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The Lasso Way

Sentimental Masculinity and Friendship in the Football TV Series *Ted Lasso*

Abstract: This article argues that *Ted Lasso* exemplifies how sentimentality can reshape masculinity and define the aesthetics of *cozy TV*. By staging emotional openness through dialogue, music, and visual warmth, the series constructs a collective 'we' that enables character development and team success. At the same time, the series critiques toxic masculinity by modeling compassionate leadership and imagining alternative forms of gender relations. Its impact extends beyond fiction: during the 2020 crises, audiences embraced the show as 'comfort viewing' and a means of emotional regulation, linking it to discourses of community and mental health. *Ted Lasso* demonstrates how sentimental narratives can subvert masculine stereotypes, foster resilience, and inspire visions of social change and belonging.

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1. Introduction

The comedy series *Ted Lasso* (2020–) follows American amateur football coach Ted Lasso, hired in England to manage the fictional Premier League club AFC Richmond despite never having coached European football and knowing little about the sport. He is appointed by owner Rebecca Welton, who intends to sabotage the team as revenge against her ex-husband Rupert Mannion, its former owner and lifelong devotee. At a press conference, she introduces Ted and a new era for the club:

Now, Coach Lasso may not have the CV that you all find acceptable, but he does have one thing this club doesn't: a trophy from this millennium. So, like it or not, Richmond are changing the way we do things. And from now on, that way is the "Lasso way".¹

Over three seasons, Ted's management style wins over press, fans, Rebecca, and players through kindness, empathy, and team building, transforming lives. This article argues that sentimentality, particularly sentimental masculinity, underpins his success, presenting it as a counterpoint to toxic masculinity and showing how it fosters community and a 'we'-identity within the team.

In addition, the series' cultural impact will be examined. *Ted Lasso* ranks among Apple TV+'s top five streamed titles;² although initially planned to conclude with season three,³ it was renewed for a fourth season.⁴ This paper argues that its enduring popularity stems from its depiction of sentimentality, which resonates with and heals viewers, and its timely release during the Covid-19 pandemic positions it as an example of *cozy media*.⁵

To this end, this article first defines sentimentality and cozy media, establishing it as the main characteristic of *cozy TV*. It then analyzes masculinity and two key friendships using a *close reading*, combining narrative and audiovisual analysis with a gender-focused perspective. Finally, the series' reception is discussed.

While the show's kindness and vulnerable or positive masculinity are widely praised,⁶ a detailed account of how these are performed remains absent.⁷ This

¹ S1E1, 00:15:31–00:15:47.

² As of August 27, 2025.

³ Cf. Cordero 2023: N. pag.

⁴ Cf. FE News Desk: N. pag.

⁵ Cf. Bódi/Waszkiewicz 2025.

⁶ Cf. Beare/Boucaut 2024: 169, 171, Tous Rivorosa 2024: 396, 398–399.

⁷ Anna Tous Rovirosa started the ball rolling with her analysis of *Ted Lasso*, but the series only makes up a small part of the analysis; cf. Tous Rovirosa 2024.

article aims to fill this gap, contributing to masculinity studies and to the study of sentimentality in television.

2. Sentimentality and Sentimental Masculinity

Since the late 18th century, the term sentimentality has had negative connotations and has often been used as a synonym for bad taste.⁸ Criticism of sentimentality frequently accuses it of failing to represent ‘authentic’ emotions⁹ and of being manipulative—such as when sentimental aesthetics in film are employed to provoke tears in the audience.¹⁰ Another common critique is that sentimental texts preserve the status quo and prevailing norms rather than subverting them, serving instead as ‘feel-good’ texts without lasting effect.¹¹

Rebecca Wanzo, however, in her analysis of the representation of African American women in U.S. culture, concludes that sentimentality holds both conservative and progressive potential.¹² In *Ted Lasso*, sentimentality functions to present a new form of masculinity and to highlight its positive effects on its environment. Although in Western culture sentimentality has often been associated with femininity and positioned in contrast to masculinity, which is positively connoted with rationality,¹³ the following analysis will show that in *Ted Lasso* sentimentality is displayed as inherent to men as well as women (and other genders) and can have positive effects for all.

But what, precisely, is sentimentality? As Wanzo summarizes, „[s]igns of the sentimental are repeated representations of the sweet, innocent, or cute;“¹⁴ though she critiques this simplification.¹⁵ I understand sentimentality, following Deborah Knight, as encompassing comforting, tender, and gentle feelings such as “affection, sympathy, fondness, caring, and compassion”¹⁶—yet sentimental texts go beyond this. They generate empathy and foster community,¹⁷ both in reception and within sentimental narratives themselves.

As Kathrin Mädler observes in relation to audiovisual media, sentimentality emphasizes connections over individuality, fostering sympathy, empathy and

⁸ Cf. Burnetts 2017: 24, 30–33.

⁹ Cf. Wanzo 2009: 8–9, Paul 2021: 16–17.

¹⁰ Cf. Wanzo 2009: 7.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*: 9.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ Cf. Mädler 2016: 35.

¹⁴ Wanzo 2009: 8.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*: 8.

¹⁶ Knight 1999: 411.

¹⁷ Cf. Paul 2021: 15.

identification rather than detachment.¹⁸ Sentimental narratives focus on character relationships and group dynamics, including their successes and failures, and aim to evoke emotional engagement from the audience rather than rational reflection.¹⁹

The community-building effect of sentimentality in *Ted Lasso* is most evident in its emphasis on team building and the large number of friendships portrayed. To describe the contagious effect of sentimentality, I propose the term *affect chains*,²⁰ which can foster a ‘we’-identity.²¹ As often discussed in academic contexts, affects can pass from one body to another.²² According to Heike Paul, the sentimental bridges the distinction between emotion and affect, bringing both modes of feeling together: sentimentality manifests as a bodily reaction (such as crying) while simultaneously activating cultural scripts (such as mourning) that are communicable.²³

Sentimental narratives can thus be narratives of suffering and liberation, of grief,²⁴ or overcoming a difficult situation. On the audiovisual level, sentimentality can take the form of physical encounters such as hugs, sentimental music such as ballads, serious conversations, or particular uses of color. In summary, sentimentality is both a narrative and aesthetic form.

Specifically, sentimental masculinity is introduced in this paper as the counterpart to toxic masculinity. According to Anna Tous Rovirosa, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is the starting point for understanding the emergence of toxic masculinity:²⁵ “It refers to an ideological construct that serves and maintains the interests of dominant male groups, and rejects femininity, emotivity and vulnerability.”²⁶ She defines *toxic masculinity* as an accumulation of traits that uphold male dominance, homophobia, violence, and the devaluation of women.²⁷

In contrast, I understand *sentimental masculinity* as a form of masculinity that rejects emotional repression in favor of empathy, equality, community, and shared resilience. Temporality also plays a role here. While toxic masculinity is often associated with nostalgia—a longing for past times when traditional gender roles prevailed—sentimental masculinity looks toward the future, envisioning

¹⁸ Cf. Mädler 2016: 42.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁰ Cf. Venzmer 2024: 131.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*: 128–129.

²² Cf. Smith/Snider 2019: 43.

²³ Cf. Paul 2021: 21.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: 18.

²⁵ Cf. Tous Rovirosa 2024: 393.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Vgl. *ibid.*

progressive gender identities. In this sense, sentimentality functions as an impulse for social change.²⁸

3. Cozy Media

Many of these qualities of sentimentality, such as ‘cuteness’ or community-building,²⁹ also appear in connection with another concept that has emerged in media studies over the past five years: *cozy media*.³⁰ The term refers to texts that flourished during the Covid-19 pandemic and are characterized by their soothing effect on audiences.³¹ For this reason, I propose to conceptualize sentimentality as the *modus operandi* of *cozy TV*.

Cozy media encompasses a wide spectrum of cultural forms—from cozy games to ASMR videos, and comfort TV—all responding to a shared need: the creation of comfort and emotional closeness in a world marked by uncertainty and crisis.³² Central to this is the “fantasy of safety, abundance, and softness”,³³ which manifests itself in aesthetic strategies, such as pastel or bright colors, gentle music, or repetitive game mechanics,³⁴ as well as in forms of reception and community. Cozy games, for example, provide emotional, safe, heart-warming experiences³⁵ as a counterbalance to hypermasculine logics of productivity, competition,³⁶ and achievement,³⁷ while cozy streams and comfort TV create spaces of intimacy, care, and alternative forms of community.³⁸

Importantly, cozy media is never mere escapism. It can also be understood as a form of care and quiet resistance,³⁹ for example in queer Twitch streams that deliberately stage ‘cozy wholesomeness’ as a counter-narrative to exclusionary ideologies.⁴⁰ These technologies of self-care provide tools for coping with anxiety, everyday pressures, or mental health challenges⁴¹—without fully displacing the hardships of reality. Instead, such realities are made experienceable in softened,

²⁸ Cf. Paul 2021: 8.

²⁹ Cf. Bódi 2024: 58, Youngblood 2022: 534.

³⁰ Cf. Bódi/Waszkiewicz 2025: N. pag.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*

³² Cf. Bódi 2024: 51–52, Youngblood 2022: 533, Horeck 2021: 35.

³³ Short et al. as quoted in Waszkiewicz/Tymińska 2024: 10.

³⁴ Cf. Waszkiewicz/Tymińska 2024: 8–10, Bódi 2024: 58.

³⁵ Cf. Bódi 2024: 54.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*: 51.

³⁷ Cf. Waszkiewicz/Tymińska 2024: 8.

³⁸ Cf. Youngblood 2022: 534–537, Horeck 2021: 35–37.

³⁹ Cf. Waszkiewicz/Tymińska 2024: 12.

⁴⁰ Cf. Youngblood 2022: 531.

⁴¹ Cf. Bódi 2024: 52.

aesthetically framed ways, allowing audiences to regain a sense of control and safety.⁴²

Ultimately, cozy media is united by an affective quality that transcends individual media forms.⁴³ ASMR videos, for instance, generate affective atmospheres that can be shared, repeated, and remembered collectively.⁴⁴ Naomi Smith and Anne-Marie Snider suggest in this context that affect can indeed be deliberately produced.⁴⁵ Here, the concept of sentimentality can help explain how such atmospheres operate at the intersection of emotion and affect, consciously evoked to create media experiences that enable healing, care, and connection, as Tanya Horeck argues in relation to binge-watching.⁴⁶

Horeck specifically identifies *kind TV* as a subcategory, referring to shows that either emerged during the pandemic or were heavily consumed at the time, such as *Schitt's Creek* (2015–2020) and *Ted Lasso*.⁴⁷ These series are characterized by “their strong vision of care”⁴⁸ and images of community, helping viewers cope with loss during lockdown:⁴⁹ „Lockdown television and its ‘affective structures’ performed important ‘mood work.’”⁵⁰

Building on this, I define cozy TV as series that deliberately employ sentimental aesthetics and narratives—such as care, depictions of community, and positive gender roles—to generate emotional warmth. As ‘comfort media’, they provide both a counterweight to the uncertainties of everyday life and an inspiring vision of alternative futures. In this context, sentimentality becomes a resource that can be repeatedly drawn upon.

4. An Analysis of *Ted Lasso*

The following analysis of *Ted Lasso* begins with an examination of sentimental masculinity. This includes both the protagonist Ted himself and other male-coded characters who are influenced by his sentimentality and thereby develop into ‘better people’. Afterwards, I will analyze two friendships within the series: the evolving relationship between Ted and Rebecca, and the friendship between the two players Roy Kent and Jamie Tartt. The first was selected because academic

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*: 58.

⁴³ Cf. Smith/Snider 2019: 43–44.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: 44, 47.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 2019.

⁴⁶ Cf. Horeck 2021: 35–36.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*: 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 35.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*: 35–37, 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 36.

discourse rarely addresses friendships between men and women, while the second highlights the role of sentimental masculinity within a male friendship.

4.1 Sentimental Masculinity

At the start of the first season, when Ted becomes the new manager of AFC Richmond, he encounters considerable resistance. The team's players do not take him seriously as their new coach since he lacks experience with European football. The most vocal opposition comes from team 'star' Jamie Tartt, who initially embodies toxic masculinity.

One scene that illustrates this toxic masculinity appears in the episode "Biscuits". In the locker room, Ted has an emotional conversation with player Sam Obisanya about how Sam misses his father and Ted misses his son. Ted then gives Sam a toy soldier to protect him, while slow piano music underscores the scene. This moment of sentimentality is abruptly interrupted by Jamie, who mutters from the background, visibly annoyed by Ted's and Sam's openly expressed emotions: "Give me a fucking break."⁵¹ Jamie is also a bully who shows no respect to subordinates such as kit man Nate Shelley. He repeatedly assaults Nate, for instance by striking him with a towel together with other players.

The team's captain, Roy Kent, initially ignores Ted but is also irritated by Jamie's childish star behavior. In the next episode Roy asks Ted if he will not intervene against Jamie's bullying of Nate, to which Ted replies in the negative. Instead, Ted gives Roy a book entitled *A Wrinkle in Time*, which tells the story of "a young girl's struggle with the burden of leadership."⁵² This gift is Ted's subtle strategy to encourage Roy to assume more responsibility within the team. Although Roy initially dismisses the book—"„[a]m I supposed to be the little girl?"⁵³—he later realizes, after reading it, that he himself must stand up against injustice. He subsequently confronts Jamie and his friends with great anger, compelling them to leave Nate alone.

Roy initially appears toxically masculine—he curses frequently, is easily angered, and dresses exclusively in black. Yet his willingness to read a children's book in order to grow reveals a sensitive side. This is also evident in his relationship with his young niece, to whom he reads the book as well. She later compliments him: "[B]ecause of you, I stand up to bullies."⁵⁴

Ted thus leaves his first mark on Roy by transforming him from follower to leader, interrupting the 'boys will be boys' behavior so often associated with toxic

⁵¹ S1E2, 00:21:18–00:21:20.

⁵² S1E3, 00:23:33–00:23:37.

⁵³ S1E3, 00:23:41–00:23:43.

⁵⁴ S2E8, 00:16:29–00:16:32.

masculinity through his compassion for Nate. When interviewed by a journalist, Ted explicitly affirms his philosophy: “For me success is not about the wins and losses. It’s about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field.”⁵⁵ This ethos directly contrasts with the hypermasculine norms of the football genre, where winning and success are paramount. Over time, other players are likewise transformed by Ted—including Jamie.

From the outset, Ted acknowledges Jamie as the best athlete he has ever coached but urges him to exchange his ‘me’ mentality for an ‘us’ mentality. Jamie repeatedly reverts to selfish behavior, taking shots himself instead of passing the ball to other players. In “Tan Lines”, Ted finally benches him for his selfish play. The rest of the team, relying on teamwork, wins without him.

In the following episode, Jamie realizes he must change, as other players have grown tired of his toxic masculinity and focus instead on teambuilding. Ted organizes a ritual in which players burn emotionally significant objects to break a supposed ‘curse’. For the first time, Jamie opens up, revealing his father as the source of his behavior: “[He was] calling me ‘soft’ if I didn’t dominate, you know. And I hated that.”⁵⁶ His tough exterior, he explains, was shaped by his abusive father, thereby inviting empathy.

Throughout the series, Jamie’s aggressive father repeatedly appears, insisting that Jamie scores himself and rejecting any ‘we’ mentality. Loaned to AFC Richmond for only one season, Jamie returns to Manchester City at the end of season one. After witnessing Jamie’s father berating and physically attacking him for passing the ball instead of scoring, Ted writes Jamie a sentimentally charged letter praising his teamwork: “Way to make that extra pass.”⁵⁷ Jamie, visibly touched, smiles when he discovers a toy soldier enclosed in the envelope. Even as members of competing teams, Ted continues to support Jamie’s growth and well-being.

Jamie temporarily quits football to spite his father, but in season two he chooses to return to Richmond as a changed man with Ted’s help. He apologizes to teammates for his past behavior, and one by one they forgive him—including Sam. While Jamie had mocked Sam in season one, he later supports Sam’s protest against Richmond’s sponsor Dubai Air, whose affiliation with an oil company caused an environmental disaster in Nigeria, Sam’s homeland. Sam covers the Dubai Air logo on his jersey with black tape; Jamie is the first teammate to join his boycott, inspiring others to follow. Jamie has now fully embraced Ted’s ‘we’-identity, completing the Jamie–Sam narrative arc.

⁵⁵ S1E3, 00:26:14–00:26:22.

⁵⁶ S1E6, 00:26:00–00:26:07.

⁵⁷ S1E10, 00:31:10–00:31:11.

Alexander Hudson Beare and Robert Boucaut criticize *Ted Lasso* for focusing on personal kindness, with characters helping each other through problems, while largely avoiding a critique of professional sports' power structures.⁵⁸ They cite Sam's boycott of Dubai Air as an example. When Sam protests, the sponsor pressures Rebecca to fire him. She refuses, and the team decides to seek a new sponsor. Beare and Boucaut read this swift change as preserving the status quo, arguing the series promotes the unrealistic belief that⁵⁹ "[y]es, companies can be bad, but they can simply be replaced with 'better' and more 'ethical' ones instead."⁶⁰

However, Sam's action does generate political change. Five episodes later, it is revealed that the oil company has withdrawn from Nigeria because of him. After the boycott match, Ted affirms at a press conference: "I think what Sam and the team did today was courageous."⁶¹ With the team's emotional support, Sam feels secure enough to confront corruption in his homeland. His father even remarks that Sam is in good hands with Ted.⁶² As Mario Tirino summarizes:

It is the media echo of the gesture, in fact, that will foster the spread of the denunciation: in this case, the series highlights the ability of the media-sport nexus to act as a sounding board for civic and social causes.⁶³

The 'we'-identity in *Ted Lasso* thus entails solidarity not only in joy but also in sorrow and adversity. At the end of season one, when Richmond is relegated from the Premier League, Ted delivers a locker-room speech:

This is a sad moment right here—for all of us. And there ain't nothing I can say standing in front of you right now that can take that away. But please do me this favor, will you? Lift your heads up, look around this locker room. [...] I want you to be grateful that you're going through this sad moment with all these other folks. Because I promise you there is something worse out there than being sad, and that is being alone and being sad. Ain't nobody in this room alone.⁶⁴

Even in hardship, Ted seeks comfort and positivity, reinforced by his many mantras throughout the series. In the same episode, he states: "I believe in hope. I believe in belief."⁶⁵ The word *believe* also holds a visual significance: Ted hangs a yellow sign with the word in Richmond's locker room in the very first season (Fig.

⁵⁸ Cf. Beare/Boucaut 2024: 173.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*: 175.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ S2E3, 00:33:43–00:33:45.

⁶² Cf. S2E2.

⁶³ Tirino 2024: 71.

⁶⁴ S1E10, 00:29:47–00:30:30.

⁶⁵ S1E10, 00:16:02–00:16:06.

1). Yellow is traditionally associated with light, warmth, joy, optimism, and happiness. As Shannon Sweeney notes, the series' color design "create[s] a tight knit feeling of community and support in certain spaces where key moments of character growth happened."⁶⁶ The series' *mise-en-scène* relies heavily on bright primary colors—yellow, blue, and red—creating an overall positive atmosphere. According to Tirino, the believe sign symbolizes Ted's communicative style and values:⁶⁷ "motivation and incitement, cultivation of individual skills and tendencies, worship for the collective, and confidence."⁶⁸

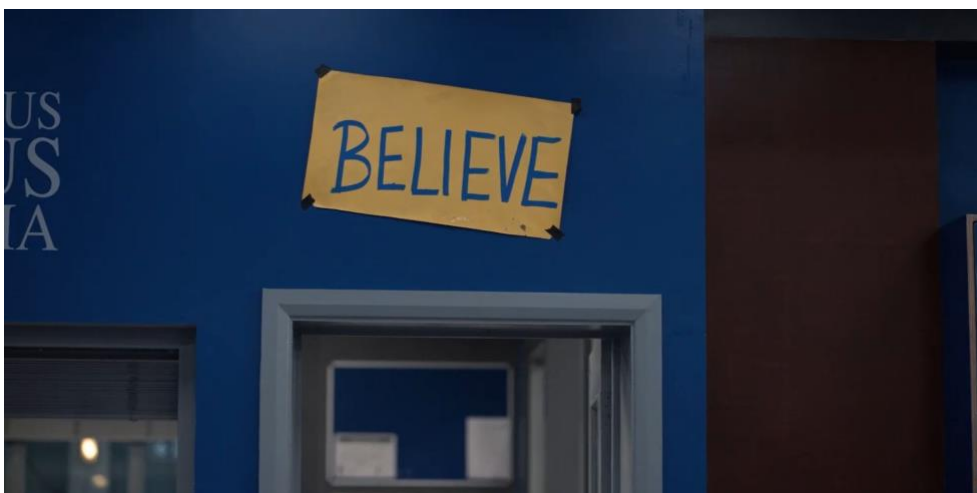


Fig. 1: The 'Believe' Sign in *Ted Lasso*. Screenshot from S1E1: 00:23:15.

When faced with sadness or difficulty, Ted responds with either encouraging words or humor. Humor often merges with sentimentality. Mädler conceptualizes sentimentality as a narrative strategy or structure that

processes emotional states and gives them images—often also with the intention of generating similar emotional states. Sentimentality thereby forms a repertoire of patterns and stagings that congeal emotions into a form and thus make them public.⁶⁹

One such moment occurs in the season two finale, where an emotion—melancholy—itself is visually frozen or congealed. Richmond has a chance to be promoted back to the Premier League but trails at halftime. As the teams head to

⁶⁶ Sweeney 2025: 444.

⁶⁷ Cf. Tirino 2024: 79.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Mädler 2016: 41 [translation by EMV].

their locker rooms, Ted acknowledges the bleakness but lightens the coaches' mood with a joke: "I'm gonna shoot it to ya all straight. It's bleak. I mean look at them out there. Looks like a Renaissance painting portraying masculine melancholy."⁷⁰ The following shot lingers for several seconds on the players, frozen in melancholic poses (Fig. 2).

Ted does not dictate tactics but instead lets the players decide as a team. Regaining their courage, they ultimately secure promotion. Ted's trust motivates them and enables belief in themselves. These affective chains extend beyond Richmond: For example, the journalist Trent Crimm tells Ted: "Ted, you're known for creating a great environment in the locker room."⁷¹



Fig. 2: Masculine Melancholy. Screenshot from S2E12: 00:28:27.

Ted's kindness and vulnerability become especially clear in contrast to other managers. His predecessor George Carrick, later a TV pundit and then coach at West Ham, is repeatedly depicted as misogynistic. Commenting on a match, he sneers: "You know, under Ted Lasso, Richmond, well, they're like a woman behind the wheel: completely lost!"⁷² For toxic men in *Ted Lasso*, football becomes a 'safe space' without women, where they can remain immature, tell crude jokes, and use derogatory language.⁷³ As Tous Rovirosa observes: "Ted is an anomalous

⁷⁰ S2E12, 00:28:16–00:28:25.

⁷¹ S2E3, 00:03:09–00:03:13.

⁷² S2E5, 00:01:45–00:01:52.

⁷³ Cf. Tous Rovirosa 2024: 395.

character, not only because of his management of his emotions, but also because of his open lack of toxicity.”⁷⁴

Ted’s sentimental masculinity is also marked by his rejection of sexism. In one exchange, Jamie asks how he can improve his relationship with Roy. Ted advises: “[Y]’all got to get together and woman up”, prompting Jamie to correct him with “I think you mean man up, mate.”⁷⁵ Ted replies: “No, y’all have been manning up for a while. Look where that’s got you.”⁷⁶ As Tous Roviroso argues, bromances can become toxic when they center on an inability to ‘man up’, expressed in childishness and trash talk.⁷⁷ Ted instead recommends a communicative mode associated with femininity. Ultimately, the series demonstrates that toxic masculinity does not pay off, as seen in Nate’s storyline.

Beare and Boucaut accuse *Ted Lasso* of ‘toxic positivity’ which they define “as a ‘denial of reality’ and a way to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths about the world around us.”⁷⁸ They therefore refer to the series as utopia: “one of wholesome characters and of simple solutions.”⁷⁹ One of their examples is Sam’s boycott of the problematic sponsor Dubai Air, which leads to a quick change of the team’s sponsor,⁸⁰ as mentioned above. Yet, they also acknowledge that the series depicts toxic masculinity through Nate.⁸¹ These positions contradict each other: the series is not utopian precisely because it portrays flawed characters. By the start of season three, Nate has gone from being a protagonist to the antagonist of the series. He becomes manager of West Ham, the team now owned by Rebecca’s cheating ex-husband Rupert, showing no respect for players or other managers. But Nate eventually resigns from his managerial post at Rupert’s West Ham, realizing that Rupert’s toxic masculinity harms him and causes depression. One telling scene shows Rupert introducing Nate to women in a bar, despite knowing Nate has a beloved girlfriend.⁸² Back at Richmond, Nate is far happier as kit man again, embedded in a supportive, non-toxic environment. *Ted Lasso* thereby shows that toxic masculinity is damaging not only to women but also to men themselves. As Tous Roviroso summarizes: “Male homosociality can be ‘negative’ when it leads to excess, alcohol, drugs, and problematic relationships with women.”⁸³

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 399.

⁷⁵ S2E6, 00:11:07–00:11:11.

⁷⁶ S2E6, 00:11:12–00:11:15.

⁷⁷ Cf. Tous Roviroso 2024: 395.

⁷⁸ Beare/Boucaut 2024: 181.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*: 178–179.

⁸² Cf. S3E9.

⁸³ Tous Roviroso 2024: 394.

The affect chains initiated by Ted thus extend beyond the team and into the personal friendships explored in the following section.

4.2 Sentimental Friendships

Although Rebecca initially hires Ted as the new manager in order to ruin AFC Richmond and thereby hurt her ex-husband Rupert, a deep friendship gradually develops between Ted and Rebecca. The first scene in which Rebecca herself becomes affected by the ‘Lasso way’ occurs at a charity gala. Rupert makes a surprise appearance at the event Rebecca has organized, attempting to sabotage it while delivering poisonous remarks directed at her. When Rebecca steps outside for some fresh air and begins to cry, it is Ted who approaches her, asks whether she is all right, and comforts her with a hug.⁸⁴

In another episode, Rebecca reciprocates Ted’s compassion. Over the course of the series, it becomes clear that Ted is also struggling with personal issues, including a divorce from his wife and, more seriously, psychological problems in the form of panic attacks. When the entire team is celebrating in a karaoke bar, Rebecca performs the ballad “Let It Go” from the Disney film *Frozen* (2013). At the moment she sings the lines, “The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside. Couldn’t keep it in, Heaven knows I’ve tried”,⁸⁵ Ted suddenly suffers a panic attack. He begins to sweat, his hands start trembling, and the audience hears the high-pitched ringing that Ted perceives in his ears. He leaves the karaoke bar and steps outside for air. Amidst the ringing, Rebecca’s voice becomes audible—she has followed him outside and offers to drive him back to his hotel.

By the end of the first season, Rebecca abandons her plan to harm Rupert and instead acknowledges the positive impact Ted has had on her team. She confesses everything to Ted and tearfully apologizes for repeatedly sabotaging him. Rather than reproaching or criticizing her, Ted forgives her and shows understanding for her situation: “Divorce is hard. [...] It makes folks do crazy things.”⁸⁶ In this way, *Ted Lasso* “turns the ‘safe space’ of football into an area to be shared with women.”⁸⁷ A friendship emerges between Ted and Rebecca that is founded on trust and honesty.

Just like Ted and Rebecca, Roy and Jamie also have a difficult beginning. Yet under Ted’s influence, both characters change for the better: Jamie, who learns to let go of toxic behavior, and Roy, who learns to open up to others. Eventually, a friendship develops between the two.

⁸⁴ Cf. S1E4.

⁸⁵ S1E7, 00:25:14–00:25:51.

⁸⁶ S1E9, 00:12:37–00:12:48.

⁸⁷ Tous Rovirosa 2024: 399.

A decisive episode is the one with the telling title “Man City”. After Richmond loses a match against Manchester City, Jamie’s father comes into the locker room and insults him. When his father calls him a “Pussy”⁸⁸ and grabs him aggressively, Jamie strikes him in the face. Coach Beard throws Jamie’s father out of the locker room, at which point Jamie breaks down in tears. While no one initially approaches him, Roy suddenly steps forward and embraces him tightly. According to Tous Roviroza, this scene demonstrates how physical violence in *Ted Lasso*—here perpetrated by Jamie’s father—is sanctioned.⁸⁹

From that moment on, Jamie and Roy are friends, though not without occasional conflicts. In one instance, Jamie tells Roy’s girlfriend, Keeley Jones—who had previously been his own partner—that he still loves her. But Roy forgives him.⁹⁰ When Keeley and Roy eventually break up, Jamie in turn consoles Roy with a hug (while Ted faints upon hearing the news).⁹¹

A larger constellation of friendship also deserves mention: the Diamond Dogs. Ted establishes a group in which men can talk about their relationships and feelings. The group consists of Ted, Coach Beard, Nate, Leslie Higgins, and Roy. The Diamond Dogs are also the first to whom Ted reveals his panic attacks, as his confession prompts his friends to admit to their own personal struggles.⁹² In *Ted Lasso*, openness about emotions is not punished but reciprocated by other men—and thereby rewarded. Ultimately, Ted even addresses the stigma of mental health in football at a press conference,⁹³ actively contributing to change within the sport.

To summarize: *Ted Lasso* presents friendships characterized by forgiveness, support, and loyalty. The characters do not compete against each other but instead help one another to achieve personal and professional growth. Sentimentality makes these friendships possible in the first place: only once Ted and Rebecca reveal their vulnerability and empathy toward one another do they truly connect—just as Jamie and Roy do.

⁸⁸ S2E8, 00:38:11.

⁸⁹ Cf. Tous Roviroza 2024: 399.

⁹⁰ Cf. S2E12.

⁹¹ Cf. S3E2.

⁹² Cf. S2E8.

⁹³ Cf. S2E12.

5. Conclusion: *Ted Lasso* as Cozy TV

Returning to Beare and Boucaut's argument that *Ted Lasso's* mantra of kindness lacks substance,⁹⁴ the results of this study are summarized and connected to the cultural impact of the series, particularly in the context of cozy TV.

As the analysis has demonstrated, sentimentality is the key reason why both individual members and the team as a whole are able to grow and ultimately achieve promotion back to the Premier League. Through Ted's open communication about emotions—staged in the series via positive color schemes, ballads, and intimate conversations, all of which generate coziness—a collective 'we'-identity is constructed that allows characters to develop both personally and professionally. This sentimentality, moreover, is transferred to the audience.

A study by Sweeney revealed that during the crisis period of 2020—marked by the pandemic, political polarization, and debates about racism—*Ted Lasso* functioned for many viewers in the USA⁹⁵ as a form of 'comfort viewing' and 'emotional regulation':⁹⁶ an image of community, optimism, and care.⁹⁷ At the same time, it displayed an ambivalence between escapism and social engagement. On the one hand, the series provided distraction from medical and societal traumas; on the other, it served as a space for reflection on political and cultural questions.⁹⁸

Central factors of its success included the optimistic overall tone, the gradual character development, and the aesthetic design, which together created a sense of intimacy and belonging.⁹⁹ Many of Sweeney's participants viewed Ted as a role model for compassion and healing, in some cases even as a blueprint for reconciling a politically divided nation.¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously, the series was closely linked to mental health discourses. *Ted Lasso's* depiction of anxiety and its management opened up conversations about depression and isolation, resonating strongly in the pandemic context.¹⁰¹ Thus, the show not only functioned as an 'emotional lifeboat' but also as a projection surface for longings and hopes for the future.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ Cf. Beare/Boucaut 2024: 173.

⁹⁵ However, due to the numerous political and ecological crises, there is also a high demand for *cozy media* in Europe; cf. Waszkiewicz/Tymińska 2024: 12.

⁹⁶ Cf. Sweeney 2025: 438–439.

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*: 439.

⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*: 442–444.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *ibid.*: 447–448.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *ibid.*: 448–449.

¹⁰² Cf. *ibid.*: 446, 449.

Even Beare and Boucaut acknowledge this positive effect of the show: “Its ethos of examining men’s mental health issues through a non-judgmental lens has [...] made political waves.”¹⁰³ Sentimentality therefore has positive effects not only within the narrative but also in processes of crisis management.¹⁰⁴ As Wanzo has summarized, sentimental narratives can “encourage audiences to change themselves and the world.”¹⁰⁵ This demonstrates that sentimental texts are not one-dimensional but rather polysemous.¹⁰⁶

Beyond its impact on viewers’ mental health, future research might explore how *Ted Lasso* has boosted the popularity of European football in the USA. While American football remains dominant, the series increased European football’s visibility; during the 2022 FIFA World Cup, motivational messages from American coach Gregg Berhalter echoed Ted’s style.¹⁰⁷ Although set in England, the show is more popular in the USA than in the UK.¹⁰⁸

Animated TV series also provide evidence of cultural shifts in this respect, as seen for instance in *The Simpsons* (1989–) or *King of the Hill* (1997–2010; 2025–). In the 2025 *King of the Hill* reboot, Hank Hill embraces European football, with a friend explicitly crediting *Ted Lasso*,¹⁰⁹ showing how affective chains extend from the series to its reception.

In the upcoming fourth season, Ted is expected to coach a women’s team.¹¹⁰ It remains to be seen how female players will be represented in this context. In the meantime, the consistently high streaming figures on Apple TV+ suggest that audiences are eager to experience sentimentality again. This also explains why Apple TV+ has increasingly leaned into sports-themed series. For example, the golf-centered series *Stick* (2025–), which likewise portrays various forms of sentimental masculinity, was released this year. Yet *Ted Lasso* has undoubtedly laid the groundwork for this trend in the sports genre.

The series subverts stereotypes of masculinity within the football genre and contributes to the well-being of its audience. *Ted Lasso* imagines a future in which gender, gender relations, and community can be constructed differently. Its message is clear: if Ted does not stop believing, then neither should we as viewers. To quote the journalist Crimm: “If the Lasso way is wrong, it’s hard to imagine

¹⁰³ Beare/Boucaut 2024: 171.

¹⁰⁴ Vgl. Paul 2021: 8.

¹⁰⁵ Wanzo 2009: 6.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Paul 2021: 18.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Tirino 2024: 79.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Burke 2023: N. pag.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *King of the Hill*, S14E5.

¹¹⁰ Cf. FE News Desk: N. pag.

being right. [...] In a business that celebrates ego, Ted reins his in. [...] I can't help but root for him."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ S1E3, 00:28:32–00:29:51.

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King of the Hill. USA 1997–2010, Fox; 2025–, Hulu/Disney+.

Schitt's Creek. USA 2015–2020, CBC Television.

Stick. USA 2025–, Apple TV+.

Ted Lasso. USA 2020–, Apple TV+.

The Simpsons. USA 1989–, Fox/Disney+.

List of Figures

Fig. 1: The 'Believe' Sign in *Ted Lasso*. Screenshot from S1E1: 00:23:15.

Fig. 2: Masculine Melancholy. Screenshot from S2E12: 00:28:27.