the chosen serial dramas, while didactic tools are the pedagogical system used for teaching the semantic material, in our case the GMN Triangle (see below).[3] Functional tools are the technological equipment supporting learning processes for students, such as a pencil for taking notes or the screen to show video clips. However, in our case we propose that technology may also be a tool for students' increase of knowledge about the teaching subject (gender and serial drama) by using similar productional (functional) tools such as editing software. We return to this final point in the latter part of the article.

In our GMN Triangle (gender, media, narrative), the pedagogical approach is divided into three corners with relevance for teach-
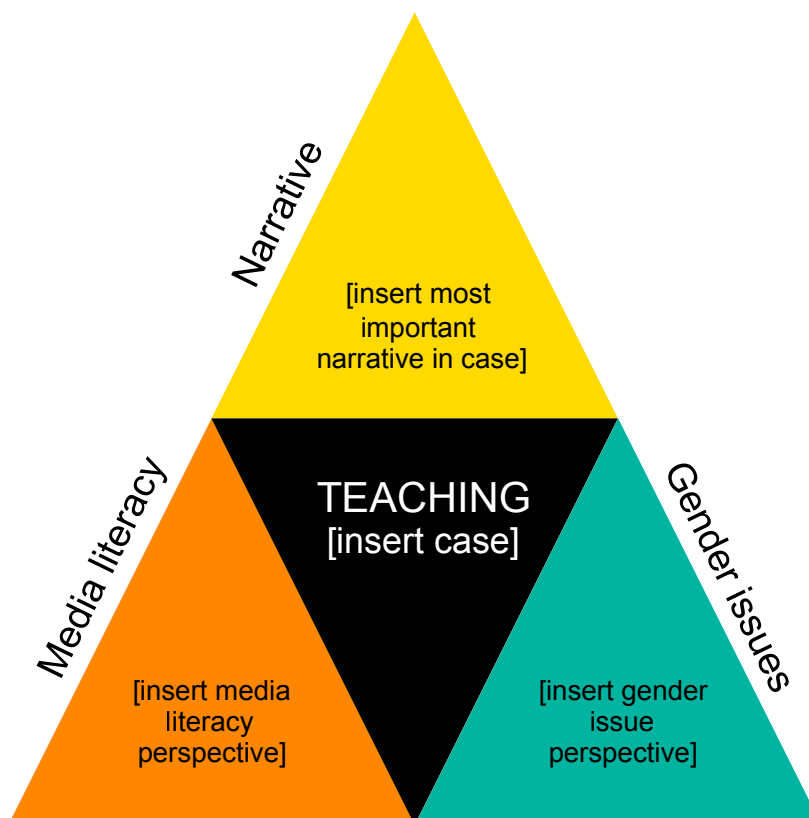

Figure 1: The GMN Triangle with three basic corners: narrative, media, and gender.

ing gender through serial drama. Before turning to our two examples, we will briefly introduce the three corners and the reflexive principles behind this focus.

Narrative refers to basic knowledge about the contents of the serial drama, which implies that the teacher should have some acquaintance with the overall narrative of the series to be able to facilitate a scholarly dialogue about the contents. In high school teaching textbooks, it is common practice to have excerpts from e.g. novels within a specific theme, and we propose that brief excerpts from serial drama may be utilised in a similar manner. Often school curricula are demanding and time-consuming, which means that teaching material should be easily integrated (Spalletta 2024, 24). Also, students may find it difficult to consume hours of screentime, which yet again may be only available behind a streamer's paywall.

For these reasons, we propose to teach gender topics through serial drama based on a simple *one series, one scene, one issue* dogma. This means using 4-6-minute ready-made excerpts from series and focus on one gender topic for each excerpt. The simplicity of this approach is less time-consuming in students' preparation for class, and using a brief video excerpt (to understand serial drama in general) produces what one of our teacher respondents refers to as a "common third":

> "I find it hard to see any disadvantages in that [using brief excerpts], because I always think it's good to use examples that aren't the students' own experiences when discussing something like this, so it doesn't become personal, so you have that common third to discuss from" (Male high school teacher over 40).

The concept of the "common third" was originally proposed by the philosopher Michael Husen: "The important thing is that there is something external, a common matter, about which they are both concerned and about which they are concerned together" (Husen 1996, 220). As pointed out by McCreadie (2020), the concept has entered the field of social pedagogy, for instance defined as "an activity or an experience they have together which feels unique in a positive way" (Ryyänen and Nivala 2019, 53). The common reference to something external may then produce a situation where

teachers and students avoid a too close interface between teaching topic (in our case gender issues) and personal experiences. As semantic tools, brief excerpts from series may function as an entry-point for a complete series and, more importantly, a less-biased common third, while the teacher through simple exposure of the overall narrative may open a route to teach both media literacy perspectives and gender issues to the students.

In the triangle, *media* turns the teachers' attention towards specific media literacy issues that may be raised from the excerpt such as a representative understanding of the role of editing or point of view. In doing so, focus shifts more clearly from the semantic to the didactic educational tools. In Danish high schools, students must acquire "knowledge about important issues related to the function of media in social, cultural and historical contexts" (Retsinformation 2024). For Mimi Olsen, teaching such "media competences" connects to "that understanding of Bildung [dannelse] that is necessary for us to be able to navigate and act as citizens in a modern democracy" (Olsen 2018: 36). Using popular serial drama not only provides an opportunity to use cases that may share students' interests in popular culture; serial drama is also a tool that may raise the awareness for students regarding *how* specific topics are framed by the means of audiovisual storytelling. In this way, an excerpt from a serial drama is also what Jens Jørgen Hansen (2010: 74), as a sub-category to *functional tools*, refers to as a *communicative educational tool* that "establishes *contact* between the parties involved in the learning situation". This perspective emphasises an obvious interface between semantic and functional educational tools. Media excerpts, then, produces a pedagogical situation where students may acquire knowledge about how one specific type of media communication (serial drama) frames a specific topic. As an outcome, this may facilitate student insights into how editing, cinematography and other stylistic parameters do not operate as a neutral window but also shape a certain perspective on the series' specific subject matter.

While *narrative* and *media* falls under W. James Potter's lower stages of media literacy, i.e. "narrative acquisition" and "acquiring fundamentals", the *gender* perspective in the GMN triangle is a more developed interpretative issue that falls under "critical appreciation", including "broad and detailed understanding of the historical, economic, political, and artistic context of message systems"

(Potter 2008: 22). Teaching gender as a topic, then, becomes guided by how a certain issue is framed by a serial drama and not by how a specific, sometimes contested concept should be defined and socially understood. In fact, Potter refers to *gender stereotypes* in entertainment as a specific topic that may be challenged by disseminating "the old tried-and-true formulas of storytelling" (ibid.: 196), i.e. disclosing how traditional ways of telling stories may include elementary gender stereotypes, for example famously expounded by Laura Mulvey's analyses of the male gaze in Hollywood cinematography (Mulvey 1975).[4] In this way, gender becomes the specific subject that may be critically analysed through the comprehension of serial dramas' framing of the subject, including an understanding of film stylistic frameworks, narrative comprehension, and thematic readings of serial drama topics and areas of interest.

By using the GMN triangle, we present below two series excerpts that show different ways of framing specific, relevant gender topics. By using short clips, we will show that you can go from 4-6 minutes excerpts to critical dialogue about how gender issues are represented and handled. Based on our interpretation of the scenes, we present potential gender themes that are negotiated in these video clips, but there can certainly be several additional interpretive angles from which the clips can be addressed.

2. Euphoria and toxic masculinity

Euphoria is a popular, edgy American serial drama well-known to Danish high school students[5]. It was originally produced for HBO (now available through Max), and it is characterised by its attention towards various gender identities beyond the binary gender system. It has been referred to as "transgressive TV" and "cool trans aesthetics", since it "appears less interested in debates about the perceived authenticity of trans identities than in employing transness as a marker of transgressive youth culture" (Macintosh 2022, 15). In contrast to Macintosh, our focus group results suggest that it is precisely the perceived authenticity of representing trans identities that aligns well with how Danish high school students seek *unforced narratives* on gender topics. In fact, *Euphoria*'s portrayal of the trans-gendered character Jules was mentioned in several focus group interviews.

Based on our focus group insights, we define unforced narratives as stylistic ways of storytelling that, for a particular audience, appear appropriate and plausible according to their own experience, while avoiding what Torben Weinreich (1994) calls "downward slanting" in children's stories, i.e. telling a specific story with a certain pedagogical audience aim or forcing a certain opinion across through storytelling devices. In many ways, this understanding of what the students refer to as 'unforced' shares similarities with Roland Barthes' classic concept *naturalisation* (Barthes 1964), which refers to how socially constructed narratives appear naturalised and perceived as integrally genuine within a given cultural context. Unforced narratives appear credible within at a specific time and place. They do not necessarily have to represent the viewers' lifeworld in a 1:1-relationship, but they must appear impartial and unjudgmental to an audience in terms of expressing characters, topics or specific issues.

The chosen sequence takes place in the final episode of the first season when many characters have been established. We know about the main character Rue's drug abuse, her friendship with the transgendered Jules, her relations to friends in school, including the venomous relationship between the couple Maddy and Nate. We have established Nate as the captain of the football team and a dominant male leader, while we have also seen Nate's father Cal's

Figure 2: In this scene from *Euphoria*, the series provides viewers with new information about the abusive character Nate, which may facilitate a broader comprehension of his character traits (HBO 2019).

troublesome and undisclosed interest in sexual relations to young-sters. In this case, we have from the start instituted Cal's abusive affiliation with Jules, a relationship that he videorecords with hidden cameras. Some of these videos now travel around without Cal's knowing, potentially exposing his illegal and amoral exploitation of Jules.[6] In this way, the series thematises different gender identities and sexual orientations, including the meeting point between heterosexual relations and toxic masculinities.

Focusing on the *Narrative* corner of the GMN triangle emphasizes how the sequence provides an opportunity to address gender issues from what many high school students in the Danish focus group interviews consider to be unforced, naturalized narratives about gender. High school students appear to disapprove of forced ways to tell stories about gender relationships and sexuality – and *Euphoria* is one series that appear notably accepted for its portrayal
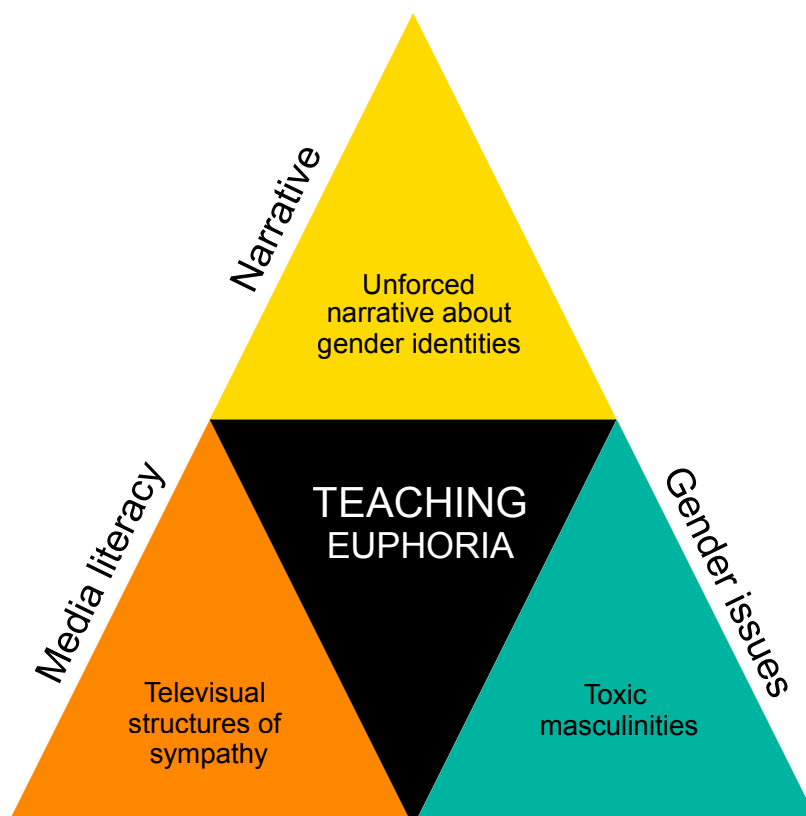

Figure 3: The GMN Triangle applied to *Euphoria*.

of especially the transgendered Jules, since Jules is not directly presented as transgendered, but characterised by other means of expression such as spontaneous, sympathetic and thoughtful. In the end, this opens the narrative for the target audience and presents an opportunity to teach complex seriality in relation to a series that appears 'liked', including specific stylistic access to why Jules is particularly likable.

Turning to the *Media literacy* corner, the specific scene is also a suitable example of how complex seriality may tweak the structures of sympathy during the plot development of a series (Smith 1995). Mostly, the viewers are invited to dislike Nate because he is incredibly controlling and abusive towards his surroundings and especially his girlfriend Maddy. However, when we are exposed to how his father is likewise controlling and vicious – and essentially sadistic – towards Nate, viewers may acquire a more sympathetic understanding of where Nate's nature comes from. Besides showcasing the complexities of narrative storytelling, the series may enhance students' ideas about how characters may develop throughout a long serial narrative. The sequence does not present justifications for Nate's behaviour, but it provides viewers with reasons for his nature.

Finally, a focus on the *Gender issues* corner of the GMN triangle shows how the sequence illustrates understandings of what has been termed 'toxic masculinity'. As noted by Carol Harrington, "toxic masculinity spread from men's movements to wider self-help, academic, and policy literature. This literature posited that emotionally distant father-son relationships produced 'toxically' masculine men, [i.e.] men who lack adequate fathering pursue unrealistic cultural images of masculinity and feel a constant need to prove their manhood" (2021, 347). Harrington's description of the origins of the term is a significantly fitting description of Nate's character development in *Euphoria*, exposing a teaching opportunity to debate and comprehend such conceptualisations in relation to a popular, acknowledged serial drama. This may include perspectives on how Nate pursues his "unrealistic cultural images of masculinity" through his endeavours on the football field.

The image of Nate after the game-winning touchdown, alone on the football field, with a confounded look on his face, is very indicative of the overall situation and his misunderstood comprehension

of leadership and masculinity. A sense of masculine control that, through the narrative development, reverts to the situation around Jules and her gender identity and sexual orientation. Complexly, this five-minute sequence is a condensed account of gender matters and serial comprehension that may be 'unpacked' through dialogues with students in a high school teaching situation.
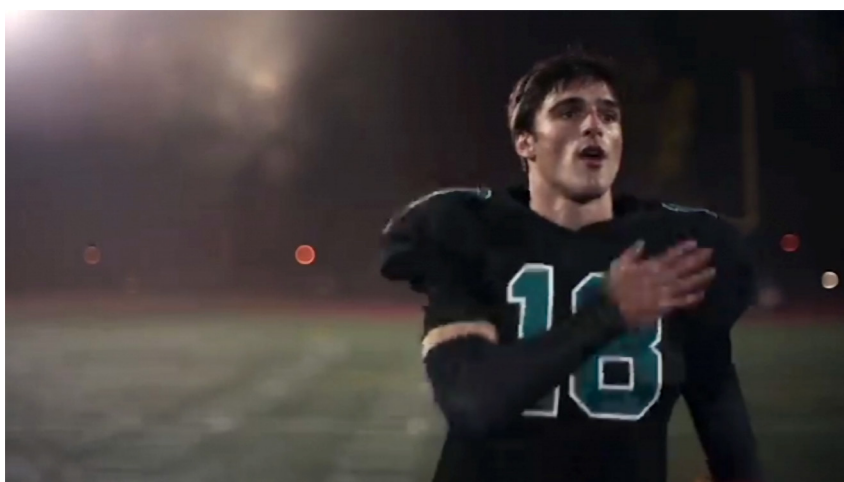

Figure 4: Nate, alone in the football field, jabs his own shoulder in acknowledgement in *Euphoria* (S1:E8). Indicatively, the team which he is supposed to lead is missing around him (HBO 2019).

3. Rita and banal gender-bending

While the attention towards *Euphoria* was expected (the series was in fact used in an 'ice-breaking' que card exercise in all five Danish focus groups),[7] *Rita* to our surprise came up unmotivated in discussions in four out of five focus group interviews. One high school respondent replied: "*Rita* is just a banger. […] I really hope that there is no one in here who hasn't watched *Rita*. That series is just fantastic" (17-year-old female focus group respondent). The series about the controversial elementary school teacher, Rita, was originally produced for the Danish commercial public service broadcaster TV 2, but after the second season of five, Netflix entered as a co-commissioner, extending the series with three additional seasons and the spin-off series *Hjørdis* (2015). Besides the conceded qualities of the series, Netflix's participation as co-commissioner may also explain the attention towards the series from Danish

young adults, as it is now available through young adults' most used streaming platform (Spalletta 2024, 42). This also makes the series internationally available for Netflix users outside the local Danish context.

As an excerpt, we have chosen a central scene from the opening episode in the first season. This scene not only introduces the controversial main character, Rita; it also integrates her contentious traits in an open discussion of her son's homosexuality. Essentially, this introduces what we would term *banal gender-bending* through a character with mixed traditional gender traits, but it may also breach with the *one issue* dogma, since the scene also involves an opportunity to discuss the sexual orientation of another character. However, the two topics are closely knitted together through the actions of Rita.

Figure 5: In this scene from *Rita*, the series provides viewers with the central character traits of the protagonist and introduces the series' subplot about the homosexuality of Rita's son Jeppe (TV 2 Denmark 2012).

According to Christian Thorpe, the creator of *Rita*, this specific scene was controversial for the broadcaster:

> "Of course, we had some discussions [with the broadcaster] on how far she can go. Definitely, a scene like the one where they have dinner in the garden and she says "hey, you're teasing your gay brother" that was a big discus-

sion. They felt that she went too far in that scene. And we felt that, as long as she says I'm sorry afterwards, we understand that it doesn't come from a bad place." (Christian Thorpe, in Série Series 2013)

On the surface, the scene was controversial because it mocks Jeppe's sexuality, but Thorpe underlined that it should be read conversely, since "no one has the faintest problem with Jeppe being gay, except himself" (Daimer & Blegvad 2012). Tightly constructed, the scene communicates Rita's use of cigarettes and alcohol, her ability to expose other people's double standards through witty one-liners, and her light-hearted approach to sexual relationships. At the same time, it introduces Jeppe's coming-out as something internally rather than culturally difficult.

Image 6: Rita lighting up a cigarette during dinner before explicitly addressing her son's sexuality with the guests (S1:E1) (TV 2 Denmark 2012).

Rather than being what Brett Martin (2013) has referred to as a 'difficult man' (hardboiled male characters with softer sensibilities), Rita is exposed as a 'difficult woman' with an explicitly cis-gendered sexual orientation and traditionally attractive female features in combination with stereotypical male traits; the actress Mille Dinesen refers to her own role as Rita as "masculine" (Mille Dinesen, in Série Series 2013). Her complex character traits align well with Isabel Pinedo's inversion of Martin's concept into 'difficult women' which

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signals "how dramas construct the female gaze, a structure of looking that centers the narrative from a female perspective and is organised around female empowerment". This provides the female characters with traits from the "antihero", understood as a "morally ambiguous figure, with an uneasy mix of likable and unlikable traits, who commits serious moral transgressions" (Pinedo 2021, 2). *Rita*'s gender portrayal may, then, be used for a constructive dialogue about traditional masculinity / femininity traits, while Jeppe's coming-out narrative and romantic storyline highlights a naturalised acceptance of homosexuality without the need for external character traits indicating his sexual orientation. Although the series addresses cultural predicaments regarding homosexuality, the series' point of view on Jeppe's character presents an unforced narrative about being gay and presents homosexuality from a naturalised, accepted perspective. The series also recognises that discovering and acknowledging your own sexuality is sometimes more challenging than the acceptance of those around you. Therefore, the series gives rise to nuanced discussions about recognition and acceptance and how to deal with coming out in general.

The scene from *Rita* may be especially suitable for pedagogical purposes, since it confronts difficult issues with a sense of humour and a positive approach to conflict. The scene integrates complex notions of gender traits and sexual identity not by confronting relations of power, but rather by narrating a cosy-friendly-cum-sarcastic environment where personal identities may be enjoyed without controlling environments. Following the GMN triangle for teaching gender issues in series, the high school teacher may motivate students' comprehension and negotiation of gender traits through especially the protagonist Rita.

Like *Euphoria,* the scene provides an opportunity to address gender issues through unforced, naturalised gender narratives (the *Narrative* corner of the triangle). The unforced nature of gender issues is closely tied to the series generic quality as a character-based dramady. This presents an occasion for teachers and students to discuss how some of Rita's character traits may be associated with traditional, stereotypical male roles (strong character with agency, chain-smoking, heavy drinking, witty and wisecracking humour, workaholic, casual sexuality). At the same time, Rita is an attractive woman with a caring relationship with her children, soft pedagogi-

cal teaching skills, and a cis-gendered and straight sexual orientation towards men, traits traditionally associated with women. In this way, the Rita character fits well into contemporary trends towards complex characters in serial fiction (Mittell 2015, Dunleavy 2017), while clearly negotiating and blurring stereotypes typically associated with masculinity and femininity, according to the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem 1981, see also Prentice and Carranza 2003 and Matud 2018).
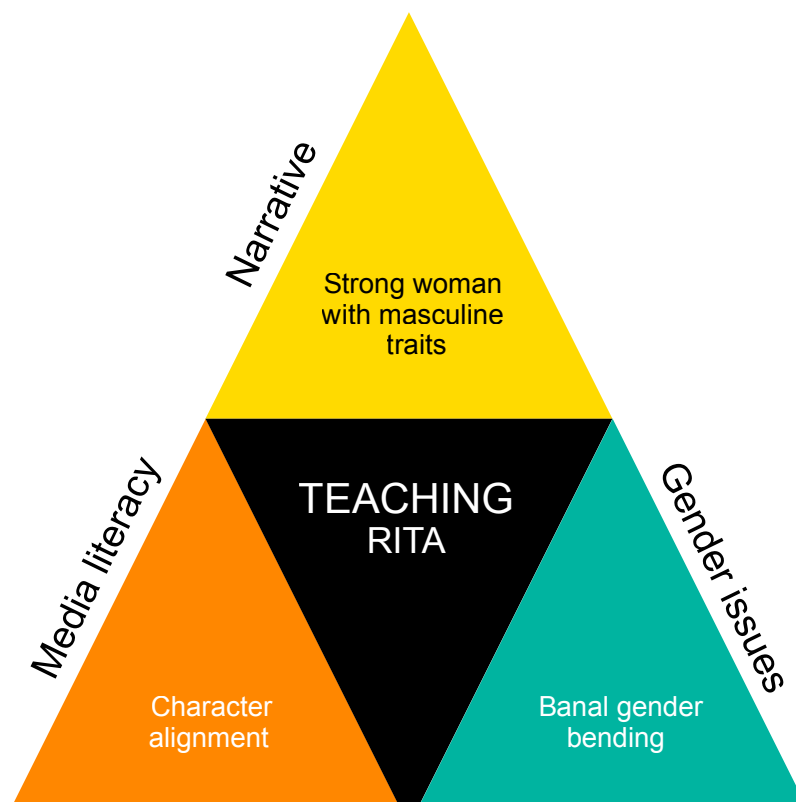

Figure 7: The GMN Triangle applied to *Rita*.

This ties directly into the *Media literacy* perspective that may be taught from the *Rita* case. While Rita is a likable character, she too has a number of flaws and politically incorrect traits. The series was criticised by the Danish Cancer Society for its explicit presentation of smoking, while the sense of humour in the series may stretch the boundaries of what can be said. In the chosen scene, one of the char-

acters says "Cheers. Drink up or be gay", which is an older, controversial, derogative and stereotypical Danish expression that is rarely used today (meaning that if you do not finish your drink in one gulp, you're gay). While the line comes from another character than Rita, it is possible to lift out this line from the scene, and debate what such an expression means, discuss its cultural context, and negotiate why such an idiom appears much more provocative today than only some years ago. In this way, *Rita* presents opportunities to teach how characters and character relations are built into complex serial dramas, and how the series' school context presents an obvious opening for discussions of many different sociocultural contexts, including gender issues. At root, the scene invites viewers to align with Rita (cf. Smith 1995), which presents an opportunity to discuss how viewers may align with 'unperfect' characters with flaws.

Turning to the *Gender issues* corner, the series' gender negotiation could be referred to as what we term *banal gender bending*. Here, we pick up Meridith Heller's exploration of gender-bending as

> "any staged performance that has the intention and takes the steps to cultivate a queer gestus. This includes all acts that centrally portrays identities, bodies, or actions as out of sync with the cultural framework of normal, natural, or ideal. […] the performer must communicate how the presented identity does not align with hegemonic scripts of identity congruence." (Heller 2020, 33)

While *Rita* does not maintain the theatrical and obvious display of different blended gender traits (e.g. like the artist Boy George), it takes traditional male and female gender traits and flips and negotiates them through Rita's character. In this way, gender bending becomes banal (with similarities to how Michael Billig (1995) refers to *banal* nationalism), which is less activistic from a gender-political perspective, but it presents a clear communication of mixed gender traits, negotiating stereotypes through humour, social criticism, and breaks with traditional female and male character traits.

Much may be debated from the *Rita* sequence, and this makes it work very well in a teaching context. Not only does it present Rita as a flawed character to root for; it also highlights several opportunities to integrate gender issues in a classroom discussion about natural-

ised sexualities and gender-mixed character traits. Such complexities may well be unpacked in an open classroom dialogue with high school students. The *Rita* sequence, then, provides ample opportunities to teach gender issues and complex character comprehension.

4. From using teaching material to editing teaching material

The GMN triangle proposes teaching strategies to approach difficult gender issues through serial drama as a common third, i.e. a production of a common safe space for both teachers and students by using an external object as tool and analytical focus. The pedagogical glitch, however, may be that teaching series works best if the students share an interest in the specific series, which may often be contemporary series that enjoy attention for a shorter or longer period. As a second stage practice, pedagogical and practical acquaintance with the GMN triangle for teachers may, therefore, at best lead towards teachers' own development of teaching examples, which may also be chosen in closer collaboration with students in the classroom. As such, the GMN triangle is not only a method used to develop teaching examples in our context; it is also a didactic tool that may expediate teachers' own case studies. It can also serve as a clear visual aid to help students identify which part of the model they are working on. As exposed through the two examples above, this approach may ideally go from 1) top corner and narrative acquaintance to 2) left corner and media style and character point of view to finally 3) analysing how gender issues are framed by narrative and stylistic exposure. However, it does not necessarily have to work in that order, but knowledge about the narrative and style of the series may facilitate a more open dialogue on how certain gender issues are frame by narrative and style. Working with the GMN triangle, then, is a way to open a series by discussing narrative comprehension, stylistic framing, and topical debates about gender issues, but it is likewise a very basic, practical tool that teachers may use to pinpoint new narratives and suitable gender topics to address through specific serial dramas.

With the GMN triangle as a recognised, comprehendible tool for students, it is then achievable to take the shared interest in serial drama into the third, practical stage. This leads directly into what has been referred to as "the leading idea" of media studies where

"the theoretical-analytical and the practical-production oriented [approaches] are part of an interactive interplay" (Olsen 2018, 22). In other words, if students apply practical skills to re-edit audio-visual material, they may acquire increased insights into media exposure, stylistics and narrative comprehension. Essentially, this leading idea is built directly into current Danish curricular plans for teachers of Danish in general high schools where students must "productively work with media expressions in social contexts" (Ministry of Teaching and Education 2024). Essentially, students must acquire practical experience with creating their own media material, which may improve both their technical skills in using screen recording systems and editing software alongside their comprehension of difficult text material. This is often referred to as "hands-on use" (Buckingham 2003, 82) or "learning by doing" (Arlien-Søborg 2018, 154).

As a practical exercise in the context of this teaching topic, we propose that students locate and record own excerpts from serial dramas and edit these scenes through software now easily available through online resources or through editing software already installed on laptops (cf. Jacobsen and Hansen 2024). In his work on media education, David Buckingham refers to several teaching techniques or "classroom strategies" that may be used in teaching media literacy to students and includes "production" as a final strategy to have students develop an understanding of "media language." According to Buckingham, engaging students in creating media output themselves, not only creates a 'safe space' "in which students can explore their emotional investments in the media"; students may also "be encouraged to develop a more thoughtful approach to concepts such as representation" (Buckingham 2003, 82). Engaging students in creating own examples would, in our case, invite students to critically reflect on how series frame specific gender issues, returning attention to Potter's higher levels of media literacy. Creating media material may go from a simple exercise in recording, re-editing and explaining the importance of a specific scene, across more complex ways of comparative examples in mash-up video material with several similar series, to increasingly demanding productions of videoessays about gender issues in serial drama. Essentially, this potential final third stage assignment does not entail setting up a wider media production process as

such. Instead, it allows students to become acquainted with topics and styles of video source material of their own choice from a more practical point of view, nudging them closer towards material within personal taste ranges and towards critical assessment of screen exposure of gender issues.

By applying a simple example of practical media assignment to teaching media and gender, we come full circle and may return to media as "functional tools", which now not only performs as a technology of *teaching*, but also as the technology of students' own *learning*. According to Arlien-Søborg (2018, 155), using practical insights into media becomes "aesthetic ways of learning" that, in the end, should have a positive impact on students' critical reflection on complex and sometimes transgressive debates about gender issues.

6. Conclusion

This article has introduced the GMN triangle as a didactic tool that may facilitate three steps in high school teachers' activities when teaching gender issues. Serial drama functions as a common third because it creates an external or less-biased reference for both teacher and students. Firstly, we have proposed two examples of how to use serial drama in teaching gender issues. Secondly, we suggest that this approach is an open-source model easily used to develop new examples in a joint classroom context. Thirdly, we include a final step where students develop their own video cases that may be shown and debated in a classroom context. In a Danish context, this approach fits well into teaching Danish as a language subject, which – as a teaching field – includes mandatory learning about media literacy and production. The curricular and institutional context is different elsewhere, but in different local situations *the one series, one scene, one issue* dogma may work well to include serial drama in other teaching subjects too. Depending on the teaching subject, teaching gender issues through popular serial drama may facilitate concrete comprehension of stylistic character and topic framing, but in more sociological or philosophical contexts using serial drama still produces a common third from which broader gender topics can be debated with distance to teachers' and students' own experience.

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Unpacking gender issues through contemporary serial drama
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Notes

1   This article has been published as part of the research-action project GEMINI (Gender Equality through Media Investigation and New training Insights). The project has received co-funding from the European Union under Grant Agreement No. 101088073.
Confer the project reports for more information on local differences across Europe in teaching media, teaching cultures, and approaching gender issues in teaching. See Spalletta (2024) for local teaching contexts in Romania, Ireland, Italy and Denmark.

2   In the research project GEMINI, we conducted a total of 15 focus groups with 15-19-year-old high school students and 42 in-depth teacher interviews in Romania, Ireland, Italy and Denmark. In both cases, both urban and rural high schools were selected to get a wider representation of differences and identities. See Spalletta (2024) for overview of focus group and teacher research. Specifically in Denmark, we interviewed 10 high school teachers from Danish high schools across the whole country. All teachers taught Danish as a subject. The 10 interviews were carried out in Danish between December 2023 and February 2024 through video call.

3   In other contexts, we referred to the model as "the GEMINI pedagogical triangle" (see Jacobsen and Hansen 2024 and the project deliverable 3.1). While the GMN model name holds some resemblance to GEMINI, the intention is to include a more scholarly precise abbreviation for the model name.

4   Mediated stereotypification is a wide field with many perspectives that we do not have the space to enter here. Gender stereotypes were famously explicated by Sandra Bem in her so-called "sex role inventory", which exposed wider cultural stereotypes among male and female traits. Even if the inventory is half a century old, Matud (2018) has highlighted how traditional gender roles and stereotypes are very persistent in contemporary societies. In her work on using TV series to teach topics related to queer TV, Parsemain (2019) also shows how queer identities and different gender identities beyond the binary gender system are often marked by negative stereotypes and prejudice. See Harvey for broader perspectives on the continuation of mediated stereotypes across different media formats (Harvey 2020).

5   In Denmark, we have conducted five focus groups with students from one high school in the capital Copenhagen, one in the second-largest city Aarhus, two in the third-largest city Aalborg (one high school of

commerce and one general high school), and one general high school in a smaller Danish town.

6   Some paragraphs in this article share words, phrases and paragraphs from material published online through GEMINI's research website (gemini.unilink.it). Kim Toft Hansen's teaching material about the two series *Euphoria* and *Rita* have been published as GEMINI SHORTS (Hansen 2024a and 2024b).

7   Students in focus groups were asked to range 10 selected title screens from serial dramas. Some of these included gender-related topics, while others did not explicitly do so. We were not directly interested in the way they ranged the series; rather, we wanted to prime the students into talking specifically about serial drama.