

**Conversations Inside the Online, Virtual Clinic: a Psychoanalytic Exploration of
Young Women's Experiences of the Contemporary, Televisual Fictions of
Pretty Little Liars and *Riverdale*.**

As approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies;

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ABSTRACT

This thesis combines oral histories and the Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic session to create an ‘online, virtual clinic’. The online, virtual clinic’s primary epistemological focus corresponds to the application of four of Lacan’s major concepts that were used to analyse young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction through the capturing of aspects of their unconscious. Specifically, these were *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of mediated fiction, *Jouissance* and *Feminine Jouissance* and the *objet a/objet petit a*.

In addition to this, this project interrogates two examples of contemporary, televisual fiction within the teen detective genre—*Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Moreover, this thesis develops a critical position that calls for a synthesis of identificatory and affective models of televisual experience to be combined with the unconscious to create a new model of contemporary, televisual experience that embraces the complex-nature of young women’s experiences. Subsequently, the lynchpin that holds this thesis argument together focuses on the orthographic differences between phantasy and fantasy, which allows for the transformation of products of the mind (phantasy) into situated, mediated fiction (fantasy) via the process of reification, where the conceptual becomes physical.

Finally, the findings of this thesis explores the role played by phantasy and fantasy as a product of mediated fiction and its correspondence with secrets, normative, hegemonic ideologies and their correspondence with U.S. culture and death. The limitations of language and representation allows for a fresh approach to televisual analysis where the visual register of experience is repositioned in favour of the auditory dimension of experience through the concept of *The Real* and young women’s speech and discourse.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Women, Oral Histories, Jacques Lacan, Television, American Genre Fiction

“There seems to be something incredibly compelling to us about the visual realm and the images we encounter in that realm” (Fink 2002, p. 30).

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All journeys begin and end and this near-5-year journey has been exciting, challenging and frustrating/stressful all in one. My Ph.D. journey has been like the television dramas I view, having many ups and downs. I first enrolled and began my Ph.D. in a different, yet related subject area, examining the phantasy/fantasy binary and its correspondence to the internet. This endeavour began at the University of Cardiff during the 2010-2011 academic year under the direction of Professor Ian Buchanan.

After supervisory complications where Ian returned to Australia, I enrolled at Hull University's Scarborough Campus under the direction of Dr. Maria Chatzichristodoulou during the 2012-2014 academic years where I focused on the construction of identity in virtual worlds. As a part-time student I ran out of funding (twice)! This brings me to my third time, lucky and final doctoral journey of which this thesis is the product.

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Glossary of Terms

Throughout the thesis I use several key terms, some of which deviate from the standard grammatical conventions normally associated with such terms. These deviations are employed to provide a modal distinction which differentiates one type of linguistic signifier from another. These terms are listed below.

Culture and culture:

I distinguish between the terms culture and Culture (one with a small 'c', the other with a large 'C'). In articulating a difference, culture with a small 'c' relegates culture to a category of lesser ontological importance. Often known as low culture, this is contrasted with Culture. Culture with a large 'C' pertains to High Culture.

The scholarly tensions between the categories of high and low culture that circulated at the forefront of cultural debates are no longer considered to be important, a point argued almost half a century ago by Raymond Williams (Williams 1974).

Furthermore, in the vein of Jacques Derrida, if one takes a historically solidified structure and flips it, new approaches to enquiry emerge. In other words, the privileging of a widely accepted hegemonic idea has a great deal more value when its opposite is analysed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which functions in this regard.

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed (Spivak 1967, Lxxvii).

The Lacanian Real:

The concept of the Lacanian Real changed form and function throughout the history of Lacan's usage of the term. Its form and function undergo several changes dependent on whether one engages with its meaning from the perspective of Lacan in the 50s/60s or 70s. The importance of this point uncovers the multidimensionality and robust application of this term and is elaborated on in the work of Tim Dean.

Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance:

My usage of the term *Jouissance* mainly corresponds with my own interpretation whereby I discuss its intensity in relation to fixated attention, indifference or apathy. Conversely, *Jouissance* is also used to refer to trauma and is linked to death in particular. Moreover, *Feminine Jouissance* is the specific form of *jouissance* related to women's experience.

Phantasy:

It is important to the thesis to distinguish between *phantasy* and *fantasy* as two different forms of *mediated fiction*. In essence, *phantasy* is mediated via the mind and the imagination, where corporeality of the ideas are invoked only when transferring the said thoughts into a particular medium. Once this occurs, *phantasy* becomes *fantasy*, a fiction mediated by and through technology; as it pertains to this thesis, this is the technology of television.

The *Becoming of Phantasy to Fantasy*, or in other words, a shift in spatiotemporal location occurs by the mental image of phantasy being displaced and re-presented through mediation. Elaboration of this point reveals the incorporeal transformation, say for example, of a fictional character and its subsequent resituating as expressed through the corporeal body of a performer. For Deleuze, this process subverts the philosophical position of the possible-impossible distinction, resituating the position as virtual and actual. This is due to it being possible to represent the idea in a physical form.

Fantasy (as mediated fiction):

My use of the term *Fantasy* (as *mediated fiction*) corresponds with a translation of the term from the realm of the imagination. In other words, incorporeal thought is given corporeal form. Almost like the emergence of a screen writer's unconscious thought into the dimension of conscious reality. The move from imaginary to imaginary- symbolic, but aside from mediation the circulation of the Lacanian *Real* is at the core of fiction, in the sense that fiction lacks material existence in the strictest sense.

Object a/Objet Petit a:

The Lacanian concept of object *a/objet petit a* is used primarily in the context of death, indicating a deep sense of loss. The object *a* corresponds with a fictional, televisual object (i.e., fictional character) that sets desire in motion.

Narrator:

I appropriate a term utilised by Mary Kay Quinlan, that of ‘narrators’ (2011, p. 26) as the standard salutation to refer to the young women I interview. This nuanced choice of language eschews the dominant field-bound lexis of psychoanalysis. In choosing to call the women I interview narrators as opposed to analysands I obviate the tendency to conflate the use of the word analysands with patients. In spite of the fact that this thesis is psychoanalytical/clinical in terms of its methods, I prefer to draw on narrator to reflect the individual, subjective experiences of these women within the context of storytelling or oral history.

The Online, Virtual Clinic:

This is my term to indicate a safe space online that has been co-constructed by narrator and interviewer using the affordances provided by technology. The co-construction gives agency to both the narrator and the interviewer to participate in a question-and-answer session relating to experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. The clinical aspects embedded within the etymology of the ‘Virtual Clinic’ relate to following protocols mapped out by the offline Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic session, resituating them in an online, virtual context. This approach also connects psychoanalysis in a synergistic relationship with the oral history testimony.

Interviewer:

In choosing to adopt the more neutral term, interviewer, I avoid identifying myself as an analyst in the clinical sense, which I am not, as I lack the necessary professional training. Furthermore, the use of the term University researcher or researcher in general formalises the process of enquiry which may cause narrators to be less forthcoming in terms of interpersonal interactions. This identificatory label also eschews, either real or perceived, the imbalances of power that exist between narrator and interviewer.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1: Reflections on Anxiety and Experiences of Televisual Fiction through the Life Writing Method

During the summer of 2017 I became intrigued by a show called *Riverdale*. This was not the first time I had been intrigued by a show or had thoughts about the development of a PhD proposal that focused on television. My interest had been similarly piqued throughout my life by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Smallville*, *Covert Affairs*, *Quantico*, *Gossip Girl*, *Teen Wolf*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. Through an introduction by my wife, Stephanie, *Pretty Little Liars* became another central part of this Ph.D.

Academically speaking, a contextual frame to this intrigue is provided through an analysis of oral histories/life-writing and auto-ethnography. Briefly, in situating the upcoming research it is useful to draw on Alexander Dhoest who examines oral histories and their connections to early television experiences. Dhoest's article 'discusses the use and value of oral history interviews as a source of audience history' (Dhoest 2014, p. 2). He claims that,

memory is [...] considered as [...] a process of production and representation which is, however, connected to actual events and lived experiences in the past (*ibid.*, p. 6).

The connection to actual events and lived experiences of the past is a useful thing to note as this personal story continues. Subsequently, I would like to briefly position auto-ethnography and life writing as connected to my own experiences. Simply put auto-ethnography

is a research method that uses personal experience ("auto") to describe and interpret ("graphy") cultural texts, experiences, beliefs and practices ("ethno") (Adams *et. al.*, 2017, p. 1).

Finally, Life Writing is a term that pertains to my personal fascinations with *Riverdale* in the sense that life writing is concerned with the fact that,

Qualitative researchers are storytellers. There are many ways to tell a story. Biographers, autobiographers, autoethnographers, life historians and oral historians all engage in the process of storytelling through life writing (Mulvihill and Swaminathan 2017).

Returning to my reminiscences of *Riverdale* it was during the time of developing my doctoral proposal that *Riverdale* was going to be my main object of study. This was due to its germane features and originality and the fact that very few, (if any) academics had focused on the topic from a televisual perspective (c.f., Herrera 2017). But what was it exactly that captured my attention? It was a range of scenes that held traits in common with scenes I had viewed from other shows, particularly when I was single and looking for ‘the one’.

The answer that struck me was one that was complex but fascinating (at least to me). It revolved around the central premise of how it was possible to be so close to such characters—for me, the women in the shows) and yet still feel this essence that was unable to be pinned down, a certain *je ne sei quoi* (Žižek 2006) if you would. Zwicky (2012) articulates this as a correspondence with viewing subjects when we ‘are moved but can’t say anything about why’ (p. 209) while still feeling completely disconnected from these very same characters as if looking at them admiringly through frosted glass—a ‘pleasurable voyeurism’ (Cavanagh 2022) —with them lacking any awareness of my existence.

Furthermore, due to my awareness of being an adult (as opposed to a child) and that these were fictional characters and situations I was viewing, did not stop me thinking back to my own teenage years (in spite of the fact that the performers are much older than the characters they play) and thinking that women such as the ones in these shows were nothing I ever encountered in my everyday life. As this thesis continued to develop my thoughts evolved to include fantasies of what I wished could be a series of alternate lives or events, as I once again regressed and retrogressed to my younger years when surprisingly, I was unemployed for a year and a half from May 2012 to November 2013. I was between 32-34 during this time and began to suffer from anxiety. It is only recently, that an answer was revealed as to why I constantly re-watched several *Smallville* DVDs during this period.

[T]here is a predilection towards viewing the same films or television series [...] over and over again, sometimes for years on end. This repetitive action seems to become more pronounced under times of stress or physical illness. These patients are often highly educated and creative individuals who present as compliant and gentle. [...] [They] speak of this repetitive viewing as spending time with old friends, of stepping inside where they belong, into a world where they know their place; the repetitive viewing is perceived to

produce comfort and a sense of predictability [...] When a patient has no centre, the repetition of story is an attempt by the psyche to fill the void created by the absent other, to create an illusion of connectedness and a world in which there is no 'black hole'—a world that is complete, in which they are omnipotent (Waldron 2013, p. 105).

I found myself imagining myself invading the on-screen narratives and wondering how these fictional characters would react to me. This corresponds to Waldron's point that,

When this behaviour is probed a little deeper, what emerges from the patients is that for them it is like entering a dream world, a place of solidarity where the world is known and reliable (*ibid.*).

What is most interesting about Waldron's point and its correspondence with the psyche is the connection of the act of repetition. The act of repetition is indicative of the emergence of the unconscious (Miller 2011; Piazza and di Robertis 2022). This emergence is explored further across chapters 5-7.

Thus, what follows (below) are a series of screen shots from *Riverdale* seasons 1 & 2, alongside an observation of my thoughts on the events and characters (below).

Table 1 Elizabeth 'Betty' Cooper played by Lili Reinhart

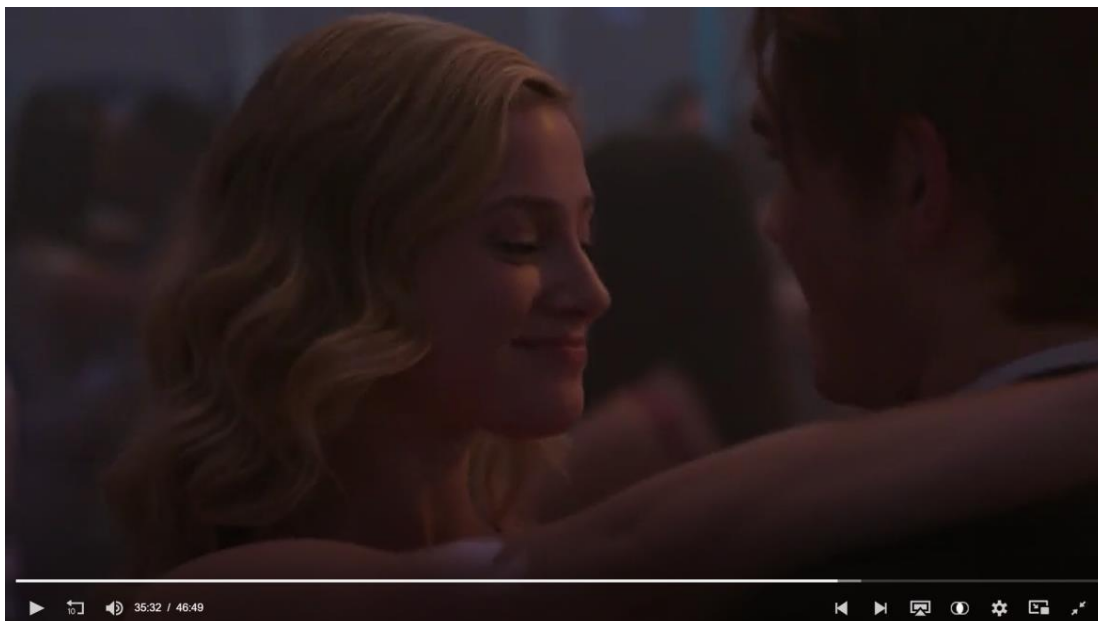
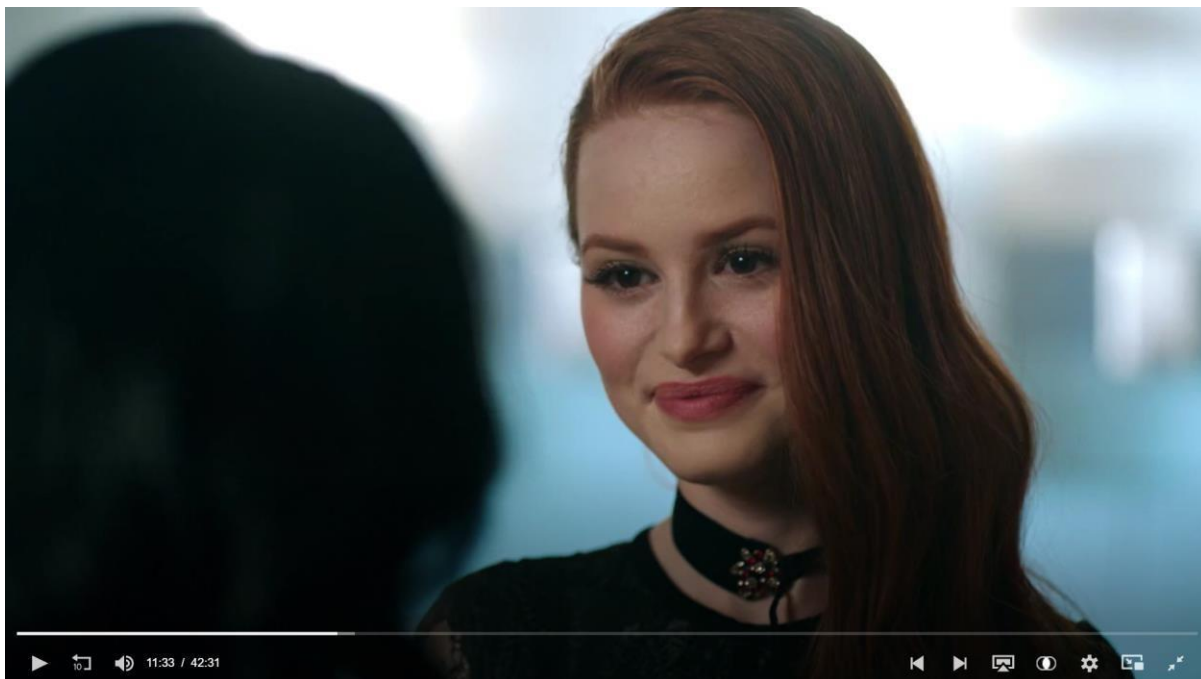


Table 1: Seasons 1 & 2 Riverdale Screenshots

Season/Episode Number	Scene	Subjective Thoughts
Season 1, episode 1 'The River's Edge': We are introduced to Elizabeth 'Betty' Cooper, the Girl Next Door.	Table 1	Betty Cooper [Lili Reinhart] is a character who was the girl of my dreams as a teenager. She's a blonde haired, blue-eyed, American. I have never dated anyone as 'nice' as Betty in real life, perhaps overly nice, but we find out her character is far more multi-layered than the Girl Next Door.

Cheryl Blossom played by Madeline Petsch

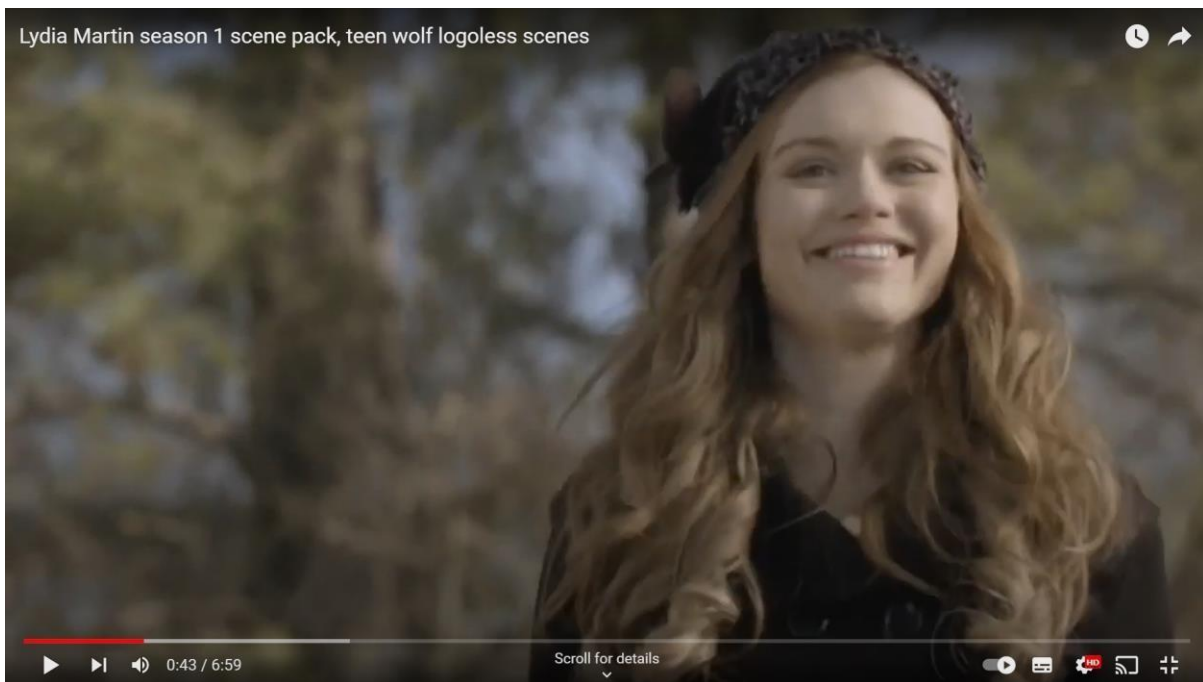


Season 1, episode 13 'The Sweet Hereafter': Cheryl abdicates her position as Head Cheerleader.

Table 1

I dated a girl like Cheryl Blossom (Madeline Petsch) while studying in Iowa. She didn't quite have Cheryl's 'attitude' though.

Teen Wolf's Lydia Martin played by Holland Roden



For comparison, I found myself attracted to Lydia Martin (Holland Roden) from *Teen Wolf*. In real life, if girls like this existed, they would be out of my league.

Table 1 Christmas in Riverdale



Season/Episode Number	Scene	Subjective Thoughts
Season 2, episode 9 'Silent Night, Deadly Night': All of the friends meet in the school to exchange presents.	Table 1	Christmas time in <i>Riverdale</i> reminds me of Christmases I spent in Iowa where things were very festive, and it snowed at the university. The 'atmosphere' in England, however, is lacking with events on-screen eclipsing real-life experiences.

In short, I wondered whether women who viewed these shows experienced the same kind of experiences I did when I watched television. My eventual investigation settled on focusing on young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. My eventual decision to focus on young women's experiences at the expense of men

was a focused and deliberate action because of the fact that women are the primary demographic for viewing shows such as *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

In a thesis which examines young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it may be favourable to discuss my own identity as a middle-aged, cis- gendered, white, male researcher. Through my reading of standpoint literature I need to be aware that some women would question why I felt qualified to speak on a topic whose very materiality and virtual subjectivity is 'beyond my own historical circumstances' (Hennessy 2000, p. 1). I offer a practical solution to argue my suitability for conducting the research.

I draw on feminist authors in helping me to critically understand experiences that are not my own. It can be argued within the academic literature, that only women can gain insight into and grasp the meaning of other women's thoughts, ideas, and feelings (c.f., works in the areas of feminist standpoint theory [Harding 2004], intersectional analysis [Crenshaw 1989], contemporary feminist thought [Jackson and Jones 1998], radical feminist work [Dworkin 1981], and socialist feminist scholarship [Ehrenreich in Hennessy and Ingraham 1997]).

Growing up in a council house as a heterosexual, only-child, to a single-parent my public-school education was fraught with tensions concerning my own academic abilities. Thus, as a result of Impostor Syndrome or the traces of some other external forces that shaped my internal sense of self, I find myself very uncomfortable prescribing labels on to myself as in reality these labels are so deep and complex I cannot with any certainty say that I either am or am not ... a Lacanian ... a Feminist ... a Deleuzian; even my own sense of Britishness is questionable, although undeniably present in unconscious actions. If I don't know anything else, I do know two things 1) that I have an academic interest in matters of fantasy and desire and 2) I am a fan of American popular culture in general and am drawn to certain shows that speak to my own interests and desires in particular.

Between the ages of 6-19 from 1985-1998 I watched a number of American shows on terrestrial TV. These shows included *Happy Days*, *My Two Dads*, *The X Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek* and later on *Smallville* and *Supernatural* which fuelled my love of and fascination for American culture and fantasy. In growing up as a child this corresponds to what Dhoest (2014) calls

A final structuring principle in television memories [which] concerns the multiple connections to the narrators' own lives and experiences. Most generally speaking, memories of television were often connected to life events or life stages (p. 10).

Taken in this context, this was indeed the case in my experiences, and some of this also comes through within the narratives of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Subsequently, I have my wife, Stephanie to thank for giving me the idea to study this topic from the viewpoint of women as she introduced me to *Pretty Little Liars* before I began to watch *Riverdale*. Throughout our engagement and then into our marriage it struck me how she responded so differently to the way I did regarding our extended conversations involving televisual storylines that included who we "liked" and a top 10 list of who I'd leave you for (Punyanunt-Carter 2006; Cohen and Ribak 2003). Ultimately, Stephanie refuelled my passion for televisual fiction having watched shows like *Once Upon a Time*, *Grimm*, *Dexter*, *The Blacklist*, *Quantico* and other shows on Amazon Prime and the Netflix streaming platform with her.

1.2 Aims of the Thesis

The thesis has three key aims. It is important to note that the hierarchical manner in which these aims are listed has no bearing on their relative level of importance as it corresponds to their relationship with one another. Despite this, due to the interconnective-nature of Lacan's concepts, the conceptual and philosophical dimensions of the thesis overlap, and this is both necessary and unavoidable. Unlike the epistemological and ontological interplay that occurs in a thesis concerning the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary televisual fiction, the key aims are articulated in as clear and succinct a manner as possible.

This is not to distil or taint the complexities of the psychoanalytic concepts used, but rather to make the complex accessible, with the aim of guiding the reader through the argument.

1. To reposition the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy*, the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, as products of *Mediated Fiction*

to foster a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

2. To synthesise identificatory and affective models of television with the unconscious with the aim of developing a new model of televisual experience.
3. To move towards the development of a practical and empirical form of psychoanalysis which extends and builds on prior theorisations of this work (c.f., Tillman, Clemence, Stevens 2011; Bainbridge, Ward and Yates 2013, Whitehouse-Hart 2014, Mimica 2007).

The choice of the aims above reflects the conceptual/theoretical and methodological lines of enquiry. Aim one captures the robustness and power of the Lacanian concepts for cultivating a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Aim two acknowledges the importance and usefulness of prior studies with this second aim feeding into discourses corresponding with critical and cultural theory which links to aim one's conceptual repositioning. In other words, for the purpose of working toward the development of a new model of televisual experience it is important to appreciate the strengths and limitations of prior studies which are developed in chapters 2 and 3.

In addition, the adoption of these conceptual/theoretical and methodological lines of enquiry link to chapters 2, 3 and 4 whose aims are to solidify a set of concepts for critique, analysis, and theory building. In chapter 4, the concepts are mobilised to attend to methodological concerns. Moreover, the appropriation of techniques that enable access to the unconscious is an important factor discussed by Alison Bancroft following the line of argument and intent pertaining to the emergence of the unconscious in speech and an appreciation of the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

The application of psychoanalysis to an object of study enables young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction to be read 'in new and productive ways' (Bancroft 2012, p. 5).

1.3 Objective(s) of the Thesis

The main objectives of this thesis are to:

1. Argue for the complexity of television, by conceptually reconfiguring *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *Mediated Fiction*, *Jouissance*, and the *Object a/Objet petit a*, and utilising the resulting complexity as a heuristic tool (defined later in section 1.6.4) to help with fostering a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.
2. Capture the opinions and complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction through undertaking a series of oral history interviews/witness testimonies.
3. Move towards the development of a practical/empirical form of psychoanalysis that acknowledges the roles played by fiction and psychic experience within the context of an online, virtual clinic.
4. Concatenate the concept of identification with televisual studies of affect and the unconscious. The combined signifying chain of "identification: affect: unconscious" progressively provides the dimensions for the development of a new model of televisual experience. In turn, it acknowledges the importance of identification in the process but condenses this dimension with other aspects of enquiry in order to shift the focus away from materialistic, identificatory models of television which were popular at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

As well as the aims and objectives, it is useful now, to introduce the five principal research questions. Thus, continuing on from the aims of the project, the research questions for this thesis are framed through *The Real's* centrality to this project. Detailed in the next section, these research questions help to shape the argument of this thesis in a critical and nuanced manner.

These questions reflect the content of the aims and scope of the thesis, the overall objectives of the project, and its use of Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to tease

out and capture the latent content of young women's responses to their experiences of contemporary televisual fiction. In essence, the concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance*, the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, and *phantasy/fantasy* as a product of *mediated televisual fiction* provides a series of frames through which to read how young women experience the reception of televisual fiction. The research questions are as follows:

1. How does the recalibration of the Lacanian concepts *Real*, *Jouissance*, *Object a/Objet Petit a*, and *Mediated Fiction* as the product of *phantasy and fantasy* provide the means for a critical interpretation of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?
2. How are these Lacanian concepts positioned to reflect the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?
3. How does the use of these specific Lacanian concepts capture the ineffability of language in young women's speech and what does this reveal about the limitations of representation *and* language?
4. How does the recalibration of Lacanian concepts aid in accessing the unconscious, psychic elements of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?
5. How do Lacanian concepts assimilate and reconfigure traditional identificatory models of television for understanding young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?

1.4 Situating Television and Television Studies

As a precursor to the wider project of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction I provide a contextual history. Drawing on Richard Dienst (1994) I argue that,

television produces all kinds of subjectivizing functions, many of them clustered around the archaic organizations of "experience" and "representation" (x).

As can be seen from earlier studies representation served a central function in television studies, whereas my thesis seeks to focus on experience, moving beyond these identificatory and affective models of television to embrace unconscious

processes. Firstly, an examination of the etymology of the signifier 'television' reveals its translation to be a combination of Latin and Greek meaning 'far-seeing'. Having established this term, it is now useful to examine the field of television studies from the perspective of a brief, potted history.

One of the most prominent critical approaches to television and television studies is provided by the Frankfurt School. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer prognosticate the arrival of television in terms of the emergence of an avant-garde technology that synthesises several elements from existing technologies. For example, sight, sound, image and narrative traditionally associated with newspapers and radio.

Horkheimer and Adorno state that

Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film, [...] The accord between word, image, and music [...] [which] compliantly document[s] only the surface of social reality, are produced in principle with the same technical work process, the unity of which they express as their true content (1972 [2002], pp. 97-8).

The documentation of 'only the surface of social reality' is addressed via Adorno in a critique in the article 'How to Look at Television' (1954 [1991]).¹ This article is seminal in the context of psychoanalysis and psychology and in following the line of argument pertaining to the need to focus on the complexities of contemporary, televisual fiction, Adorno called for this to occur in terms of manifest and latent content almost seven decades ago. He argues that,

A depth-psychological approach to television has to be focused on its *multilayered structure* (Adorno 1954 [2001], p. 221, emphasis added).

He continues the argument corresponding to latent and manifest content and polymorphic meanings by arguing that,

an attempt should be made, with the aid of depth-psychological categories and previous knowledge of mass media, to crystallize a number of theoretical concepts by which the potential effect of television—its impact upon various layers of the spectator's personality—could be studied (*ibid.*, p. 213).

¹ There seems to be some chronological discrepancies with respects to publication dates. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was originally published in 1947 and translated in 1972, the 2002 Stanford University Press edition from 2002 is cited here, with Adorno's critique of television appearing in 1954 (as cited). The article was re-printed in 1991 in Adorno's *Culture Industry*—Adorno, T. (1991) *The Culture Industry Selected Essays on Mass Culture.*, J. M. Bernstein (Ed.). London and New York, NY: Routledge.

It is useful to differentiate here between 'spectator' and 'viewer'. Generally speaking, spectators tend to experience events that are 'live', while viewers can experience events that have been pre-recorded etc. It appears in the context of Adorno's writing that he is using these terms interchangeably.

Furthermore, in proceeding with further examples, key figures in television studies include Raymond Williams (1974[2003]) who wrote *Technology, Television and Cultural Form*. Williams' main argument pertained to the effects of televisual technologies, which is a useful precursor to the effects of the unconscious in young women's psychic experiences. Subsequently, Williams focused on the shaping effects of television's technological structures; this is useful for a preamble to television as a psychic object. Subsequently, a further useful resource is provided in the form of Robert C. Allen's and Annette Hill's *Television Studies Reader*.

The essays within the edited collection are grouped into seven themed categories, not all of which are included here (I have selected) those categories most useful to the thesis. With this in mind, some of these categories include:

- (a) Social Representation on Television,
- (b) Watching Television, and
- (c) Transforming Television

Notable essays in this collection include contributions by Julie D' Acci whose object of interest is Television, Representation and Gender. Her early work is useful for informing the role that femininity plays in television as it reflects certain facets of my own work. Subsequently, Ellen Seiter's Qualitative Audience Research helps inform the Methodological choices made for this project. Finally, Will Brooker's Living on Dawson's Creek: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Televisual Overflow can be positioned as a precursor to *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

Furthermore, the 1970s witnessed an explosion of interest in the critical field of television studies. Around the same time as the publication of Raymond Williams' seminal work, another scholar, Stuart Hall, of the Birmingham Centre for Critical and

Cultural Theory wrote a further formative piece of literature titled Encoder/Decoder theory (1973). Applied to the field of audience studies the theory focused on ways in which viewers interpreted media texts through reception. These ways were reported as hegemonic or dominant readings, negotiated readings, oppositional or resistant readings and a fourth, often unacknowledged category of the aberrant reading.

Briefly, these relate to reading the way the producer intended, having to occupy a position that is in direct contrast to the position usually occupied by the receiver of the message, effectuating a counter-reading and finally, reading something incorrectly. Other notable theorists occupying the field of television studies include Carol Lopate (1976) who wrote a seminal article titled 'Daytime Television: You'll Never Want to Leave Home'. In the conclusion she argues that

For the woman confined to her house, television fills out the empty spaces of the long day when she is home alone, *channels her fantasies* toward love and family dramas, and promises the life that she is in can fulfil her needs. But it does not call to her attention *her aloneness and isolation*, and it does not suggest to her that it is precisely in her solitude that she has the possibility for gaining a self (Lopate 1976, p. 81).

Interestingly, the juxtaposition between aloneness and isolation and the channelling of her fantasies corresponds to daydreaming and the operations of psychic life as a mechanism to relieve boredom. Broader critical perspectives are offered by Postman (1985) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In essence, Postman argues that the 'media', particularly television, has negative socializing effects on traditional literacy skills and pointed out that the effects of the media and consumer culture was undermining education, with the quality of literacy skills suffering especially.

Furthermore, the 1990s focused on issues of race with Herman Gray's (1995) piece focusing on the scrutinization of black representation on network television in an analysis that considered the structures and conventions of the medium as well as the sociopolitical conditions of textual production. Gray's specific focus examined past representations of Blacks on television such as *Beulah*, *The Nat King Cole Show*, and *Amos 'n' Andy* arguing that these representations and contemporary representations could be used to articulate a politics of difference. Specifically, Gray points out that he is,

concerned with trying to clarify just how we might talk about, theorize, and understand the representations of “blackness” presented in commercial culture, especially network television and the political projects in which these representations are deployed (Gray 1995, pp. 1-2).

Related to, and intersecting studies by Gray (1995) bell hooks analysed race, class, gender and other markers of identity in the construction of individual subjectivity (1992). Early in her career she focused on debates concerning cultural appropriation versus cultural appreciation with the aim of uncovering the personal and political cross currents at work in mass media representation. Her book, *“Eating the Other”*, focusing on people of colour being objects of desire for white, heterosexual males within a college context. This highlights the problematics associated with racial domination by white supremacists and the subordination of the Other.

In conclusion, the 1950s-1990s (before the advent of the millennium) included many seminal works of great importance to the field of television and television studies. Due to constraints of space, I shall not continue to document television studies in the 2000s suffice to say that many of these developments are scattered in abridged form throughout this thesis aside from the mention of a single piece of work by Jacob Johanssen which helped shape some of the arguments of this thesis.

Johanssen (2019) writes on the topic of affect and audio-visual representation. Specifically, Johanssen draws on Lisa Cartwright (2008) in arguing, ‘...we may be particularly affected by media in a way that is felt by the body’ (p. 32). That which is felt by the body is useful to connect to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

Furthermore, these affective capacities are discussed further in chapters 2 and 3. Moreover, Johanssen’s book explores reality television. He points out that prior historical scholarship, ‘lack[s] considerations of embodied-affective modes of viewing and instead rel[ies] more on cognitive accounts of viewers (*ibid.*, p. 46).

The interest of this thesis embraces both aspects, building on the embodied-affective modes of viewing through extending Johanssen’s propositions and applying them to young women’s experiences of the contemporary, televisual fictions of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Finally, I take inspiration from Johanssen’s chapter on reality

television as my approach mirrors Johanssen's own in the sense that his '...chapter discusses two case studies and supplements them with data from other interviewees (*ibid.*, pp. 46-47). The difference between Johanssen's study and my own is that my data from the interviewees was collected as part of an online, virtual clinic and helped to shape my two original case studies.

The next section of the thesis positions various bodies of knowledge that provide the underpinning epistemologies to the study's central arguments. These arguments provide the supporting bedrock and scaffolding to enable the reader to critically understand young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

1.5 Positioning Television as a Serious Object of Academic Enquiry

In positioning television as a serious object of academic enquiry (Williams [1974] 2003) and as a response to criticisms of it (Mander 1978 [2002]) this thesis provides insights into the ways in which women read and experience contemporary, televisual fiction. These dimensions of enquiry are illuminated by capturing instances of the emergence of the unconscious within conscious discourse. Analysis of these dimensions allow for latent or subtextual explorations of standard narratives to occur. This mode of analysis bypasses manifest content that are common to studies of television, particularly televisual studies that focus on identificatory models. The latent aspect of the unconscious provides the means through which to theorise the complexities of television in general and televisual fiction in particular. Furthermore, it is through a repositioning of Žižek's opening argument in the *Parallax View* which prefaces the general introductions to the short circuits series that the intentions behind this thesis can be brought to light.

In repositioning his ideas, I concur with Žižek's argument that,

Is not one of the most effective critical procedures to cross wires that do not usually touch: to take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short-circuiting way, through the lens of a "minor" author, text, or conceptual apparatus ("minor" should be understood here in Deleuze's sense: not "of lesser quality," but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, or dealing with a "lower," less dignified topic)? If the minor reference is well chosen such a procedure can lead to insights which completely shatter and undermine our common perceptions (Žižek 2009, preface).

My argument follows the logic suggested by Žižek in the sense that the popular culture contextualizations of *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* act as the minor aspects, whereas the major classic notion are the lenses of the discipline of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (*The Real*, etc.). The use of women's voices, with a revision and repositioning of the concepts, intend to foster a critical understanding of women's psychic worlds. The focus on the psychical and the unconscious reflects Žižek's secondary argument that,

...Lacanian Psychoanalysis is a privileged instrument [...] whose purpose is to illuminate a standard text or ideological formation, making it readable in a totally new way [...] (*ibid*).

The next section considers the main claims concerning the originality of the theoretical, critical, and methodological insights.

1.6 Note on Originality

The original aspects of this study can be broken down into three interconnected argumentative strands. Firstly, this thesis positions a series of psychoanalytic concepts (*The Real*, *Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* equating to the product of *Mediated Fiction*, and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*) as a series of frames used to interrogate and analyse young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction). This intervention builds on the work of Bainbridge, Ward, and Yates (2013) who apply psychoanalytic concepts to television but don't focus on Lacanian concepts.

Methodologically, and secondly, the Freudo-Lacanian Psychoanalytic session is synthesised with oral history to create an online, virtual clinic. Finally, original analytical insights are provided through an original focus on the concept of secrets (chapter 5), an extension of psychoanalysis to ideology and culture (chapter 6) and a focus on death within television from a psychoanalytic perspective (chapter 7).

Several academic interventions have come close to articulating the application of Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to popular culture in order to explore the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction; but ultimately, suffer deficiencies.

These deficiencies pertain to a singular focus that manifests as the choice to focus on popular culture from within a filmic context with little regard for the unconscious. This can be seen through (a) the application of identification (Mulvey 1974) and identificatory models of television (Press 1989, 1991; Ang 2007; Star 1994) or affective theories (Gorton 2009; Lamerichs 2018; Burwell 2015) applied to television or b) the choice to focus on material phenomena with no synthesis or concatenation of the previously mentioned concepts to the unconscious. By unpacking these statements, we come to learn that most approaches to television focus on conscious, material phenomena (c.f., Cohen 2001; Whitehouse-Hart 2014) at the expense of deeper, unconscious processes, and that some academics are critics of popular culture, believing that television is not a serious object of scholarly enquiry.

I argue that television and popular culture in general and televisual fiction in particular can be considered to be a serious object of academic enquiry, despite several critics who believe this to be contrary advice (c.f., Mander 1978; Butsch 2000; Carey 1992). Having mentioned *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* it is now useful to provide a synopsis of the shows to inform the reader as to the content of the productions for those unfamiliar with either.

1.7 Reception and Fan Studies: Diversions and Reconfigurations

It is the aim of this thesis to develop a new model of contemporary, televisual experience. With this aim in mind, it is useful to explain how this project diverts from the field of reception and fan studies due to the field's perceived limited focus on identificatory and affective models. Moreover, through a reconfiguration of identification and affect it becomes clear how the development of a new model of contemporary, televisual experience becomes to be possible.

Firstly, this thesis delves into the field of reception and fan studies noting how both seminal and contemporary scholarship falls into one of two categories, either identification or affect. The seminal scholarship of Jonathan Cohen (Cohen 2001) investigates audience identification with media characters. Within his work, Cohen argues that identification has not been adequately conceptualised or rigorously tested in empirical studies (Cohen 2001, p. 245). Both Cohen and similarly, Williams (see overleaf) discuss the act of audience members or fans identifying with the characters being portrayed, albeit with Cohen offering a more general take, whereas Williams uses more specific examples such as fans' identifications

with the different incarnations of *Dr. Who*. Subsequently, Cohen argues that

identification is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them (*ibid.*).

It should be noted that this response still manifests itself as external to the viewer as children in particular dress-up as their favourite superheroes or heroines, and to an extent, so do adults when expressing their predilections for particular types of fandoms such as D.C. (Anderson 2015) or Marvel characters (Radošinská and Mago 2023). Cohen draws on Wollheim in arguing that identification has an internal component as opposed to the external and behavioural phenomena of imitation. It can be argued that when children or adults cosplay, for instance, there is *meaning behind* why they are engaging in these activities (Cohen 2001, p. 247).

Furthermore, in *Post-Object Fandom: Television, Identity and Self-narrative*, Rebecca Williams (Williams 2015) draws on Gray (2007) in discussing how

Fandom is now accepted as an integral part of everyday life which impacts upon 'how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world' (p. 2).

These emotional bonds are tied up in the affective realm, and relate not only to how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others, but how we form emotional bonds with fictional television characters also (Cohen 2001; Wojciehowski and Gallese 2022). In light of this, Cohen makes sure to point out that

identification has often been confused with similar concepts, such as parasocial relationships and fandom (Cohen 2001, p. 249)

hence Williams' focus on the affective in relation to Post-Object Fandom, as opposed to identification.

Williams supports Gray's point arguing that, '...attention must be paid to fans' *affective and interpretive responses* to such TV events...', for example, the expiration of a TV show (Williams 2015, p. 2). Moreover, the focus on fan objects 'can have a profound impact on [fans'] sense of identity and self-narrative' *ibid.*, p. 6). Given this, with a focus on fan objects the critical focus remains in the visual and material domain of ontic reality with identity and

self-narrative pertaining to the politics of identification and fans' affective experiences as Williams argues that 'enduring fandom' and 'lifelong fandom' are important.

Further to studies by Cohen and Bennett, many other scholars focus on identification and affect respectively with identification pertaining to studies by (Dajches 2022; Frazer and Moyer-Gusè 2023; Huang, Fung and Sun 2024). In turn, scholarly studies of affect focus on explorations by (Grossberg 1992; Harrington and Bielby 2010b and Hills 2002). Finally, studies by Ross Garner and Lucy Bennett prove fruitful also.

Ross P Garner's study focuses on affective textualities and their correspondence to the return of *Twin Peaks*. In particular, Garner explored the affective reaction of fans to fan objects in the form of special anniversary/commemorative re-releases on DVD/Blu-Ray. Ross Garner argues that the study shows that

the empirical audience research demonstrates, [...] affective responses from fans that are linked to the specificity of how the anniversary is positioned (Garner 2018, p. 65).

Furthermore, Garner argues that it is important to draw on Grossberg (1992, p. 80) as the

concept of the 'mattering map' is developed to incorporate the ways that affect becomes manifested through social, cultural and historical structures of signification within fan identities (ibid., pp. 65-66).

Garner goes on to discuss the concept of affect as being pre-cognitive and related to the body through drawing on Deleuze. This is a further instance of another study that ignores Grodal's synthesised concept of bodymind (see Chapter 3), particularly in relation to the intensities of affect and their correspondence with cinematic and contemporary, televisual fiction.

In turn, Lucy Bennett's study on reflections on the development of fan studies and digital fan studies, does not primarily focus on identificatory or affective practices in her work. In spite of this when discussing directions for future research she argues that,

...fans are becoming more integrated into the production process and subsequently positioned in an even more participatory culture than before. How funding impacts on a fans' reading and *affective relationship towards the text and textual producers* thus needs to be theorized and explored further, with an acknowledgement surrounding the powers and pleasures of agency that can occur within fan labour... (Bennett 2014, p. 13; my emphasis).

Given this, there has certainly been a move beyond identification to affect, however, my argument is that fan studies fails to account for the complex interactions with fans of media objects/media characters as there is no synthesis of identification and affect together, nor is the unconscious a part of this synthesis in spite of the fact the Matt Hills has written several studies pertaining to psychoanalysis and fan studies (c.f., Hills 2005; Hills 2016 and Hills 2017). In other words, all categories are theorised separately when a productive synthesis would yield fascinating results. To conclude, the focus of fan studies use combinations of identification and affective reception to experience a media text or engage with a media character, event/situation or location in the shows much like my study of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* does, however, there is a lack in the sense that the unconscious is not paid attention to, and this is the central aspect of renovating prior studies, leading to the original aspects of this thesis.

1.8 What are the narratives associated with *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*?

The aim of this section recounts the basic narratives of the two contextual instances of the American TV shows, *Riverdale*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. Firstly, *Pretty Little Liars* concerns the disappearance of fifteen-year-old, Rosewood, Pennsylvania resident, Alison DiLaurentis. The show opens with a flash forward of events occurring a year after the initial scene in a barn. Viewers are introduced to four of Alison's friends: Aria Montgomery, Hanna Marin, Emily Fields, and Spencer Hastings who begin to receive mysterious and threatening correspondence from an unknown assailant, known only as 'A'.

Conversely, *Riverdale* opens with the discovery of the body of Jason Blossom on American Independence Day. Viewers are introduced to Archie Andrews, Betty Cooper, Veronica Lodge and Cheryl Blossom, amongst others. Season one concerns the teens trying to solve the mystery of Jason Blossom's murder.

The next and penultimate section of the thesis introduction, introduces and positions several key terms of importance to the lines of argument supporting this investigation. These terms provide a bedrock for understanding how these concepts operate within the thesis. The situating of these terms illuminates the critical dimensions of this enquiry and its focus on young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

1.9 Key Terms

This thesis examines issues pertaining to the line of argument that examines the limits of representation *and* language, drawing on the concept of the ineffable or ineffability. It is here I analyse and position the ineffable and ineffability as a key term for developing a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. So, just what is the ineffable?

The ineffable and ineffability has been tied to Lacan's concept of *The Real*. It possesses a wider contextual and conceptual meaning which is useful for this thesis and is applied to chapter 5's discussion of the limitations of secrets and impossible modes of *jouissance* in chapter 7. Chapter 7's discussion is allied to issues corresponding to death, immortality, and the configuration of impossible modes of *jouissance*; that which is unable to be materially experienced and can only be simulated through a fictional body within the realm of *psychic experience*.

1.9.1 What is the Ineffable?

A succinct definition of the ineffable is provided by several scholarly accounts who position ineffability in both a broader sense and in relation, more specifically, to Lacan's concept of *The Real*. One account is provided by Jan Zwicky, whose account is utilised as a placeholder in translating the 'I don't know's' of the narrator's responses into paradoxically critical assertions that indeed, they do know. The issue at stake between knowing and not knowing corresponds to an absence in language— an inability to articulate their experiences.

In providing evidence in support of this Zwicky (2012) argues that the things that we say are ineffable appertain to

...what we feel we cannot talk about adequately in an experience—a complex of perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and memories, something we undergo (p. 198).

In addition, Zwicky argues that,

An experience is ineffable to *the extent that* it is an experience of resonant form. The experiences we feel compelled to describe as ineffable are ones in which we are touched by or filled with the resonance of being (*ibid.*, p. 211; emphasis in original).

These resonances do appear frequently throughout the data analysis chapters. In concluding this section, I draw on a different and earlier argument provided by Zaphiropoulos. Zaphiropoulos discusses phenomena whose very essence causes a 'difficulty in defining it', for example, as an aspect of 'objectless love' (Zaphiropoulos 2000, p. 281).

The very notion of what Zaphiropoulos calls 'objectless love' pertains to thoughts and feelings whose object is illusory, non-existent in the sense that it does not possess materialistic qualities. These qualities find expression in the data analysis chapters as secrets (chapter 5), U.S. culture and ideological formation (chapter 6), and death and immortality (Chapter 7). In addition to Zwicky's assertions a succinct definition of the ineffable is also provided by Alexander Galloway, who draws on the theories of Jacques Rancière in questioning whether or not some things are unrepresentable. Galloway urges us to,

[c]onsider the logic of how the thing[s] that most permeate our daily lives will be the same thing[s] that retreats from any tangible malleability in our hands and minds (Galloway 2011, p. 95).

He goes on to continue to argue that,

The point of unrepresentability is the point of power. And the point of power today is *not in the image*. The point of power today resides in networks, computers, algorithms, *information* and data (*ibid*; my emphasis).

Taken in tandem, these two points are important in helping to explain the phenomenon of death (chapter 7). Furthermore, in paying particular attention to the

dimension of information in Galloway's argument, in Derridean-fashion it is possible to take a point of interest that has been relegated to a category of lesser ontological importance and venerate it. In essence, information (particularly the voices of young women have been suppressed throughout history, yet through the combination of psychoanalysis and oral histories (chapter 4)) the repositioning and ontological reconfiguration of Galloway's argument concerning information allows it to supplant imagery as an area of central concern, even though initially Galloway reconfigures the binary relationship between the two terms, effectuating a shift in power from one object of enquiry to another.

This reconfiguration of binaries is an interesting point to pick up in terms of irrepresentability as Jacques Rancière discusses this in his book *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). In repositioning Rancière I argue that the ineffable 'abolishes any fixity and hierarchy of positions' (p. 12). Ostensibly, the ineffable is indeed enigmatic and it is its enigmatic nature that makes it so flexible a theoretical tool.

In addition, chapter 2's upcoming argument revolves around an object substitute—a target for 'objectless love' in the forms of the *object a*, and the *objet petit a*. Moving on now, this thesis uses the terms 'the unconscious' and 'psychic experience'. What is meant by these terms and how do they interrelate in developing a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?

1.9.2 What are psychic experiences and how do they relate to the unconscious?

Returning to Zaphiropolous it is important to ground the unconscious as the central point of all psychic processes. A full explication of psychic processes is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet these processes can be articulated in a general sense. As discussed in the upcoming chapter Lacan argues that there are three domains of psychic experience—The *Imaginary*, The *Symbolic*, and The *Real*.

I argue that it is *The Real* that corresponds most strongly to the unconscious. Yet, before following this trajectory one must position through definition, the Unconscious and psychic experience. In contemplation of the Unconscious, it is necessary, as Lacan taught, for us to 'return to Freud'.

Simply put, 'psychic' [...] means nothing more mystical than pertaining to the psyche' (Frankland *in* Freud 2005 xxiii). Furthermore, Jon Mills (2010) draws on 'Joseph Newirth (2003) [who] reminds us that the unconscious is generative, [...]' (p. 7). This point is important as *phantasies* are generative, and are positioned as so, within the argument of this thesis, particularly so far as the experience of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction is concerned.

Phantasy provides the evidence through which to theorise that 'Psychic reality begins as unconscious experience' (*ibid.*) which is then displaced through *mediated fiction* into conscious representation. Having defined and positioned psychic reality it is now useful before moving on to map out the relationship between fiction, *The Real*, the *unconscious*, and *affective* responses to interrogate Mills' viewpoint concerning the tensions between the metaphysical and the empirical as this is key to the line of argument of this thesis which focuses on the limitations of language *and* representation, while developing a practical model of psychoanalysis (see chapter 4).

I reposition Mills' argument (*ibid.*, p. 8) that,

we must centre our inquiry from the speculative standpoint of an unconscious phenomenology, phenomena we cannot directly observe or measure, despite the fact that what we are positing is based in ontological discourse. This makes our inquiry a metaphysical enterprise and not an empirical one; for how can we measure that which cannot be observed?

Although I agree here with what Mills says about not being able to measure particular phenomena (See Chapter 5 on secrets), I disagree with Mills' point of view that certain phenomena cannot be observed, they can be observed through traces left by the unconscious. Furthermore, academic commentators have begun (since the publication of Mills' project) to collate ways of measuring the unconscious (Stamenova and Hinshelwood 2019).

1.9.3 The Unconscious, Affect, and The Real

A turn to Lacan's extension of Freud's work on the unconscious reveals Lacan's usage of the term affect as corresponding to *The Real*. This correspondence is explored by Lacan in the sense that first and foremost 'Psychoanalysis is concerned with our unconscious desires and wishes and not with social reality' (Homer 2005, p

85). Thus, an extension of Freud's unconscious desires and wishes as expressed through dreams can be replaced by vicarious televisual experiences which are arguably a manifestation of another's dreams when forging a link between the structure of television images (Aufderheide 1986) with affect dreaming processes (Van den Bulck 2004).

Moreover, it is useful for this thesis to draw on the process of unconscious affect which can be described as active processes outside of the awareness of the individual (Pulver 1971). Unconscious affect, often linked to the dynamic unconscious, are best articulated as thoughts, desires and feelings that were denied to conscious awareness because of a psychological force (Kihlstrom 2015). This brings the crux of the argument to the forefront of enquiry as Lacan saw the Unconscious as a failure, impediment or rupture in the symbolic chain (something that disrupts social reality).

The disruption of social reality, this rupture in the symbolic corresponds to properties associated with *The Real*. This failure, impediment or rupture (as captured through unconscious affect) allows for the emergence of an interesting question: how is it possible for a non-existent object (for example, a fictional character or event) to profoundly affect the lives of viewers as manifested through their televisual experiences? It is useful to think of fictional experiences as either idealised fantasies or transgressive traumas.

Focusing on the former of the two, idealisations are associated with imaginary dimensions. There also exists a symbolic dimension where both on-screen virtual character and viewing subject are both lacking in different ways (e.g., lacking an experience and lacking tangible, physical existence). Finally, there is always something more, particularly for women who are fans of the show in the sense that other, similar shows may possess dimensions of enjoyment, excitement, attractive characters, and compelling plots.

The elusivity and intangibility of attraction to a particular event or character, that something extra that cannot be grasped or articulated are the *object a*—the object- cause of desire and the *objet petit a*—the unattainable object of desire. The next chapter focuses briefly on the relationship of these concepts to *phantasy* and *fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction*. The next section moves on to consider the positioning of the term 'heuristic' as a tool of enquiry for psychoanalysis.

1.9.4 Positioning the term ‘heuristic’ as a tool of enquiry

Drawing on the scholarship of Groner, Groner, and Bischof (1983) the positioning of the term ‘heuristic’ as a tool of enquiry in psychoanalysis corresponds to ‘the main usage of the word “heuristic” [which] is mostly the adjective in the sense of “guiding discovery” (p. 1). In essence, this results in a loose framework which accommodates the fluid nature of the terms used in psychoanalysis. In addition, this guiding of discovery is illuminated by a series of lenses through which young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be viewed.

Moreover, in the sense of using practical tools and shifting frameworks, whose shapes are both capable of adaptation while also being amorphous and indeterminate, particularly Lacan’s *The Real*, the application to multiple modes of enquiry is possible from the analysis of culture and ideology to secrets and death. Applied as a heuristic tool to the analysis of culture, ideology, secrets and death, *The Real* takes on the properties of “improving problem solving” (*ibid.*) as it pertains to the critical understanding and development of young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, particularly in terms of knowledge production.

1.9.5 The Imaginary and Imaginary Idealisation

As a final point of note, it is necessary to ground what is meant by imaginary idealisation. Firstly, in thinking through imaginary idealisation it is necessary to turn to the scholarship of Ronald Britton (1998). For Britton, the function of imaginary idealisation can be approached through the faculties of the imagination via a questioning of how the imagination can be conceived in psychoanalytic terms (Britton 1998, p. 1).

In turn, the imagination approached as a ‘mental function’ (*ibid.*) provides the means for differentiating between imagination and the imaginary. Through undertaking such an endeavour I turn to Ian Buchanan to articulate the modal distinction between these two terms. Firstly, for Buchanan (2010) the imaginary is,

A concept used by [...] Jacques Lacan, [...] to indicate a process of the mind or the psychical apparatus susceptible to the seductions of the image (p. 244).

This relates to the process of internal spectatorship advanced by M. G. Benton (1995) and the seductions of the image strongly emerge in narrator discussions in chapter 6.

Furthermore, the imagination can be differentiated from the imaginary as Beres (1960, p. 252) points out that the

imagination is the capacity to form a mental representation of an absent object, an affect, a body function, or an instinctual drive.

The absent object is usually venerated in the mind of the viewer (see chapter 6 in particular), this veneration leads to the viewer placing the fictional object on what I call a 'pedestal of perfection', hence the term imaginary idealisation.

1.10 Chapter Synopses

Within this chapter I aim to find out how the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction*, and the *object a/objet petit a* can be repositioned in gaining a critical insight into young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. In addition, I am interested in analysing the power of these concepts as tools for critiquing and addressing the limitations of language *and* representation in young women's experiential accounts.

It is with these issues in mind I seek to assess the viability of synthesising and developing a model of television which both acknowledges and synthesises the use of identificatory and affective models for understanding television, yet ultimately moves beyond them in addressing latent issues of the unconscious through young women's psychic experiences.

Chapter Two

This chapter, the first of two literature reviews, positions four terms from Lacanian Psychoanalytic theory to capture and gain an insight into how young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be better understood. These concepts are a) *The Real*, which acts as the central keystone, providing the

foundations/bedrock upon which the thesis argument is built. Anchored to *The Real* are several other aspects of *The Real* which work in tandem with one another.

These aspects are appropriated to provide a series of frames through which to examine and illuminate the complexities inherent in television in general and young women's experiences of the reception of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular. Furthermore, other aspects of enquiry, expressed as b) *Jouissance*, c) the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, and d) *phantasy/fantasy*, which leads to my own theorisation of *phantasy/fantasy* (whose product is *mediated fiction*) are mobilised in order to explain women's desires, anxieties, and fears in the contextual chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Chapter Three

Within this chapter I aim to apply the concepts discussed in chapter 2 as mechanisms for discussing issues pertaining to television and practical research. Although many qualitative studies have been conducted, the earliest studies focused on quantitative approaches with identificatory models of television forming the locus of enquiry. It is expected that an empirical gap exists in the field which creates a space for the positioning of the unconscious, which is deployed as a heuristic tool for supplanting identificatory and affective models of television through their acknowledgment, synthesis, extension, and reconfiguration.

The third chapter, the second of two reviews of literature, firmly positions the original contribution of this thesis into a pre-existing field of academic studies. With a specific focus on psychoanalytical and psychosocial studies, it identifies an empirical gap in the theorisation of scholars' prior theorisations of women's experiences of televisual fiction. Broadly speaking, it also draws on feminist studies of television and scholarly accounts of television and popular culture.

Particularly useful to my own intervention have been the works of Lori Bindig, who in spite of doing interesting and innovative work on popular culture, shies away from an empirical examination of popular culture. Furthermore, it is argued that prior works have engaged with televisual studies at a material (non-psychic) level, while innovations in methods of research into the unconscious (Stamenova and Hinshelwood 2019) have provided

the opportunity to engage with the sub-textual or latent content, inherent in women's discourses.

Chapter Four

Within this chapter I aim to illuminate the relationships between oral histories and the psychoanalytic session. It is by synthesising these methods that I seek to develop an original research method for accessing the unconscious experiences of young women as their desires and anxieties correspond to contemporary, televisual fiction. In essence, oral history is inflected with issues pertaining to transference and countertransference which act as tools for excavating young women's desires, anxieties, and passions.

Chapter four argues for an intervention with respects to an accessing of the unconscious. Although as aforementioned, Stamenova and Hinshelwood (2019) touch upon an exploration of this content, there is no engagement with Lacanian concepts or Oral History as a method of analysis. Armed with this knowledge, chapter four utilises affordances created by the COVID-19 pandemic to construct an online, virtual clinic, allowing for a frank and honest exchange of ideas between interviewer and narrator(s).

In addition, the practical and ethical dimensions of conducting the interviews and gaining informed consent for the discussion of highly personal information, manifested as anxieties, wishes, desires, and fantasies form a part of this chapter. This chapter leads on to the first of three contextual instances where the theme of secrets is examined with respects to its relationship to the Lacanian *Real*.

Furthermore, the role of secrets allied to young women's readings and experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction illuminates the complex nature of secrets as one thematic element adding to the overall argument concerning the complexity of television in general and televisual fiction in particular.

Chapter Five

The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the limitations inherent in the representation of the symbolic as discussed through the discourses of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. In particular, the ineffable nature of secrets are positioned in relation to arguments concerning the emergence of the unconscious within speech. Of importance also is the correspondence of secrets to the line of argument pertaining to the intersectional nature of *The Real* and *Jouissance* in repositioning and framing televisual complexity through the acknowledgement and extension of identificatory and affective models of television in order to change the theoretical emphasis of television as an object of culture and academic enquiry.

Chapter five examines the theme of secrets in relation to the popular culture shows, *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*. For the first time, the emergent relationship between *The Real* and the theme of secrets is discussed. The exploration of this relationship captures the multi-faceted manner in which the concept of the secret (as an ephemeral and nebulous excess) can be projected on to objects while also reflecting social practices such as collecting, which when allied to commerce, within the context of a menagerie, reveals the underlying mechanisms which shape women's experiences of fandom which relates to the excessive extension of experiences beyond the reception of televisual fiction on the small screen.

Chapter Six

The aim of this chapter is to enquire how and in what ways women position and respond to hegemonic ideologies. Are they embraced? resisted? ignored? repurposed? What modes of expression are used when young women articulate their experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction? and how does *phantasy* and *fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* correspond to the shaping and critical understanding of the role televisual fiction plays in reality.

The second chapter of three contextual instances examines the theme of American culture to young women's subjective responses and their correspondence to *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. In particular, the construction of Hollywood ideologies on appearances, the concept of the All-American Girl/Girl Next Door, and representations of American suburbia form parts of the argument. Furthermore, several intersecting lines of enquiry run throughout the chapter connecting *The Real*, its associated concepts of *Jouissance*, and the triad of *phantasy/fantasy* (as a product of mediated fiction).

Chapter Seven

The aim of this chapter, with its focus on death and immortality, corresponds to arguments relating to the limitations of representation *and* language. I hope to find that through the speech of young women death and immortality are subjects that are ineffable and difficult to articulate. In turn, it is hoped that manifestations of the unconscious are apparent through the tensions that emerge through how young women articulate their anxieties around the subject of death.

The third and final chapter of the three contextual instances that revolves around the shows *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* investigates the themes of trauma and death in addition to analysing issues pertaining to immortality. Immortality as a signifier reveals the limitations of language *and* representation as is discussed through an impasse between desire and representation and its correspondence with an impossible mode of *Jouissance*.

1.11 Conclusion

The aforementioned synopses assist with positioning the overall intent and ambitions of this thesis to the reader, alongside the nuanced appreciation and appropriation of several key terms, designed to enable a robust discussion of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. The purpose of this introduction has presented the logical outline of a thesis that reflects and links to the project's aims and objectives with the intent of providing a series of frames which capture how *phantasy/fantasy* (as a product of mediated fiction), *Jouissance*, *l'Objet Petit a/Objet a*, and the centrality of the Lacanian *Real* provide the means through which

to capture how young women experience contemporary, televisual fiction. The next chapter attempts to position the intervention of this thesis within the existing literature, examining the philosophical and conceptual elements which provide the epistemological and ontological bedrock through which young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be critically understood.

Chapter 2. Accessing the Unconscious, Psychic Worlds of Young Women and their Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction Through Lacanian Lenses

“...below the level of conscious attention, emotional forces combine [...] in modes ancient and satisfying.”

- Simon O' Lesser (1957) drawing on Maud Bodkin (1934)

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a thesis introduction outlining the context of the research, the research questions, aims, objectives and thesis structure. This chapter provides conceptual and theoretical background for this study, presenting a discussion on the definition of the concepts involved in studying young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. It presents the main definitions of Jacques Lacan's concepts of *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, and the *object a/objet petit a*.

This chapter is organised and subdivided into ten sections. The first section explains the interconnected nature of Lacan's concepts. The second section examines the relationship between television and *The Real* documenting its connection through its historical evolution.

The third section theorises the concept of *Jouissance* as a mode of intensity that corresponds with young women's levels of engagement with contemporary, televisual fiction. The fourth section explores the relationship between *Jouissance* and *Fantasy* which leads on to the fifth section. The fifth section examines pleasure and pain in television, which circles back to *Jouissance* and *Fantasy* that results in both uplifting and disturbing experiences.

The sixth section articulates the orthographic differences between *phantasy* and *fantasy* arguing that their synthesis creates mediated fiction. The seventh section documents how both the *object a* and *objet petit a* (object cause of desire and unattainable object of desire) function within the context of contemporary, televisual fiction. The eighth section links the aforementioned concepts to the concept of *The Real*, illustrating the interconnectedness of the concepts discussed back in section one.

The ninth and penultimate section continues with the interconnectedness of the concepts linking the object *a*/objet petit *a* to phantasy and fantasy as the synthesis that creates the product of mediated fiction. Finally, the tenth section concludes this chapter with a preview of how these concepts connect to empirical examples of television. This chapter established a crucial conceptual and theoretical background as this forms a keystone, which acts as the first step in answering the research questions.

2.1.1. Lacanian Lenses

In his documentary, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek provides commentary on John Carpenter's 1988 movie, *They Live!* When protagonist, John Nada (Roddy Piper) finds a haul of sunglasses in an abandoned church he finds that by wearing them he is able to see the 'underlying intent of the communication' encoded as a series of invisible ideologies in the form of messages. In a similar vein, this thesis seeks to position a series of what I call 'Lacanian Lenses' in the sense that through a repositioning of concepts one is able to 'capture' the unconscious aspects of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

With this in mind and in the interests of addressing issues amalgamating at the intersection of psychoanalysis and television through Lacan, there are four key areas and/or concepts that require elaboration. The keystone of this project is *The Real* and it is the intent of this thesis to follow several lines of argument as detailed in the prior chapter's introduction, mapping out the argument's correspondences with *The Real*. Section one examines the power of *The Real* as a conceptual tool for capturing the emergence of the unconscious in speech, articulating its use for developing a new model of televisual experience that both acknowledges the complexities involved in the construction of televisual fiction by extending identificatory models of television through addressing the deadlocks, tensions, and impasses associated with the limits of language *and* representation.

In section two, *The Real* acts as a bedrock for the emergence of *Jouissance*, which provides a frame for critically engaging with and mapping out the levels of interest displayed by the young women involved in the online psychoanalytic oral histories, detailed further in chapter 6. Finally, *The Real*'s association with fiction is considered with the development of an original concept of *mediated fiction* referring to the condensation of two different types of fiction – *phantasy* and *fantasy* as the product of *mediated fiction*. Across chapters 5, 6, and 7 the usefulness of these concepts are examined for developing an analysis for the ways in

which young women's experiences of secrets, American culture and ideologies, death and immortality operate.

As well as this, issues related to desire, metaphor, metonymy, and the roles of the *object a* in the process of *phantasy/fantasy*, *Jouissance*, and *The Real* are considered. Furthermore, in developing a rationale for the adoption of the Lacanian concepts chosen for the conceptual focus of this thesis I have chosen concepts that enable young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction to be critically understood through the power of their application.

2.1.2 A note on the integrative nature of the literature review

There may be times when the organizational structure of the Lacanian concepts I use 'seep' into one another; wherein the epistemological and ontological boundaries of the terms become obscured as opposed to being clear and simple. This is due not only to the nature of a thesis' structure in general, but more specifically, the fact that Eshan Azari Stanizai points out that: 'A salient feature of Lacanian concepts is their intrinsic interrelatedness and interdependences' (Stanizai 2018, p. 1). Moreover, the interrelatedness and interdependences of the concepts provide a firm foundation for positioning a series of lenses through which to illuminate the complexities that correspond with the study of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

The immaterial nature of Lacan's concepts imbues them with both a power and a potentiality where the boundaries of the psychoanalytic context can be traversed, allowing the concepts to be repositioned and applied to television in particular and popular culture more broadly. Through this 'seepage' the interrelatedness of the concepts have the potential for re(position)configure(ing) bodies, barring access to, compelling/fascinating, and complicating interpretations of young women's psychic worlds. Young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, I suggest, are also capable of bringing these complications to the surface of thought through traces of the unconscious found in speech.

In moving forwards this chapter considers the history of *The Real* and how it can be repositioned/reconfigured as a mechanism for explaining the construction of televisual fiction.

2.2 The Historical Evolution of *The Real* and its Relationship to Televisual Fiction

The exact definition of *The Real* is difficult to pin down. Before going into the ways in which *The Real* is specifically mobilised as it pertains to this thesis, I will first consider the changing nature of *The Real* in the thought of Lacan. Paul Ricœur suggests that ‘in an ontological sense, we mean by historical [...] what actually happened in the past’ (1990, p. 96). It is useful to appropriate Ricœur’s term here as opposed to any psychoanalytic conceptualisation of history, as Tim Dean points out that ‘The question of what psychoanalysis means by “history” —and what Lacan means by the imperative to historicise is too complex to pursue [...]’ (Dean 2000, p. 8).

Furthermore, a brief historical journey is necessary to follow the trajectory of *The Real* and its development. Firstly, Lacan’s use of *The Real* appears as a factual concept in 1936 where he draws on the work of Emilie Meyerson in forming a definition of his concept (Evans 1996, p. 162). *The Real* as defined by Evans (1996, p. 162) drawing on Roustang (1986, p. 61) drawing on Meyerson (1925, p. 79) is ‘an ontological absolute, a true being-in-itself’. This ontological absolute corresponds with Christian theology and the essential absolute of God. In resituating this point for this thesis it imbues *The Real* with a special status, that just like God, the concept can be used for the imagination and creation of new worlds.

Theorised by Lacan in opposition to the imaginary of the mirror phase, Meyerson’s ‘being-in-itself’ is a central thread of this thesis. It binds together alternative conceptualisations of *The Real* which are discussed as the development of an under theorised auditory Real. ‘Being-in-itself’, when placed in opposition to the imaginary of the mirror phase takes on the status of being ‘beyond the realm of appearances and images’ (No Subject/Encyclopedia of Lacanian Psychoanalysis). After the 1930s the term faded into obscurity before its re-emergence in 1953 after which throughout the 1960s and 1970s the concept continued to develop until Lacan’s death in 1981. Especially pertinent to this thesis and the concepts it engages with is the fact that just before his death,

The real in late Lacan is inseparable from an understanding of the role of fantasy, the objet petit a and jouissance (*ibid.*).

Tim Dean (2000) provides a summary of past uses of *The Real* alongside its subsequent development. For Dean, in periodising the evolution of the concept of *The Real* we begin in the decade of the 1950s, more specifically, writing in 1953 Lacan conceptualises *The Real* as 'the brute, pre-symbolic reality which always returns to its place' and this is echoed by Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 1989, p. 182). The term has little significance in the 1950s yet as time moves on *The Real* of the 1960s marks another shift in meaning.

During this period 'Lacan's emphasis shifts from the symbolic order to the nonsymbolic real' (Dean 2000, p. 50) where "'60s Lacan" focuses on the limits rather than the omnipotence of the symbolic order' (*ibid.*) and this point corresponds to the line of argument concerning the limits of language *and* representation for portraying non-existent/ineffable objects. Furthermore, as a key point to the conflation of *The Real* with fiction in the final section it is important to note that for Dean, '...the real is generative, not simply constraining' (*ibid.*, p. 51). The generativity Dean alludes to is repositioned in linking to a prior argument put forth by Katerina Kolozova where I argue that *The Real* is 'a status that can be assumed by other realities', therefore, possessing the capacity for 'the "reinvention of worlds."' (Kolozova 2015, pp. 2, 1).

Furthermore, throughout this thesis I follow Tim Dean as

I rehearse different ways of describing the real, offering a range of examples to suggest the positive effects of its purely negative presence (Dean 2000, p. 51).

This means that in sections two and three on *Jouissance* and *Phantasy* and *Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* I explain the emergence of the unconscious in speech and its associated correspondence with trauma and anxiety (a function of *The Real* viewed through the veil of *Jouissance*). This provides a means for articulating how fictional characters in particular and televisual fiction in general produce very real effects. In continuing to document the historical evolution of *The Real* I deemed it necessary to engage with the scholarship of Tom Evers (2012).

Eyers extends Dean's conceptualisations of *The Real* pointing out aspects of *The Real* which are useful for developing a model of televisual fiction that extends identificatory models when accounting for the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. In positioning the concept of *The Real* it is first important to note that '...other concepts would come to define [*The Real*]' (Eyers 2012, p. 15). In exploiting the power of the concept and the complexities associated with *The Real* it is useful to distinguish between the real and The Real (Capital 'T', capital 'R'). The differences in conceptualising and differentiating between the Real (capital R) and the real (small r) pertains to issues of ontological positionality or indeed, distinguishing between *different conceptualisations of reality*.

The small r pertains not just to reality (as it can be argued there are multiple realities) but in the context of this thesis I mean ontic reality or something that is physical, factual, or material in structure (Berghofer 2018). With this in mind *The Real* can be productively harnessed as a critique of Realism with Realism being theorised as a '...conjunction of the following two theses: (i) there are facts or entities distinctive of that domain, and (ii) their existence and nature is in some important sense objective and mind-independent (Brock and Mares 2007, p. 2).

Given this, *The Real*, thought of as an antithesis of reality is *mind-dependent* in the sense that young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction correspond with the reception of fictional characters who are a product of someone else's imagination where the mind is required to apprehend fictional realities through psychic experience.

Furthermore, Brock and Mares explain that the first part of their thesis can be considered to be what they term their "existence thesis" (*ibid.*). Metaphysical debates are beyond the scope of this thesis suffice to say that Brock and Mares' "existence thesis" and their claim that it corresponds to 'facts' alone is a false dichotomy when applied to the existence of fictional characters as they too possess a certain type of 'existence', discussed in more detail in the third section on *phantasy* and *fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction*. Returning now to the distinction between *The Real* and reality, my modal distinction between reality and *The Real* is echoed by Tom Eyers (2012) who argues that,

The Real, then, must be distinguished from any broader concept of 'reality'. Reality, for Lacan, is generated across the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic (p. 4).

It can be seen that *The Real* is a complicated fluid term that shifts its meaning throughout Lacan's career. It can be argued that of all three aspects of *The Real*, Symbolic, Imaginary triad *The Real*, for Lacan, is perhaps relegated to an ontological category of lesser importance than the symbolic and the imaginary. Despite this, these three registers are reliant on one another to be effective as it is the Borromean knot that provides the structure or the glue allowing the tripartite topology to function. It is important at this stage of the thesis to point out that,

A Borromean knot is defined by two or more loops or rings knotted by another (each ring represents one of the Lacanian orders); cut one, and all disentangle (Milovanovic 2004, p. 369).

The topological metaphor that Lacan uses relates to '...a representation of the functioning of the psychic apparatus' (*ibid.*, p. 370). Subsequently, the Borromean knots can be related to fantasy, something discussed in the penultimate section of this thesis chapter. This chapter now moves on to the ways in which *The Real* has found expression in various instantiations in the works of Jacques Lacan, charting how this trajectory has evolved.

Various appropriations of *The Real* are useful for critically interrogating young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction but it is *The Real* that pertains to the void and *The Real* as an aspect of fiction which are the two most illuminating. It can be argued that *fiction is always grounded on the void* and when such a void exists, like a puzzle it is the human desire to complete that becomes the driving force, as due to seeking a method of suture, the void is filled by subjective *fantasies*. It can be argued that television is the cause of desire to complete because television and its portrayals are ontologically classified as partial objects in the sense that televised portrayals do not offer the viewer an experience of all five senses. Given this, the sensibility at stake here relates to the incompleteness of the subjective experience.

The urge or desire to complete is strong as the paucity of the audio-visual representational form—that which lacks taste, touch/sensation, and smell, results in

an imbalanced viewing experience when contrasted with the real of everyday life. An example of the incompleteness of subjective experience is articulated by Semprun (1997) who argues that mediated forms lack the necessary components to give the audience a full experience that encompasses all five of the senses. In the example, Semprun discusses newsreel images,

Even though [the newsreel images] showed the naked obscenity, the physical deterioration, the grim destruction of death, the images, in fact, were silent. Not merely because they were filmed with live sound recording, which was standard practice at the time. They were silent, above all, because *they said nothing precise about the reality they showed*, because they discovered confused scraps of meaning (p. 200; emphasis added).

Semprun's observations say nothing precise about the reality being shown and the silence surrounding the 'scraps of meaning' are indicative of *The Real's* function of safeguarding the viewer against trauma. The context of Semprun's discussions relate to experiences of the Holocaust. The void of *The Real* has a purpose in this case— this purpose is to assist the viewer in filling in the gaps via the function of their imaginations, as without mediation, the Holocaust as an event cannot be represented due to its viscosity and this argument extends to instances of rape in *Riverdale*.

In continuing to map out a trajectory of *The Real* as a void I draw on André Nusselder's use of Lacan in the sense that Nusselder argues that Lacan 'speaks of the real as a hole in reality that fantasy fills' (2013, p. 64). This hole in reality needs to be made (w)hole and this is the function of fantasy as it pertains to *The Real*, but it should be noted that Lacan is generally suspicious of the whole and is ever pointing to the hole in every whole [...] (Fink 2002, p. 31). In the coming chapters this subjectivity can be seen manifested in the anxieties and tensions of speech of some of the narrators involved in the oral histories (see Chapter 6).

Furthermore, as it corresponds to fiction the function of *The Real* ensures that 'the subject of the signifier ex-sists' (Žižek 2005, p. 41). Ex-sistence as opposed to existence can be explained by drawing on Žižek's reading of Hegel who argues that 'the concept is what makes the thing be there, while, all the while, it isn't' (*ibid.*, p. 43). In essence, the concept masks the hole in reality making it (w)hole by acting as a linguistic placeholder which is given agency and life through the body of a

performer. In repositioning Hegel's *Philosophy of History* I draw on Žižek's use of the Historical Theory of Repetition in arguing for the power that *The Real* as fiction possesses as a catalyst for shaping young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

For Žižek, 'By repetition [fiction] becomes a real and ratified existence' (*ibid.*, p. 54). Moreover, these fictional figures and characters become inculcated into culture where they are treated as if they were actual people. Even though these fictional figures or characters are often treated as if they existed it is important to remember as Tom Eyers argues that the function of *The Real* when viewed through the veil of fiction helps to structure,

the psychic enclosure [whereby the presence of the fictional concept on-screen] [...] is *constituted* and *reconstituted* precariously as signifiers 'pass on' the job of standing in for the subject in its absence (Eyers 2012, p. 74; emphasis in the original).

This means that a performer stands in or acts as a proxy for the fiction. In essence, the flesh and blood performer acts as a placeholder capable of *allowing the fiction to occupy them*. The function of the signifier as a proxy reveals the power that images and the symbolic have in our worlds, yet without the underpinning psychic enclosure provided by *The Real*.

In other words, the functions of language and sounds support the construction of on-screen representations. Without this functionality, without this *je ne sais quoi* (Žižek 2006) the internal consistency and validity associated with the situated nature of these fictions would be destabilised. Thus, in following the lines of argument concerning the limits of language *and* representation I reposition

the Lacanian notion of [T]he *Real* as that rock which resists symbolization [sic] [arguing that it] is extremely useful for a non-naïve notion of ideology. By non-naïve notion of ideology, I mean a notion of ideology which avoids the usual traps of, if you say ideology, false consciousness, then you automatically imply some kind of natural direct approach to what reality truly is, etc [...] reality itself is never fully constituted, and this is what ideological spectral fantasies try to mask. Not some positive reality but precisely the fact that what we usually call in sociology the 'social construction of reality' always fails (Žižek 2005, p. 101; my emphasis).

In drilling down as to how the 'social construction of reality' always fails I turn to Žižek who argues that a distinction exists which calls into question what the social construction of reality means as

the very notion of what 'reality' (or 'effectively to exist') means or what 'counts' as reality has [...] changed, so that we cannot simply presuppose a *neutral external measure that allows us to judge that, with modern science, we come closer to the 'same' reality as that with which premodern mythology was dealing* (Žižek 2005, p. 112; emphasis in the original).

When applied to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, in deciding what counts as reality a modal distinction which differentiates terms must be made in order to tease out the context-specific and situated nature of the examples. This can be achieved by turning to Ian Maitland Buchanan's *Oxford Dictionary of Critical and Cultural Studies* which provides evidence in differentiating between the Virtual, the Real (as in what is real, not the Lacanian Real, and the Actual). For Buchanan (2010)

both the actual and the virtual are fully real—the former has concrete existence, while the latter does not, but it is no less real for that fact. The importance of this distinction can readily be seen by giving thought to the state of being of an idea: it may only exist in our heads, or on paper, but its effects are fully real and may also be fully actual too. Initially treated as an esoteric distinction of interest only to specialists in the field of ontology, since the advent of computer games, and more specifically the Internet, this distinction has become very important because *it allows that what is seen or experienced on screen is still real, even if it isn't actual* (pp. 4-5; my emphasis).

Although I agree with Buchanan's viewpoint, he fails to point out that this is not a historically unique proposition. For example, I argue, as a form of technological media that television was the first technology to exploit these properties. Hence, computer games and the Internet may have supplanted television in this regard, however, I argue that it was television which first allowed people to experience the dualities of the virtual and the actual.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is no solid foundational structure to the social construction of reality as ideologies shift and change affecting human perceptions in different ways throughout their life course. Thus, lacking stability

these notions of reality are ultimately doomed to failure. This is particularly true when measured against innovations and changes in the philosophy of technology. With the evolutionary nature of technology in mind, various appropriations of *The Real* are useful for fostering a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, but returning to *The Real* as a void the impetus for a discussion around the limitations of *The Real* become apparent when measured against the visual domain and I argue that alternatives lie in the domain of the auditory.

2.2.1 The auditory dimension of The Real

This thesis shifts in focus from the restrictive nature of *The Real* in the visual register to a consideration of *The Real* in the auditory register through the function of speech and the production of discourse. In repositioning *The Real* I make connections to the unconscious in the sense that both *The Real* and the unconscious are impossible to directly observe (Cousins in Freud 2005, xvi). In the Introduction to Sigmund Freud's, *The Unconscious* Mark Cousins points out that,

Consciousness is full of 'gaps'. It simply does not function as a *continuous and exhaustive representation* of what we know. We *forget things*, we make *slips of the tongue*, and above all we hold most thoughts, feelings and knowledge in a realm of latency (Cousins in Freud 2005, ix; my emphasis).

Given this, there is correspondence here with the work of Semprun (1997) (discussed earlier) which will be synthesised with the works of Don Ihde (2007) and Friedrich Kittler (2009). Moreover, this quotation points out the limits of language *and* representation. Slips of the tongue manifest in chapter 6, forgetting occurs throughout chapters 6 and 7 and an inability to explain why particular thoughts and feelings occur brings to light the latent natures of the unconscious and *The Real*. I now reposition *The Real* as important to the auditory register.

Don Ihde makes an important point for focusing on the auditory register of *The Real* – 'The *silence of the invisible* comes to life in sound' (Ihde 2007, pp. 3-4; my emphasis). In other words, that which cannot be assimilated via direct representation in the visual register can be experienced through sound, that which cannot be seen can be heard through speech and discourse. Thus, Cousins' point that most

experiences are held in the realm of latency directly corresponds with the auditory *Real* that Kittler positions as

‘...acoustic effects of the real’ (Kittler 2009, xxviii; emphasis in original).

Subsequently, Ihde makes a further important point that corresponds to the methodology of chapter 4 in the sense that this thesis is ‘concerned with the roots of reflection in human experience, [so one] must [...] listen to the *sounds as meaningful*’ (*ibid.*, p. 4; emphasis in original). Furthermore, in foreshadowing the notion of *The Real* and its connection to *phantasy/fantasy* as the product of mediated fiction in section three it is important to note that,

Repressed psychical material cannot be drawn towards the reality principle; it is not even conscious. It *turns away from reality* (*ibid.*, xii-xiii; my emphasis).

The *Real* in this sense is the underlying structure supporting *phantasy/fantasy/mediated fiction* through the functions of speech and the product of discourse pertaining to young women’s psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Furthermore, the limits of psychic representation linked to wider arguments around the irrepresentability of what it means to have and to hold a secret, the changing nature of ideology and death (see chapters 5, 6, and 7) correspond to Cousins’ point that much like the contextual examples used by this thesis, in general, ‘there has been an increasing reluctance to refer to a quantitative dimension within psychical life without being able to assign numbers or measured relations to it’ (*ibid.*, xv).

Ostensibly, this highlights the ontological and epistemological choices pertaining to the use of qualitative over quantitative methods in chapter four. Indeed, psychical life cannot be objectively measured. In continuing with limitations and the need for reconfigurations, the shift to include the auditory dimension of *The Real* speaks to the fact that television in itself is audiovisual in nature, yet it is not the auditory dimension of the televisual that has been ignored, indeed, due to the nature of technology it *cannot* be ignored. Rather, an acceptance of the limits of the visual in researching television is what is important, as the auditory dimension of *The Real* has been

ignored in favour of external, visual identification and observations of affects. It is as Ihde argues,

What is being called visualism here as a symptom is *the whole reductionist tendency*, which in seeking to purify experiences belies its *richness* at the source. A turn to the auditory dimension is thus potentially more than a simple changing of variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional *double reduction* of vision as the main variable and metaphor. This deliberate change of emphasis from the visual to the auditory dimension at first symbolises a hope to find material for *a recovery of the richness of primary experience* that is now forgotten or covered over in the too tightly interpreted visualist traditions (Ihde 2007, p. 13).

Indeed, following the line of argument connecting the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction with the tensions created via a positioning of the signifiers, 'reduction' and 'reductionist' with the signifier 'richness' provides a pathway for the reconfiguration of *The Real*. This reconfiguration corresponds to an embracement of the complexities involved in fictional, televisual experiences and the development of a new model of televisual experience. The next section documents the enigmatic nature of Lacan's concept of *Jouissance* connecting it to *The Real*, *Phantasy* and *Fantasy* as a product of *Mediated Fiction* and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*.

2.3 Theorising *Jouissance* as a mode of intensity allied to young women's levels of engagement with contemporary, televisual fiction

This section of the thesis addresses the entanglements, interconnectedness, interdependences and ubiquity of *Jouissance* (there are a variety of different types and modes of *Jouissance* that are referred to throughout this thesis) and its associations with *The Real*, *Phantasy* and *Fantasy* as products of *Mediated Fiction*, with the *Object a/Objet Petit a*'s relation to *Jouissance* being discussed in the final section. Given this, it is important to note that *Jouissance* is an enigmatic idea conceptualised by Jacques Lacan. *Jouissance* serves a multitude of purposes for the examination, interrogation, and destabilisation of a range of political, ideological, and cultural dimensions of enquiry.

Moreover, in a thesis that examines young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it is useful at this stage to differentiate *phallic jouissance* from *feminine jouissance*, with the aim of positioning *feminine jouissance* at the forefront of enquiry. Drawing on ideas appropriated in *Culture and the Unconscious*, Susannah Radstone adopts a feminist position arguing that,

Psychoanalysis has sometimes been accused of being ahistorical – for drawing upon a set of concepts, including the Oedipus complex and *castration*, for instance, that seem to take little account of historical or cultural variation (Radstone 2007, p. 7; my emphasis).

Castration pertains to Lacan's *phallic jouissance* which is theorised separately to *feminine jouissance*. An exegesis of *feminine jouissance* is provided by Barnard and Fink (2002). Moreover, in a thesis that examines young women's psychic, unconscious experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it is useful to examine the *jouissance* associated with women—*feminine jouissance*. Originally ascribed to Lacan's *Seminar XX Encore! On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (Lacan 1998) recent commentators have provided stringent readings of the concept of *feminine jouissance*.

Feminine *jouissance* is an important concept as the term can be repositioned so that the complex nature of young women's experiences of televisual fiction can be critically understood. Furthermore, it is useful to differentiate between *feminine jouissance* and the default, masculine *jouissance*, which is just expressed as *jouissance*. In short, *feminine jouissance* is beyond the phallus in the sense that it is an 'Other enjoyment' (Lacan 1998) or a supplementary enjoyment. With this in mind, it is useful to examine the work of Marie-Hélène Brousse (2021) as according to commentary by Thomas Svolos it 'highlights a usually unseen libidinal approach to [...] human experience and sexuality.'

This sexual desire is re-positioned as a mechanism in accounting for the attraction and subsequent experiences that young women may have when watching contemporary television shows (I have avoided the use of the terms enjoyment or joy and pleasure) although other scholars use them (see later) as Lacan claims these cannot be represented, which is useful for pointing out the limitations of language

and representation in the sense that even though used, these concepts have no concrete definition, thus are not conclusively defined by those using them.

In accounting for the complexities of which I speak it is important to note that the ‘two terms, “women” and “feminine,” do not overlap (Brousse 2021, p. 2). Given this, throughout the oral histories that were conducted, with the data collected, analysed, and reviewed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* are designed to inherently appeal to women, yet if those women possess *jouissance* that stands in opposition to *feminine jouissance*, unexpected outcomes emerge (c.f., chapter 6 on attitudes to *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* as it pertains to aspects of culture in particular). Furthermore, in following the line of argument corresponding with how television is experienced through conscious, external, representation this thesis eschews historical accounts which favour the reception of televisual fiction as propagated by these hegemonic ideologies.

These seminal works by inveterate scholars are limiting in nature and possess a fidelity to external representation. It is important to remind the reader that it is the aim of this thesis to move beyond identification and conscious affects and into the realm of the unconscious drawing on the fact that Brousse explains that ‘Jouissance, [...] *does not respond to identifications*’ (*ibid.*, p. 3; my emphasis). A corrective is required whereby alternatives to identificatory models of experiencing television are addressed, particularly with reference to the unconscious. It is important to note that there are varying interpretations as to whether or not *Jouissance* is unconscious with (Fierens, 2021 and Rickert 2007) saying it is.

Thomas Rickert’s definition of *Jouissance* suffers from what Jacques Allain Miller points out as being an abuse of Lacan’s original theorisations ‘by a spate of American, Australian and British critics, who have, [...], grossly misrepresented him (Fink in Lacan 1998, vii). Rickert points out that for him, *Jouissance* corresponds with,

a French word customarily left untranslated, [that] means enjoyment, but not in the traditional sense [...] Instead, it refers to the, again, *largely unconscious enjoyment* one derives from habits, attitudes, beliefs, and activities (2007, p. 3; emphasis in original and emphasis added).

This infraction, which requires a corrective, echoes Bruce Fink's contestation further, pertaining to academics utilising tertiary commentaries of Lacan's work that lack the rigor of the original works. For the purposes of this thesis, I reposition Derek Hook who proclaims,

Jouissance *is not*—as is sometimes assumed—*unconscious*, [...] Jouissance thus entails an 'erotic of transgression': overstepping a boundary, the fact that something illicit is involved, increases the subject's enjoyment enormously (Hook *in* Stavrakakis 2019, p. 276; emphasis in original).

I argue that *Jouissance* is not unconscious, but rather pre-conscious due to its associations with *The Real*. The emergence of the unconscious can be seen through its effects and its affects. In addition, I follow Bou-Ali's (2022) notion of *Surplus- jouissance* [which] is a fundamental concept for Jacques Lacan and has *a singular function for the constitution of unconscious mechanisms*, so to reiterate, *Jouissance* is *not* unconscious in and of itself.

The illicitness of which Hook speaks is manifested in discussions pertaining to issues concerning statutory rape (chapter 6) and death (chapter 7), both arguably taboo topics unfit for discussion in polite society. Furthermore, in accessing *The Real* through the veil of *Jouissance* the ineffable natures of not being able to directly represent rape or death are experienced through mediation and a screen of fantasy, discussed in the next section. When read alongside *Seminar XX* (1998) and *Reading Seminar XX* (2002), Brousse's book (2021) provides important functional purposes in that they act as blueprints for the study of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction as Brousse's aim is to examine 'what there is to say about the experiences of feminine jouissance in our time' (2021, p. 4).

Unlike Brousse, this thesis attempts to examine *feminine jouissance* through its condensation with young women's experiences of the contemporary, televisual fictions of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* as Brousse focuses on *feminine jouissance* at the exclusion of its relationship to women's experience claiming the book is 'not about women' (*ibid.*, p. 6). Ultimately, this thesis reconfigures the notion of *feminine jouissance* positioning it as a tool through which young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be critically understood—that of a mode of intensity allied to young women's levels of engagement with contemporary,

televisual fiction—be that the high intensity of ‘love’ or complete indifference (see chapter 6 for responses).

2.4 Jouissance and its relationship to The Real

Dean (2000) argues that ‘...the real is generative, not simply constraining’ (2000, p. 51). This notion of generativity has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis echoing the sentiments of Katerina Kolozova (2014) who claims the structural properties of *The Real* possess the power and function of generativity for building new worlds and being a status that can be assumed by other realities.

In turn, Lacan’s concept of *Jouissance* and its relation to *The Real* is clearly articulated by Dean as

In Lacanian theory, The Woman and the *père-jouissant* occupy this position of plenitude, beyond division. As their mythic status suggests, and as Lacan’s famous pronouncements concerning The Woman indicate, none of these figures actually exists. But this fact of nonexistence does nothing to diminish the effectiveness of their functioning (*ibid.*, p. 89).

This is an important point to appropriate in relation to explaining the effects that televisual fiction has on young women as general viewers and fans, see chapter 6 in particular on U.S. Culture and ideologies and the next section on *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* for further evidence and explanation. Furthermore, drawing on Freud’s notion of psychical reality, is how Lacan develops his notion of *The Real* (Dean 2000). Taken in this light, *The Real* as a synonym for *Jouissance* reflects the psychical nature of *Jouissance*, yet in spite of its psychic nature, as previously mentioned, it is not unconscious.

Taken in this context, Žižek argues that,

If we define the real as [...] a paradoxical, chimerical entity which, although it doesn’t exist, has a series of properties and can produce a series of effects, it becomes clear that the real par excellence is *jouissance*: *jouissance* doesn’t exist; it is impossible, but it produces a lot of traumatic effects (1989, p. 184).

Furthermore, Flisfeder (2012) discusses how the 'cinema interpellates subjects as spectators by reproducing a degree of enjoyment' (p. 13). Although this enjoyment contrasts with trauma, it is the closest translation of the original French and explains in the words of Dean (2000) why *jouissance* is just as '...likely to be experienced in the mosh pit as they are in the opera hall' (p. 279). Drawing on the notion of *jouissance* as enjoyment it is useful to appropriate the work of Paul Kingsbury (2008) who draws on Žižek in providing a counterargument to the interpretation of *Jouissance* provided by Wilson who defined *Jouissance* as unrelated to joy in the sense that he argues that he seeks to 'rigorously distinguish joy from jouissance' (2008, xviii).

Thus, 'Translated by Žižek as 'enjoyment', [...] Žižek emphasizes both the celebratory and bizarre sides of *Jouissance* as part of the 'metastases of enjoyment' in consumption [...] (Kingsbury 2008, p. 49). For Wilson, *Jouissance* is not related to Joy, but as Joy is a part of enjoyment for Žižek, I argue against Wilson's thesis. Despite this, the epistemological tensions between Žižek and Wilson are productive in the sense that in a consumer society, from the perspective of joy/enjoyment, televisual fiction has the power to both attract and repulse viewers and both of these aspects can be seen further in chapters 6 and 7.

2.5 *Jouissance* and Fantasy

It is argued that the relationship between *Jouissance* and *Fantasy* is paramount for cultivating a critical understanding of viewers and their relationships to particular television shows. Some shows 'grab our attention', they 'move us' or cause us to question certain aspects of our lives. In other words, "*Jouissance*' [...] is fixed, fixated' (Laurent, 2019).

The fixed and fixated language appropriated by Laurent relates to the notion of cathexis, where through *Jouissance* a fictional object, storyline, etc fascinates the viewer to such an extent that they become fully immersed in the world they are viewing. Furthermore, Durić and Matijašević (2019) argue that,

Jouissance is clearly on the side of the pleasure principle, sometimes to such an extent that it can completely wipe out and dislocate the reality principle (p. 2).

This dislocation of the reality principle points back to media narratives shaping viewers' particular expectations. Thus, it may be that viewers cultivate unrealistic expectations for a partner through coming into contact with gender failures in fictional televisual narratives. Yet it may just be the catalyst for action to attend to something in their lives that may have been neglected, such as the need to find a partner.

For Laurent (2019),

there has to be at least a tension between desire and *Jouissance*, there has to be a possibility of *displacement*. This means that the subject can be fixated but at the same time has to have a desire for something else (*ibid.*).

Finding a mode of *Jouissance* that satisfies desire is dependent upon the level of the mode of *Jouissance* experienced. Studies detailing the intensity of this excess or surplus enjoyment are described by Moncayo (2018). For Moncayo, these different experiences or levels of intensities within the wider discourse of psychoanalysis are often considered in an opposing relational dialectical structure (with pleasure and pain forming the cornerstones) and this helps to explain why we are drawn as viewers and can experience pleasure from things that are both aesthetically pleasing as well as depictions which disgust us.

Furthermore, following the line of argument related to the limitations of language *and* representation, Scott Wilson provides insight into the unique, complex, and vicissitudinal experiences, which lack any fixed meaning as they pertain to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Wilson explains that,

just as there are different languages and different formations of discourse, so there are different modalities of pleasure. There is no hierarchy in the relationship between language and pleasure, words and things. *Different modalities of pleasure*—including pain, suffering and misery, laughter and tears—inhabit the gaps in language and articulate the experience and knowledge of things in different ways. Pleasure silently shapes and configures the order of things (Wilson 2008, xv).

What is interesting about this quotation in relation to my own theorising of *Jouissance* is that as different modalities of pleasure exist, subjective reactions to them in the form of experiences will differ. It is through these differences that laughter, sadness, terror, indifference, loving, liking and empathy and sympathy all circulate within the

discourse of young women through individual subjectivities towards their experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

2.6 Experiencing Pleasure and Pain through the Television

Jouissance as a synonym for trauma, which can be experienced as both pleasure and pain can best be described through an analysis of the work of Amit Pinchevski. Pinchevski points out a very important factor allied to the level of access granted to viewers with regards to what is watched (on streaming, post-network television platforms, in particular). Pinchevski argues that violence has shifted from direct, to indirect, and from the immediate to the mediated (Pinchevski 2015).

Further studies include Ute Holl's (2017) and Friedrich Kittler's (1999) links to the concept of what Hugo Münsterberg calls 'Psycho-technology'. Kittler points out that, 'Psychotechnology relays psychology and media technology under the pretext that each psychic apparatus is also a technological one, and vice versa' (p. 160). Pinchevski's interpretation of Kittler's propositions can be appropriated to examine how trauma is differentiated when approached through the lens of what some consider to be 'normal' *Jouissance* as opposed to Lacan's argument for '*Feminine Jouissance*' (1998).

Elaboration of this point, leads to the question: what exactly is a *feminine jouissance* and how can it be applied and reified to television to explain women's subjective experiences? As a reminder to the reader, this would be allied to levels of engagement and their subsequent modes of intensity or psychoanalytic investment— cathexis—in the TV shows *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Furthermore, and as aforementioned, a clear definition of *feminine jouissance* is that it is a supplementary jouissance or an enjoyment of the Other; this explains, why structurally, as a man, I am unable to comprehend young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction (Lacan 1998).

Subsequently, Brian Ott examines 'the various pleasure/meaning/identity configurations that are possible when audiences engage televisual texts' (Ott 2007, p. 26). In addition, Ott brings attention to the limitations of approaching this

investigation from the subject position of a male, providing a link to scholars who interpret televisual phenomena through different lenses. These various pleasure/meaning/identity configurations link back to Wilson's assertions and the line of argument that there are limitations to language *and* representation, particularly when they are relayed in a continuum of possibilities and expressed as structurally ineffable.

The penultimate section of this chapter examines the relationship that *The Real* has to phantasy and fantasy as products of mediated fiction, documenting fantasy's entanglement with Lacan's concepts of the object a/objet petit a. This provides evidence in support of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction as discussed in the upcoming data analysis chapters. As a pre-cursor to a discussion of the relationship of *The Real* to *phantasy* and *fantasy* as products of *mediated fiction* it is useful to examine the etymology of *phantasy* and *fantasy*, marking their differences as well as explaining how the two together, when synthesised, create the original concept of *mediated fiction*. Finally, the function played by fantasy in the shaping of fiction relates back to my conceptualisation of *The Real* and through my repositioning of the term, its structural similarities to fiction.

2.7 Articulating the Orthographic Differences of Phantasy and Fantasy

This section of the thesis investigates the orthographic differences between the concepts of *phantasy* and *fantasy*. It differentiates between products of the imagination and the displacement of these non-material ideas into the realm of materially lived experience. In other words, it considers how the virtual becomes represented in the actual.

This intervention draws on two lines of argument, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Firstly, it examines dimensions of *phantasy* and *fantasy* as the product of *mediated fiction* in furtherance of developing a new model of televisual experience that both acknowledges yet moves beyond identificatory and affective models of television and theorizes a model that synthesizes the elements of identification and the affective with the role of the unconscious. Secondly, and following the second line of argument, the role of *The Real* is considered in articulating the limits of language *and* representation in televisual experience.

2.8 Orthographically Positioning *Phantasy* and *Fantasy*

Jennifer Henderson argues that the 'orthographic difference between an *f* and a *ph* [...] can indicate a difference [in relation to *fantasy* and *phantasy*] between a daydream and [an] unconscious wish' (Henderson 1994, p. 5). I do not concur here with Jennifer Henderson's assessment of attributing the signifier 'f' to a daydream, as daydreams fall into the category of psychic experience, sharing a space with the unconscious. In essence, the modal distinction between these terms is repositioned in accounting for *phantasy*'s correspondence to the psychic. Furthermore, another point of view is provided earlier in history by Susan Isaacs.

For Isaacs, drawing on Freud's translators,

...a special spelling of the word 'phantasy', with the ph, [...] differentiate[s] the psycho-analytical significance of the term [as distinct from] ... *conscious* [...] *fictions*, and so on (1948, p. 79; emphasis added).

Isaacs' spelling of fantasy with a ph relates to unconscious fictions such as daydreams, as opposed to mediated, consciously experienced fictions which are viewed on television. Drilling deeper into the bedrock of this concept, the 'ph' *phantasy* is demarcated from *fantasy* in this regard, due to the nature and function of *phantasy* being '*unconscious*' (Isaacs, 1948; Grotstein, 2008; Steiner, 2018[2003]). In addition, the term *fantasy* is pertinent in terms of its relationship with ontic/material reality. In other words, ideas find their expressions in mediated form on-screen through portrayals and depictions.

Furthermore, it is important for this thesis to differentiate between *situated being* and *existence*, as from a philosophical sensibility and an ontological standpoint, fictional characters are *situated beings* that *do not* have material existence (Reicher, 2010). Reicher's argument reflects a similar argument proposed by philosopher, Ian Buchanan that the realm of the virtual is just as real as the actual, yet it is the virtual that does not have actual, concrete existence (Buchanan 2010).

In expressing the ways in which *phantasy* becomes conscious I follow the line of argument connected to the emergence of the unconscious within speech (as detailed

in the prior section). This argument is also taken up again in chapter 4's methodology. At this stage, it is useful to synthesise and reposition the terms *phantasy* and *fantasy* as representative of my original concept of *mediated fiction* as this provides a key aspect intended to foster a small step towards a model of televisual fiction that embraces psychic and bodily dimensions (see chapter 3 and the bodymind concept through the synthesis of the signifiers identification, affect, unconscious).

2.8.1 Fantasy (as materially mediated fiction)

The term '*fantasy*' (as repositioned for this thesis) refers to *fictions* which are mediated by television. As women engage with fictional characters, events, and settings it is important to explore televisual fiction and fictional characters in more depth, particularly their ontological complexities as these complexities assist with the development of a critical understanding of women's experiences of televisual fiction. Both seminal and contemporary definitions of fiction are adopted and (re)appropriated from the works of Jane Mobley (1974) and Maria E. Reicher (2010).

For Mobley,

As a Fiction, it requires the [viewers] entering an '*Other*' World and following a hero whose adventures *take place in a reality far removed* from the mundane reality of the [viewers] waking experience (p. 117; emphasis added).

In addition, Reicher (2010) articulates fictional characters as

contingent objects. That is, they do not exist necessarily. Rather, they owe their existence to particular (human) activities through which they are *created* (p. 116; emphasis in original).

With this point in mind it is useful to articulate how fantasy interactions between performers as mediated subjects/fictional objects and young women occur in relation to television. To unpack this further it is useful to draw on the Lacanian concept of the *objet petit a*. The most useful account in attempting to connect the relationship between television, *fantasy*, and the *objet petit a* can be found in the scholarly work

of Slavoj Žižek and his project *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997). For Žižek, the concept of *Fantasy* is best explained through its relationship to what he calls

the 'objectively subjective' underlying fantasy [...] which two subjects are never able to assume, [...] (p. 95).

Due to the inability for two subjects to assume a position, the *objet petit a* is inculcated into the viewing subject's reality to mediate access to the subject's unattainable object of desire. Applied to the practice of viewing televisual fiction, Renata Salecl points out that,

One [...] does not need the real person present, what is necessary is the existence of the image. [T]hat the subject loves in the [O]ther the image it would like to inhabit him-or herself (1996, p. 187, emphasis added).

The disconnection of the real person with the image, or in this case, fictional television characters, produces a relationship with the character (see the role of *fantasy* in chapter 5). Or more specifically, the image becomes a representation of how the self would like to imagine its own desire. The implication of this is that fictional characters become read through the relationship that the self has to its own fantasies.

There is also a question of 'inhabit' and the assumption that image is something that is occupied. In response, it could be argued that fantasies are not placeholders for the expression of desire; they are desire itself. Thus, it is important to tease out the relationships between desire and fantasy in the context of television as *phantasy*, *fantasy* and *mediated fiction* play important roles in helping to explain young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, see chapters 5 and 6.

Moreover, in addressing the importance of the relationship between desire and fantasy, André Nusselder's research provides a useful tool so that issues pertaining to 'the space of fantasy between individual 'inner' life and social 'outer' life' can be addressed (Nusselder 2013). The subject matter echoes the relationship between conscious viewing and unconscious experience. Furthermore, my thesis extends Freudo-Lacanian notions of *phantasy* and *fantasy* condensing them to form an original concept through the product of *mediated fiction*.

In addition, Nusselder states that *fantasy* is ‘the primary medium for the subject of desire’ (Nusselder 2013, p. 1); this point can be extended to include the notion that *fantasy* is the catalyst for an attachment or cathexis (Edelman 2004) to both an object-cause of desire and an unattainable object of desire, circulating in a fictional void through the *object a/objet petit a*, discussed in the next section and giving rise to bodily sensations through *Jouissance* (as discussed in the previous section). The next section deals with the function of phantasy as both metonymic desire and metaphor, two useful linguistic tools for capturing how *The Real* might be expressed or represented on television and how women’s desires circulate within a televisual context directed toward fictional objects, characters and situations.

2.8.2 Fantasy as Metonymic Desire vs. Fantasy as Metaphor

I turn to an analysis of *fantasy* through the concepts of *metonymy* and *metaphor* where [t]he linguistic devices of metaphor and metonymy are linked to the operation of the unconscious by their connection with Freud’s terms of condensation and displacement (Bancroft 2012, p. 124). In contrast to Metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson provide a formal definition of the concept of metonymy. They state that ‘using one entity to refer to another that is related to it [...] is a case of [...] *metonymy*’ (p. 35, emphasis in original).

An example of metonymy is provided by Fiske and Hartley (1978 [2003], p. 32) who explain that the metonymic mode of television signs are used where a part signifies the whole in the sense that ‘...the crown is [...] a metonymic sign for sovereignty.’ Appropriating the work of Feng (2017) ‘metonymy is fundamental to visual meaning making [in the sense that] conceptual metonymies are realised in [...] moving images’ making this study important for articulating the different ways in which women experience televisual fiction internally and introspectively beyond the domain of external representation (p. 441). It can be further argued that due to an ontological complexity between women as viewers of televisual fiction and fictional characters operating in different dimensions of reality, metonymy cannot be used to characterise a relationship between a human being and a fictional character, but one must realise that the human being (as viewer) and the fictional character (as object) are both human.

The ontological tensions that exist in Feng's argument come about through the sense that, 'in metonymies, the mapping or connection between two things is in the same domain' (*ibid.*, p. 443). Arguably, this could be true if one differentiates mediated reality and actual reality as separate dimensions of experience, or not, if one considers that the mediated and situated nature of produced television although representative of a different dimension of reality, still occurs in the actual reality of lived experience. Finally, it is useful to appropriate the concept of abstraction in relation to modality (Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to explain how, within fantasy, fictional characters 'refers to how close the representation is to reality' (Feng 2017, p. 451) but at the same time fictional characters can be thought of as liminal or 'as existing somewhere between reality and unreality' (Turner 2017, p. 12).

In articulating the relationship of metonymy to *fantasy* it is useful to draw on Lacan's assertion in *Écrits* that the very notion of engaging with *fantasy* in general, and televisually mediated *fantasy* revolves around the concept of desire. For Lacan, '...desire is metonymy' (2006, p. 439). Elaboration of this point links the concept of metonymy to displacement or combination in the signifying chain: metonymy: combination: displacement. In contrast, *metaphor* is linked to condensation or substitution in the signifying chain: metaphor: substitution: condensation.

At this stage it is useful for the concepts of condensation and displacement and their relationship to metaphor and metonymy to be developed in relation to the televisual and young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Firstly, it is useful to turn to the work of Katherine P. Ewing (1990, p. 266) as she argues that '...the psyche uses metaphor and metonymy to organize and internalize interpersonal experience.' In addition, she points out that with relation to displacement and metonymy '...the psyche evades the memory of a disturbing experience by focusing on a peripheral detail, with comes to represent the experience itself in a manner that is not affectively charged' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, John J. Stine (2005) argues that '...a metaphor is a symbol that represents a condensation of multiple impulses, conflicts, fantasies and affects.' The operation of these can be seen across chapters 5-7 in the data analysis chapters.

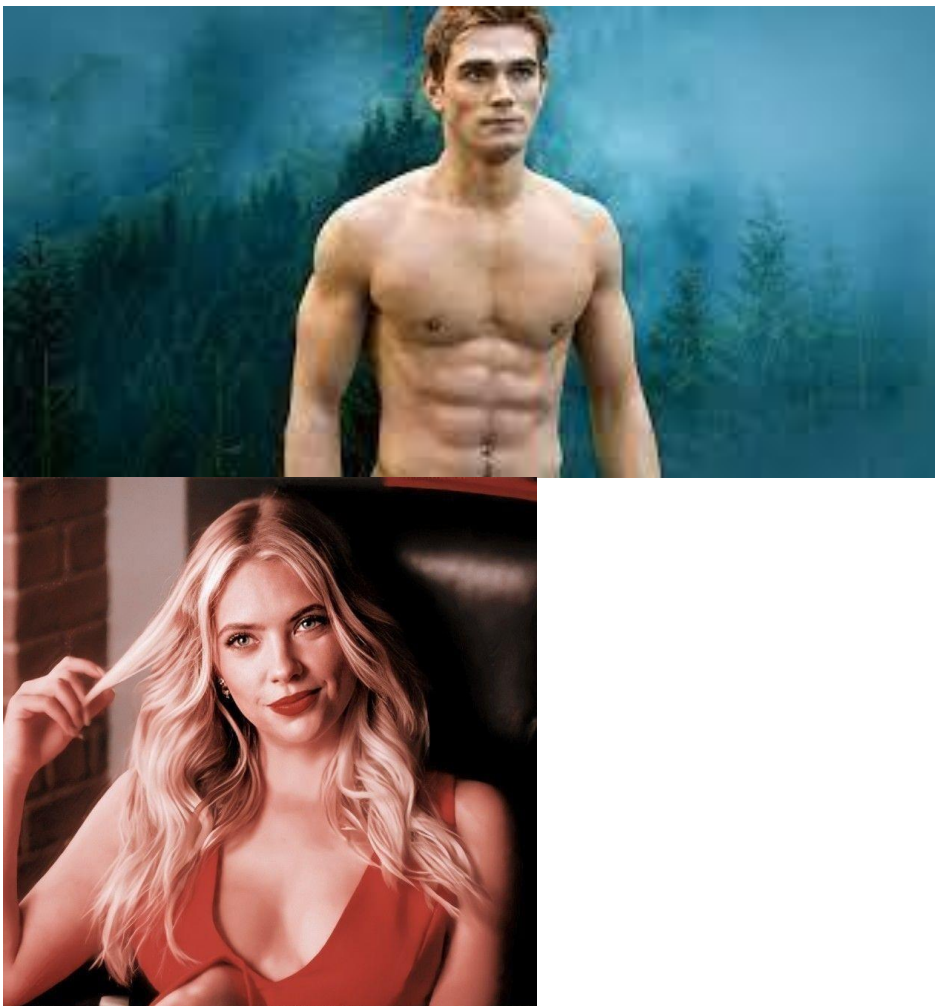
Furthermore, drawing on Freud, Huskinson (2011) appropriates the theory of Displacement in the sense that,

Displacement [...] distorts reality by replacing one idea with another which in some way is closely associated with it. By this process, the emotional signification of the real object or idea is separated from it and attached to a different, unexpected one (2011, p. 88).

Drawing on Huskinson's point that displacement is a distortion of reality, the fictional characters that young women view are arguably likely to be hypermasculine and hyperfeminine portrayals that are unlikely to be encountered in everyday life. These portrayals (see **Figure 1**, below) are what often trigger desire in the viewer.

Furthermore, sixteen-year-old young men and women as depicted by the fictional characters, Archie Andrews and Hanna Marin do not correspond with the realities of High Schoolers cosmetic appearances (see chapter 6).

Figure 1 Hypermasculine and Hyperfeminine Depictions in Riverdale and Pretty Little Liars



A counterargument to this point could also see such fictional characters as indicative of gender failures, whereby gender roles, rules, and assumptions are constantly challenged (c.f., Coyote and Spoon, 2013). Having considered the notion of metonymy it is now logical, in the next section to tackle metaphor.

2.8.3 Metaphor and *Fantasy*

Lakoff and Johnson (1980[2003]) argue (p. 3) that, ‘what we experience, [...] is very much a matter of Metaphor.’ Giving a formal definition of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson describe this as ‘...*experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*’ (p. 5, emphasis in original). Given this, viewers arguably engage with television to metaphorically connect with desirable experiences.

A subcategory of metaphor (*ibid*, p. 25) called Ontological metaphors allows viewers of televisual fiction to understand the relationship between themselves, what they view and how they view it. For example, ‘our experiences of physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, *ways of viewing events*, activities, *emotions*, ideas, etc., as entities and substances (emphasis added). Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson’s research (1980, p. 25), Harrison (2013) points out that,

Ontological metaphors allow us to conceive of “things” which are not objects as if they were objects by picking “out parts of our experience and treat[ing] them as [if they were] discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind.”

The conceptualisation of multiple objects on television, being considered as single entities, may be known by an all-encompassing moniker through the use of the concept of the ontological metaphor (e.g., Aria, Hanna, Spencer and Emily are collectively known as *Pretty Little Liars*). In addition, appropriation of Kappelhoff and Greifenstein’s concepts from the chapter: *Audiovisual Metaphors Embodied Meaning and Processes of Fictionalization* [Sic] is a key concept allowing for a determination of how fictionalisation works within the context of television.

For Kappelhoff and Greifenstein, ‘...fictionalization can be reconstructed as processes of metaphorization [sic].’ Indeed, one can view the formation of metaphor itself as a fundamental driving force of any fictionalization [sic] (2016, p. 184). Given this,

Kappelhoff and Greifenstein go on to explain that 'Metaphor can be described as [...] projecting two different complexes of experience,' [...] (n.p. e-book). The hybrid nature of this experience can be repositioned to explain how the process of fictionalisation relies on elements of what Buchanan (2010) calls the lifeworld, or in other words, actual, as opposed to virtually mediated reality.

Subsequent articulations draw on Lacan's use of Roman Jakobson's conceptualization of metaphor, which is described as in *absentia*, where one signifier is replaced for another. Jakobson's term, allows for a dialogue to take place whereby just like Žižek's example of the empty signifier receiving occupation by Roger O Thornhill in *North by Northwest* (Žižek, 1992), the 'being' of a fictional character is in *absentia*. Thus, performers occupy the metaphoric fantasy space *as a substitute* for that which is conceptually real, but something, that in essence, *lacks corporeal actuality* (emphasis added). It is these arguments that lend themselves to taking a small step towards actualising *The Real* on television (through metaphor and mediation).

2.8.4 The Real's Relationship to Phantasy/Fantasy or The Function of Fantasy in The Real

In positioning the role of *The Real* as the underlying core supporting and mediating *phantasy*, *fantasy* and *fiction* and its correspondence to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, it is useful to reposition Freud (2005) in providing a way of explaining how televisual fiction can be understood under the umbrella of a type of art within culture. This repositioning highlights the processes involved in transforming psychic phantasies into a part of material reality through *fantasy* as a form of *mediated fiction*.

Art brings about a reconciliation of the two principles [pleasure and reality] in a unique way. The artist is originally someone who, unable to come to terms with the renunciation of drive satisfaction initially demanded by reality, turns away from it and gives free rein to erotic and ambitious wishes in his fantasy life. Thanks to special gifts, however, [they] find... [their] way back to reality from this fantasy world by shaping [their] fantasies *into new kinds of reality*, which are appreciated by people as *valid representations of the real world*. Thus, in a certain way [they] actually becomes the hero, king, *creator*, favourite [they] wanted to be, without having to make the enormous detour of actually changing the outside world (Freud 1958, p. 224).

Whereas Freud uses the masculine terms 'his' and 'he' to reflect the artistic creations of I. Marlene King's *Pretty Little Liars* and Greg Berlanti's, *Riverdale* the gender- neutral terms 'they' and 'their' are more apt reflecting the diversity and inclusion that forms a part of the twenty-first century, as opposed to the text's original nineteenth century origins and patriarchal bent (Freud 1958). Freud's point concerning new kinds of reality echoes the words of Katerina Kolozova and my repositioning of her terms conflating *The Real* with fiction. Furthermore, the term '*phantasy*' is preferred to Freud's use of the term '*fantasy*' as this distinguishes mental processes from *mediated fiction*.

Finally, representations of reality possessing qualities of verisimilitude are interesting as not all fantasy representations are valid representations of reality. Indeed, *Riverdale* oscillates between two divergent poles of fantasy representation which could be true to life and those that could definitely never be.

Moreover, *fantasy* and reality and *fantasy's* function within *The Real* are interwoven in a symbiotic relationship. The notion of distancing discussed in the section prior is elaborated on by Slavoj Žižek who explains that '...fantasy is the screen that protects us from the encounter with The Real,' [...] (2006, p. 59) and furthermore, The Real is *the excess of Fantasy*, mediated and gentrified by the symbolic screen because some things that are too strong must be experienced as fiction on the screen (Žižek, 2012). Drilling further into this point, it is useful for this thesis to appropriate lines of argument from the contemporary scholarship of Gammelgaard and Kristiansen and to trace the source of *The Real* and Lacan's development of it, as interwoven in the earlier experiments of Sigmund Freud (Gammelgaard and Kristiansen, 2017).

Following Žižek for Gammelgaard and Kristiansen,

It [Fantasy] serves as a window into the most primary scenes where the subject may not even have a specific place, [it] simultaneously functions as a protection against the real (2017, p. 2).

In terms of lacking a specific place, (re)appropriation of Gammelgaard and Kristiansen's concept of fantasy, wherein a subject lacks a specific place, is important because it arguably allows one to experience the nature of the traumatic from a safe distance. In opposition to reality this specific place is lacking as it lies

beyond what a television viewer may physically experience, thus, in a sense it would be an alien experience, due to being outside of the subject's comprehension. Turning now to Freud, *The Real* existed long before Lacan's conceptualisation of it in the sense that Casey points out that,

there are no indications of reality in the unconscious. Here he [Freud] implies that in the unconscious, we cannot distinguish between truth and fiction (Casey 1972, p. 674).

Returning to the argument and applying this point to *fantasy* as conscious fiction, and *phantasy* as the unconscious, a distinction can be made between the two. This modal distinction assists with explaining why television viewers *both* accept and blur the boundaries between truth as an actual, reality in opposition to the obfuscating *Real*. In essence, both unconscious and conscious processes are in constant tension with one another during the act of trying to make sense of fiction and the televisual.

2.9 The Function of the *Object a/Objet Petit a* in contemporary, televisual fiction

The final section of this chapter examines Lacan's concepts of *object a/objet petit a*, and their associations with *The Real*, *phantasy/fantasy as mediated fiction* and *Jouissance* before discussing the *object a/objet petit a* as a 'love object'. Firstly, in conceptualizing the *object a* Brousse (2021) points out that the object *a* 'is not a desired object, but rather an object that causes desire in humans' (p. 6). This is a useful theoretical and methodological tool as

It is not grasped directly, but passes through what the analysand [narrator] says, according to the waves it produces in speech. In the course of an analysis, these waves will reveal the black hole that is the experience of jouissance. Unconscious desire is a wave that can be grasped by the tracks it leaves in language (*ibid.*).

These unconscious traces correspond to parapraxes or slips of the tongue (chapter 6), an inability to express or remember (chapters 6 and 7) and extralinguistic affects associated with the body and the emergence of *The Real* in the auditory dimension (chapters 5, 6, and 7). Furthermore, I argue that the essence of the *object a*, and the *objet petit a* have different functions—one being the object cause of desire; the other

being the unattainable object of desire. This corresponds to a psychic structure that is given by “jouissance, the body and death” (*ibid.*, p. 26).

In essence, the object cause of desire and the unattainable object of desire are a part of the same psychic structure but serve different functions. In turn, Brousse is repositioned here in sketching a pathway corresponding to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Principally, the fictional *object a/objet petit a* is a catalyst for *jouissance*, the effects on the body are directly observable. The third element of death is uniquely positioned as I argue that fictional characters that both cause desire and are ‘unavailable’ act as catalysts so that young women’s experiences of death in contemporary, televisual fiction can be understood through the concept of immortality which is discussed further in chapter 7.

Returning now to the concept of the *objet petit a*, it is useful to define what Lacan meant by the concept, as he is directly responsible for the term’s invention. As we have seen in the previous sections the *objet petit a* corresponds to *The Real*, *Fantasy*, and *Jouissance* but in repositioning the term so that young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be better understood it is useful to draw on Laurence Simmons’ *Žižek through Hitchcock*.

Simmons explains (drawing on Žižek’s, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 2001) that in moving Žižek’s notions and their correspondence from the realm of cinema and into television, the spectator is confronted with a shot, finds pleasure in it in an immediate, imaginary way, and is absorbed by it (Simmons 2021, p. 26).

In this sense, the *objet petit a* may appear outside of the subject, but it cannot be grasped as what is presented in the mediated confines of the televisual context is pure fiction. Furthermore, I return to my line of argument pertaining to the complexities of viewing televisual fiction from the vantage point of unconscious processes. In providing evidence for an exegesis of this point Simmons once again directly references Žižek whom I reposition to explain the encounter between fictional characters and narrators (see chapter 6).

Simmons points out that,

The Lacanian *objet petit a*, [...] lies beyond the signifier [...] as 'when the gap can no longer be filled by an additional signifier, it is filled by a *spectral object* [...]' (p. 27; my emphasis).

The phrases 'beyond the signifier' and the concept of the spectral object are of interest here in delineating the boundaries of the virtual, fictional image and the actual corporeal performer. To be beyond signification points to an ineffability of language which corresponds to the limits of representation. It is the case that the *objet petit a* is both the unattainable and impossible object of desire due to its non-existence.

Thus, the illusory nature of the fictional character, provided through the process of the mediation of *phantasy/fantasy* pertains to a spectral object. The use of the signifier 'spectral' illuminates the ghost-like qualities of both an imaginary- symbolic/virtual- symbolic signifier. The 'gap' of which Simmons speaks corresponds to the void of *The Real* pertaining to motivations which are liked to 'gaps' or 'failles' in our own subjectivities.

Indeed, in chapter 6 it can be seen that lacking a partner in the actual world, one of the young women relies on a virtual, fictional object that provides her with pleasure in an immediate, imaginary way, through the process of absorption where she literally consumes the fictional character, making it a part of her reality. The next section focuses not on reality but the antithesis of reality and the relationship of the *object a/objet petit a* to *The Real*.

2.9.1 The Correspondence of the Object a/Objet Petit a to The Real

The *Objet Petit a* is expressed through its ineffable nature which corresponds to *The Real*. Tyrer and Piotrowska's collection provides insights into what they term 'unrepresentables'—those subjects that equate directly with the concepts of *The Real* and the Ineffable in the data analysis chapters of this thesis. For example, the object-cause-of-desire or unattainable object of desire connects to *Jouissance* in the final section in terms of a lack of knowledge concerning things that cannot, technically, be experienced.

For now, it is useful to connect the contributors' scholarship from Piotrowska's edited collection (Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017) and detail its correspondences to the three data analysis chapters of this project. Firstly, Piotrowska and Tyrer (2017) point out that,

love and loss, forbidden sexual desire, [...] the fear of mortality, [and] a desire to connect these things [...] would [help to] make meaning of the contemporary world, [...] (p. 1).

These issues of love and loss, forbidden sexual desires and the fear of mortality are discussed in chapters 6 and 7. In turn, *The Real* and its connection to the *Object a/Objet Petit a* positioned as something lacking in experience is discussed by the editors, which is something that can be repositioned to help explain the emergence of *The Real* in young women's discourse through the mechanism of speech. It is the voice, lacking in knowledge through an entanglement of *Jouissance* and the *objet petit a* as voice which acknowledges that 'language does fail when we approach things to do with the Body, the Real as Lacan would have it (*ibid.*, p. 1).

The *objet petit a* has been theorized as both Gaze and Voice (Žižek and Salecl 1996). This manifests in young women's experiences of contemporary televisual fiction as the gaze of the viewer, who cannot possess what they experience. Conversely, it is the voice of the viewer which fails to compel the fictional character to action as, returning to Žižek, no dialogue or mediation is possible (2012). Given this,

The voice, like the visual, is similarly structured around desire: and therefore [also], lack and [is] unrepresentable (Elsaesser 2017, p. 54).

This means that if women could have what they wanted there would be no lack and no cause to desire. This absence in speech 'speaks volumes without speaking' because 'the [...] voice is constituted on silence' (*ibid.*, p. 54). Ostensibly, it is this silence or void that provides evidence in support of traces of *The Real* within the speech of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

In summary, the evidence presented supports the three lines of argument pertaining to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction being positioned from the standpoint of the complexities of televisual fiction beyond identificatory and

affective models, the limitations of language *and* representation and the emergence of *The Real* in the speech of the women narrators. It has been argued in turn that the structural properties of *The Real* and fiction possess similarities, so the next section examines the correspondence between the concepts of the *Objet Petit a* and *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction*.

2.9.2 The Object a/Objet Petit a's Correspondence with Phantasy/Fantasy as a product of mediated fiction.

Phantasies, articulated as immaterial, psychic experiences possess a strong connection to the concept of the *Objet Petit a*. *Phantasy* itself plays a mediating function acting as a proxy to counteract the viewer's 'desire for the lost referent' (Elsaesser 2017, p. 56). The complexities of what I call 'proxy for the satisfaction of desire' is elaborated further by Elsaesser when he argues that the mediated fantasies associated with contemporary, televisual fiction can 'conjure up [...] an uncanny effect by claiming truth and authenticity for something that does not exist' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, it is useful to draw on the work of Jaap Kooijman (2004) as a means for analysing the ways in which fantasy representations effectively leave out aspects of American culture.

Due to the creation of a hole in experience, America is fictionalized (see chapter 6). It is due to this fictionalization that this scholarship is useful because,

Fabricating the Absolute Fake shows possible ways in which "America" can be interpreted, thereby developing effective tools to analyze pop-cultural artifacts (pp. 12-13).

This way of interpreting pop-cultural artifacts can be applied to *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* and most notably, Kooijman makes a salient point applicable to the methodology of the thesis in chapter 4. This point also corresponds to my argument concerning the complexities of televisual fiction in general and young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular. Kooijman argues that

the analysis of the pop-cultural artifact, like the object itself, *tends to remain literally on the surface*, whereby its historical and economic contexts are easily ignored. Its superficiality (here meaning not going beyond the surface rather than a value judgment) makes the study of pop culture ambiguous, as one

tends to underestimate its ideological implications because one takes the object for granted—after all, they are “*only entertainment*” (*ibid.*, p. 19; my emphasis).

This notion of being ‘only entertainment’ captures the need to move beyond identificatory and affective models of contemporary, televisual fiction, following the line of argument that a new model of televisual experience be developed that acknowledges the role of the unconscious in the process. At the same time the complexity of young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction should also be acknowledged. This shift in positionality from materiality to unconscious, psychic experience is discussed further in chapter 4’s methodology, detailing the importance of such changes to both psychoanalysis and television.

2.10 Conclusion

The function of the *objet petit a* and its correspondence with the concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance*, *Phantasy* and *Fantasy* as a product of *Mediated Fiction* has been shown to be a useful tool for critically understanding experiences of young women in relation to contemporary, televisual fiction. Furthermore, the concept helps add credence to the development of a new model of televisual experience which acknowledges prior studies that have focused on both identificatory and affective models of televisual fiction. Beyond identification as an experience, the use of the Lacanian concepts have enabled us to venture into a space where we are able to take steps towards the development of a model of televisual fiction that considers the role of the unconscious and its connections to the complexities involved when women watch contemporary, televisual fiction.

These are experiences that move beyond the ontic and embrace the ineffable nature of immaterial, psychic processes which includes a critique of the limitations of language *and* representation. It is through the unconscious experiences of women’s psychic worlds and an examination of the role of the *objet petit a* as signifying what is not structurally present that one can experience traces of *The Real* as seen through the unconscious within speech. The final part of this section positions the unattainable object of desire and object cause of desire as ‘love objects’ as this corresponds to some of the content of the data analysis chapters where the young women said they either loved *Pretty Little Liars* as a show or loved characters

from *Pretty Little Liars*. The next chapter moves on to discuss and connect the application of the philosophical/conceptual terms of Lacan as discussed in this chapter to instances of empirical televisual scholarship.

Chapter 3. Applying Psychoanalytic Concepts to the Empirical

“The television sign is complex, [...] [Furthermore,] the relationships between audience and television are very complex, *not always based on the television content or interpretation of it.*” – Nazaruddin (2011; emphasis added).

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the bedrock for the concepts and theories corresponding to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. It defined four of Lacan’s concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction*, and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*. The previous chapter provided a theoretical background for this study before moving forwards to apply these concepts to television as an empirical object of enquiry.

This chapter is divided into thirteen sections. Section one presents the case for four broad areas of study and two arguments, which are discussed further later. Section two introduces the two shows of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* to the reader, documenting prior studies of the two areas of enquiry before linking the shows to the context of late/liquid modern television drama. Section three explores psychoanalytic and psychosocial studies of television which move on to the role and importance of the unconscious within this context in section four.

The fifth section explores the debates between Lacanians and Feminists, leading on to section six which analyses the context of psychoanalysis, feminism and film theory, sections seven and eight look respectively at women’s viewing and the context of the post-feminist. Sections nine and ten attempt to articulate the role of the mind and the body in televisual experience, while theorising feelings and emotions and their correspondence to contemporary television fiction through the work of Sara Ahmed and beyond. The final three sections—eleven, twelve and thirteen respectively look at the circulation of feelings, emotions and affects in a post-network era, the theorisation of affect and a conclusion which previews the ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions of the study.

This chapter critically positions young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction at the intersection of psychoanalysis and television. Focusing on four areas this chapter examines (a) prior psychoanalytical and psychosocial studies of television, b)

women's viewing, (c) the role of feelings, emotions, and affects in televisual experience, and (d) broader studies of popular culture and the televisual. These four areas are used as evidence to support a dual argument including 1) the need to transcend studies that focus on external representation (in particular those that examine identification, media effects and affects) in accounting for the irrepresentability and (re)representability of concepts associated with Non Representational Theory (e.g., *Jouissance* and the *Real*) and their correspondence with mediated, televisual contexts and 2) the need to synthesise identification, affect, the unconscious and *The Real* in accounting for the complexities of viewing and experiencing televisual fiction, particularly as it pertains to the psychic lives of women and the capturing of aspects of their unconscious within speech.

The next section examines prior studies of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*, placing the emphasis of this thesis in the context of television and popular culture and positioning the contribution of the thesis within extant studies of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

3.2 Prior studies of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*

Released in 2010, I. Marlene King's *Pretty Little Liars* series adapts the eponymous books written by author, Sara Shepard. A search of Google Scholar using the keywords 'Pretty Little Liars' reveals that no scholarship was written on the show during the year of its emergence. Conversely, 2011 saw the emergence of early studies of *Pretty Little Liars* which were combined with other issues.

The first of these pays 'lip service' to the show. Jennifer DeClue discusses *Pretty Little Liars* in her article on *The Wire*, alongside the *L Word*. DeClue argues that *Pretty Little Liars* 'is among the first fictional TV programs in the U.S. to depict [B]lack, queer women' (DeClue 2011, p. 54). This is an important starting point as Jennifer DeClue opens the doors for discussions of identity politics, which although interesting is a facet of psychoanalysis that has well-trodden ground (and other commentators), Julia Himberg, author of the edited collection where DeClue appears, reflects upon

Popular culture's use of "post-gay" and "post-race" rhetoric [which] provides an opportunity to examine the cultural and political complexities of modern identity formations. [Julia Himberg explains that] This topic seems especially pressing as contemporary television shows including [...] *Pretty Little Liars*, [...] have provoked strong reactions about their representations of queer characters and personalities of color (Himberg 2011, p. 7).

Notably, as the show developed and became more popular another important study emerged positioning *Pretty Little Liars* in the domain of psychiatry. The appropriation of Cerney, Friedman and Smith's (2014) article lays the groundwork for methodological ideas linked to the context of the psychiatric clinic and the psychoanalytic session, discussed further in chapter four. In addition, although *Pretty Little Liars* is just one example used in helping to teach young women about women who possess psychopathic traits, the focus revolves around critical commentary of the shows where the authors state that '...clips from these various programs are of utility in teaching concepts about psychopathy' (p. 234).

A key difference of the intervention of this thesis is that as opposed to commentary on media examples, young women were interviewed and asked to recall from memory their experiences of the shows, which gives a less contrived and pure account of their experiences, while also taking account of issues such as misremembering. The repositioning of Cerney, Friedman and Smith's advice is useful for developing areas of focus pertaining to young women's experiences of televisual fiction, alongside fostering an enhanced degree of immediacy or closeness within the clinical encounter as '[h]aving knowledge of popular television can help doctors connect with patients' (*ibid.*, p. 235). In criticising the approach taken to this study the tone of the research is firmly planted in the field of media effects which, historically, being the dominant mode of thought associated with viewing experience, this thesis seeks to change. As mentioned previously, media effects models are often simplistic adaptations of complex phenomena.

A further contribution by Louisa Ellen Stein possesses qualities that are both inherent in psychoanalysis and lend themselves to the repositioning of *The Real*, discussed further in chapter two's philosophical literature review. Writing on the subject of *Pretty Little Liars*, Stein makes a concerted effort to discuss psychoanalytic topics through reference to the Hitchcockian, which unlike Žižek (1992) she arguably achieves implicitly, thus by harnessing psychoanalytic ideas that are not described as such, lends credence to the intervention of this thesis. Stein explains that,

ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars* fully embraces the uncontrollable, omniscient, digitally empowered millennial fille fatale in the character of A, who is supposedly the digital embodiment of the four main characters' dead best friend (Stein 2015, p. 105).

This thesis draws on the notion of digital embodiment as a heuristic tool so that the representation of *The Real* on television can be better understood. Moreover, the capturing and encoding of sound waves as digital code has associations with the human voice as a way of indirectly accessing *The Real*. The *Real*'s associations with digital code are advanced by Jodi Dean's appropriation of Friedrich Kittler who claims that,

The Real is recorded sound, inclusive of all the hisses and noise accompanying the vocals produced by the larynx (Dean 2013, n. p.).

This evidence corresponds with Kittler's usage of Lacan to argue that *The Real* is represented by white noise (Kittler 1999). In addition, Ros Murray (2014) draws on Kittler in pointing out that,

The destruction of the subject in sound recording occurs, according to Kittler through the body, which without the imaginary illusion of completeness that its image provides actively disrupts identification (p. 160).

Conversely, access to the *Real* is mediated through speech (Kittler 1999) and in her examples, Stein draws on the use of voice overs in two other shows closely associated with *Pretty Little Liars*, *Veronica Mars* and *Gossip Girl*. Stein explains the function and properties of voice overs in the sense that,

Gossip Girl uses the voice-over to create a sense of social discomfort while simultaneously connecting viewers with character experience (Stein 2015, p. 100).

The importance of Stein's point cannot be over-stated, particularly as the thesis draws upon the notion that encounters with *The Real* are traumatic to explore how *The Real* can be extended to make the unrepresentable, representable, solving the issue of how to represent *The Real* on television. Furthermore, the signifier 'discomfort' has associations with *jouissance*, an aspect of *The Real*, echoing the prior point about the duality of psychoanalysis, which can be problematic, see a corrective response (Clough 2000, chapter 6) and the role of *jouissance* as both comforter and disturber (Silverstone 1994). Unlike *Gossip Girl*, *Veronica Mars* and my extension of the voiceover to Jughead in *Riverdale*, the anonymous force known only as 'A' in *Pretty Little Liars* does not function as voice-over, but is indirectly mediated through the girls' technology, where they receive all the threats.

Stein makes an interesting point that draws on Žižek's use of Hitchcock to describe *The Real* (Žižek 1992) which is repositioned to describe the function of the role of *fantasy* in filling the void left by the emergence of *The Real*, as discussed in the prior chapter. For Stein,

...it becomes clear that [voice-overs are] more [of] a role waiting to be filled, a role anyone could fill, than a particular individual subjectivity. Any sense that the voice-over gives us access to an individual emotional interiority is a MacGuffin, [...] (2015, p. 101).

In providing a means of interpreting the link between the MacGuffin or McGuffin and the *Real* Žižek argues that mediation occurs through the *objet petit a*. With respects to a mystery to be explained or interpreted the *objet petit a* can be repositioned as a metaphor for arguing that the narrative structure, the genre (Mystery) and the interpretive experiences of the shows implied viewing audiences—*Pretty Little Liars*, *Riverdale*, *Veronica Mars* and *Gossip Girl* are all connected by and through *The Real* because as Žižek explains,

The McGuffin is clearly the *objet petit a*, a gap in the centre of the symbolic order — the lack, the void of the Real setting in motion the symbolic movement of interpretation, a pure semblance of the Mystery to be explained, interpreted [...] (Žižek 1992, p. 8).

Appropriation of Žižek's point allows for the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction to come to the forefront. Released in 2017, I now turn to *Riverdale* which is a grittier take on the Archie comics of the 1940s. During the year of its release, like *Pretty Little Liars* before it, not much academic attention was garnered. This changed a few years later when Amber Moore (2020) provided an erudite explication pertaining to the complexities of televisual fiction in general and *Riverdale* in particular.

Moore's model utilised intersectional feminism as part of an analysis of rape culture where she draws on the theoretical frameworks of several scholars, notably Sara Ahmed, Bell Hooks and Bonnie Thornton Dill. Her analysis examines a single episode of *Riverdale* mobilising Sara Ahmed's 'feminist snaps' concept which corresponds with

"That point where you have to act" [...]. A snap is a verb that encompasses many feminist actions emerging from fracture; the image of a twig breaking can illustrate a snap— "a starting point," "a transformation," or an "unbecoming" [and ...] [a] snap can

also be “feminist pedagogy” [...] Ultimately, snaps often signal social justice work, and so, it is useful to apply to *Riverdale* characters who are incensed to respond to sexism and racism (Moore 2020, p. 4).

Young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be better understood through the extension and repositioning of the feminist concept of the ‘snap’. By drawing on the notions of “a starting point” or “a transformation” the feminist snap, combined with the psychoanalytic session can bring issues of importance to the forefront of young women’s minds, while in turn assisting with the development of the methodological questions to ask as a part of the oral history interviews (see chapter 4).

Furthermore, a criticism arises of Moore’s contribution in the sense that the voices of actual women are marginalised. A social and academic commentary based on representation is chosen as opposed to an on the ground exploration of issues.

The on the ground exploration captured through young women’s oral histories was a missed opportunity that this thesis attempts to address.

In addition, most of the scholarship on *Riverdale* addresses issues of race, feminism, and fan practices (Miller 2018; Burkhardt, Trott, and Monaghan 2021). This thesis seeks to extend these conversations to new, previously unexplored avenues of enquiry through a focus on secrets, U.S. culture and death. Finally, in seeking to combine psychoanalytic and feminist ideas, the complex nature of the social issues dealt with in televisual fiction can be brought into a clearer light. Prior to moving on to psychoanalytic and psychosocial studies of television it is useful to document the function of late and liquid modern TV drama as a pre-cursor which shows how studies such as *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* historically developed.

3.2.1 Televisual Consumption and the Late/Liquid Modern Television Drama

The proliferation of late or liquid modern television dramas such as *The O.C.*, *Dawson’s Creek* and *Gossip Girl* (and the people who consume them), form, from the perspective of this thesis, an important part of society. Prior studies have adopted a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks to analyse the internal content of genres and inculcated ideologies in the texts, investigated by drawing on the reception of shows by either actual audiences, or through the fictional, critically

constructed subject position of the implied viewer. Before an engagement with these studies can occur, it is important to draw on the work of Zygmunt Bauman to explain how the term late or liquid modern is of use to this project.

The categorisation of television which is described as being late or liquid modern can be better understood by drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' (2000). Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' is described through Buchanan (2010) as

the present historical condition of globalised capitalism. It is defined by a chronic weakening of the relationship between labour and capital and the unleashing of capital's power to dissolve social and communal bonds (p. 295).

Liquid modernity's repositioning and reconfiguration allows for a discussion of the status of contemporary television drama in the context of the late modern period. Displaced from its sociological context and transposed into the domain of psychoanalysis and post-network television, the ways in which technology has changed can be brought to light, hence the changing or liquid-nature of televisual development. In turn, rather than dissolving social and communal bonds, Bauman's concept can be thought to strengthen social and communal bonds through the evolution of new technologies.

This includes ways that viewers can access contemporary drama through streaming services such as Netflix, allowing for more choice which is streamlined, narrowcast, personalised and on-demand. Subsequently, appropriation of the concept liquid modern is useful in demarcating and charting the boundary shifts that occur in technology, particularly when applied to the hybridisation of media (i.e., online discussions of television shows) and the evolutionary elasticity of the postmodern in reconfiguring and (re)presenting traditional narratives as reboots (i.e., the current series of *Riverdale* adapted from the Archie comic books and *Pretty Little Liars* adapted from the novels of Sara Shepard).

In beginning to analyse television shows in the broader categories of late or liquid modern television dramas, it is important to discuss shows that fall into the broader categories of teen fiction, before focusing on specific shows that sit in the same genres as *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*—those shows that identify with the genre label of teenage crime fiction. A separate sub-section to the seminal works that paved the way for these studies

provides historical context as to how the consumption of teen-targeted, late/liquid modern television drama has changed in the last two and a half decades. Thus, this thesis examines three studies which collectively adopt similar analytical and theoretical frameworks with the first of these three studies articulating an important point useful to the argument of this thesis

Although gender is a spectrum, containing a wide range of possibilities, *media representations* tend to focus on its dichotomous ends of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity (Bindig and Bergstrom 2012, p. 25; emphasis added).

This statement appears to be no different in current incarnations of American shows and appears to be linked to the ways in which the fictional characters are stylised according to their physical and cosmetic appearances. The grounding of fiction within the mundane creates a tension between hyper-masculinity/hyper-femininity, or as a catch-all term, hyper-sexuality (Zaitchik and Mosher 1993; Murnen and Byrne 1991; Heintz-Knowles and Henderson 2001 cited in Downs and Smith 2009 as ‘...voluptuous, disproportionately sized characters ...’ (p. 722)). The hyper-sexual does not appear to reflect the realities of U.S. culture, particularly considering the country’s growing issues in high schools with obesity epidemics (Hu, *et. al.*, 2018). In contrast, the portrayals of women as fictional characters both conform to and subvert the hegemonic expectations encoded in the show’s ideologies as Bergstrom and Bindig (2012) draw on scholarship from Susan Douglas to explain that,

hyper-feminine women “are supposed to be dependent, positive, nurturing types, uninterested in competition, achievement or success, who should conform to the wishes of the men in their lives” [...] Television characters that fail to conform to these gender extremes (which have now become gender norms) are often villainized [*sic*], marginalized [*sic*], or punished (1994, pp. 25-26).

It appears that Bergstrom and Bindig’s reading of Douglas conflates hyper-sexuality with fixed, rigid structures whereas Shaun Coyne (2016) argues that the term villain is a role that can be played by anyone, and each character can play multiple roles in the evolution of the story, a villain is not indicative of a character, the villain is a role that one plays. The focus of attention now turns to examine a study by Lisa Emmerton who focuses on issues of social realism enshrouded in the sensibility of the noir-aesthetic synonymous with *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*, which is a pastiche of the noir detective movies of the 1940s, which incidentally, was the same periodisation

allied to the publication of the Archie comics. In addition to the pastiche, in analysing and appropriating the nuances present in Emmerton's argument it is important to appropriate her term which blends fiction and reality.

Fiction and reality [in television] are often blended when the series draws on historical events that younger viewers may have experienced virtually and that older viewers actually lived through (Emmerton 2016, p. 126).

The appropriation of the blending of fiction and reality provides a framework for how the 'lived' experiences of young women affect the ways in which they see social issues in the shows from a cross-cultural perspective. It is important to note that for this thesis, the population sampled, and method of oral history does not offer such affordances but future research with a wider population demographic and a different method of enquiry would allow Emmerton's theories to be tested. This section concludes by drawing on a third and final study that sits outside of the teen detective drama genre, yet still sits in the general field of enquiry.

In harnessing evidence in support of the original aspects of this investigation this project draws on the work of Lori Bindig (2008) who points out the limitations of her approach of using textual analysis in her study, *Dawson's Creek: A Critical Understanding*. Bindig argues that,

textual analysis is only capable of *suggesting* how audiences might respond or interpret media. In order to concretely state how individuals are affected by television content [...] an *audience analysis* must be performed (p. 155; emphasis added).

Focusing on further studies, Dickason's (2018) usage of the concepts of spectatorship and surveillance illustrate the one-sided nature of viewer interactions with fictional media personae. Elaboration of this point in relation to 'the intimacy of identification, between objectification and spectatorship' (p. 33) divests women viewers with a power that enables them to admire the objects of their gaze regardless, as reciprocation is not possible. This type of one-sidedness reflects the way in which *phantasy* works in tandem with the viewing of fantasy as a product of mediated fiction.

Moreover, through the appropriation of the term *jouissance* (discussed in chapter 2) this thesis repositions concepts which have their

theoretical heritage in the psychoanalytic approaches to spectatorship of earliest feminist film theory. Such work has been thoroughly revised in recent decades, [...] to account for viewer agency [...] and to consider how television and other media are structured by forms of pleasure other than the male gaze (*ibid.*, p. 34).

Dickason's point reinforces the importance of a study of women and television with respects to the concept of *Jouissance*. Moving on now to a second study in the edited collection, a valid point is emphasised by Lange who suggests that,

Television shows, especially to adolescents, create an idea of what situations in life may include, and *the distinction of fiction and life experiences* may seem indistinguishable. When we conceptualize [sic] television as an extension of life scenarios, we become socialized [sic] through the messages that we receive from the shows we watch (Lange 2018, p. 69).

Important to note here is that both Dickason and Lange focus on the perspective of analysing the show itself using critical methods, leading to the question of—where is the audience in all of this? Dickason (2018) adopts a psychoanalytic analysis of *Pretty Little Liars* and Lange (2018) adopts a feminist approach. The approaches adopted by both authors leads back to a point of contention pertaining to the need for the development of practical approaches to psychoanalysis which involve the audience beyond pure critical approaches, which although empirical in themselves, lack the central point of studies of television.

What this means is that if audience members and viewers are central aspects in viewer-show relationships, how can this social dynamic fully work with a major element such as the audience member or viewer missing? An examination of the advice of contemporary scholars in moving studies forwards is examined in this final section. The approach of this thesis reconfigures the advice of Bergstrom and Bindig (2012) with respects to augmenting studies as

a more extensive audience analysis utilizing [sic] closed and open-ended surveys as well as focus groups could provide additional insight[s] [in]to fan behavior and the interpretation of the ideological underpinnings of the *O.C.* (p. 200).

Chapter four reveals that the open-ended nature of the oral history interview is favoured over closed questions. Furthermore, focus groups are eschewed for the context of an online, virtual clinic. Moreover, when viewed through the lenses of both conscious and unconscious processes, psychoanalytic approaches, interpretations and ideological underpinnings are captured.

3.3 Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial Studies of Television

As a point of entry into studies of the psychoanalytic and the psychosocial it is pertinent to examine the work of Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992). This work provides an early blueprint that illuminates ‘the ways in which psychoanalytic theory must be modified when applied to TV...’ (Flitterman-Lewis 1992, p.152). It is this modification of psychoanalytic theory (as applied to television) which lends credence to this thesis which focuses on the unconscious, psychical dynamics of young American, European, and British women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction as presented within their discourse, detailed in chapter one’s introduction.

Flitterman-Lewis’ work provides a useful starting point for unpacking and capturing the theoretical and methodological complexities required for shaping and contouring the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the thesis discussed in chapter 4. Furthermore, as is the case with most studies of the time, the critical and cultural zeitgeist positioned televisual studies in the same vein as film. Thus, a ‘pure’ account of psychoanalysis and television would not occur until almost a quarter of a century later (Bainbridge, Ward, and Yates 2014).

Subsequently, the mobilisation of concepts discussed in the introduction to the prior chapter – *phantasy/fantasy as a product of mediated fiction*, *the object a/objet petit a*, *Jouissance*, and *The Real* provide the means to theorise and capture ‘the fundamental structures of desire that underlie all human activity’ (Flitterman-Lewis 1992, p. 153). In defining the parameters of her research Flitterman-Lewis argues that the work of the unconscious, fantasy and desire are central tenets pertaining to television and film studies, yet she fails to explore these in any detail. Hence, theorisation of the importance of the unconscious in both psychoanalytic work and studies of the televisual is placed at the forefront of concern of this project.

Flitterman-Lewis fails to explore the correspondence of the connections of the unconscious, fantasy, and desire to television. This lack of connection to the under-theorised *Real* is arguably a missed opportunity, particularly as fantasy and desire share central components in common with *The Real* (chapter 2). Finally, in providing further information in support of *The Real*’s ability to assist with unpacking the underlying complexities of young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction one can turn to the similarities in language

used to describe both *The Real* and the reception of televisual content. Both processes capture the complex characteristics communicated by the signifier's 'fragmentary, dispersed and varied nature' (*ibid.*, p. 162). The fragmentary nature of *The Real* is derived from *The Real*'s derivative, *the objet petit a*. Moreover, *The Real*'s dispersal is akin to its application to different contexts and emphasises its varied nature and historical evolution (Dean 2000). Furthermore, the epistemological tensions between Flitterman-Lewis' use of the words 'simple' and 'unconscious desires', reveals the complex nature of the reception of televisual fiction and its impact on experience, as she contends that 'Even the *simple* acts of [...] watching TV are shaped by *unconscious desires*' (*ibid.*, p. 155; my emphasis) which is in tension with Mar and Oatley who argue that the act of viewing fiction is complex and distal as opposed to proximal and simple (2008).

Thus, Mar and Oatley point out that as opposed to being passive the complexities of the televisual are perceived from a distance in the sense that fiction 'can evoke deeply felt experiences of a particular kind' (*ibid.*, p. 173). Having considered the complexities of televisual fiction, the next section examines the role of the unconscious in psychoanalytical and psychosocial studies of television.

3.4 The Unconscious in Psychoanalytical and Psychosocial Studies of Television

A key contribution for helping us to think through the role of the psychoanalytical is Peter H. Wood's study contained in *Television as a Cultural Force* (1976). Wood makes the first sustained effort to link psychoanalysis with television via an exploration of the similarities between dreams and television. This theoretical and critical theorising paved the way not only for contemporary studies of psychoanalysis, but it was in part responsible for refuting the views of academic critics (Mander 1978) and helped establish television as a serious object of academic study.

Critics had attacked television for numerous reasons most notably with respects to television shows being a part of mainstream popular culture (and in the 70s at least) the widely held belief 'that popular culture can only be of interest as sociological phenomena' (Adler 1976, p. 3). With Wood's piece entrenched in the psychological/psychoanalytical (with the additional elements applied to a specific case study lacking) Wood, at the time of writing, was close to discussing a psychosocial approach to television, which emerged years later (Whitehouse-Hart 2010). For Wood, who sees dreams as manifesting the televisual, Freudian Dreamwork and

Television Work share similar traits as can be seen in chapter 2 through the connections between metaphor, metonymy, condensation, and displacement. Elaborating on the point of Freudian Dreamwork and television sharing similar traits, the importance of young women's experiences of contemporary,

televisual fiction assists with explaining the appeal of televisual fiction as 'provid[ing] an escape and a release into a world of fantasy' (Wood 1976, p. 21) because 'fantasy [...] often gains its power as a *heightened and intensified version of reality*' (*ibid.*, p. 22; my emphasis).

Further studies emerged throughout the 1990s when scholars began to pay more attention to the under researched area of psychoanalysis and its application to the field of television studies. For example, Elsaesser (1992) highlighted the differences between film and television pointing out that,

TV has a different "apparatus," *a different psychic investment in the image*, a different treatment of sound, different definitions of the shot or the sequence, different forms of suture and textual closure, a different (non-existent) concept of off-screen space (p. 7; emphasis added).

In relation to studies documenting the relationship between fictional characters as on-screen images and members of the implied viewing audience, it is the psychic investment in the image that is most interesting to the argument. The question of how the psychic investments of the image differ between film and television is paramount to cultivating an understanding of how members of the audience respond to film and television images in different ways which draws on the aims and objectives of the thesis (chapter 1) from the perspective of individual subjectivity. In elaborating briefly, psychic investment (chapter 2) is allied to the psychoanalytic notion of cathexes.

Subsequently, the technologies of image capture and transmission cause a different kind of psychic investment in the image which is context specific (e.g., a darkened cinema versus a domestic space). Elsaesser draws on the theories of Beverle Houston one of the first pioneers to theorise a theoretical application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of television. In order to pursue this further, a detour back to the past is necessary in order to assess Houston's contribution to the overall argument of applying psychoanalysis to television as this will help us to understand how her influence mapped on to and inspired Elsaesser's study.

Houston (1984) discusses the topic of *Viewing Television: The Metapsychology of Endless Consumption*. At the time Houston's contribution was ground-breaking in the sense that she referred to the phenomenon of what she termed, 'endless consumption' before streaming services such as Netflix existed and the associated phenomena of binge watching was unimagined in discussions of television scholarship. In what follows, Houston outlines her *modus operandi* to,

make some distinctions for the positions offered for the spectator by American television [...] in comparison with those offered by mainstream cinema, especially with respect to issues of *desire* (Houston 1984, p. 183; my emphasis).

Houston's argument is that we desire differently due to what Elsaesser (1992) argued earlier as being, 'a different psychic investment in the image' (p. 7). This distinction between cinema and television is central to a psychoanalytic argument as it is the application of psychoanalysis to film that has enabled scholars to apply similar theories to a discussion of television, evoking the phrase, to learn about the future, we must look to the past. In demarcating the distinctions between the two technologies Houston argues that 'television insists upon the repetitive *reformulation of desire*' (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

Taken in this context, Curtin (1999) appears to draw on Houston's assertions in pointing out that '[t]elevision texts around the world increasingly feature female characters who resist or *reformulate* conventional gender roles' (p. 55; emphasis added). Moreover, this thesis draws on Curtin's viewpoint that the reformulation of conventional gender roles have 'political potential' (p. 67) echoing the feminist mantra of the personal is political and the political is personal (Hanisch 1970/2006) which provides a means for assessing young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction with respects to their embracing or resisting fictional feminist subject positions and ideologies.

As a final point, this thesis draws on Curtin's viewpoint concerning the emergence of

fluid and ephemeral spaces in which to imagine new gender roles, political affinities, and sexual orientations [particularly with respects to locations] in which to construct alternative images of feminine desire (*ibid.*, p. 68; emphasis added).

The fleetingly fluid, ephemeral nature structuring ideological interpretations reaches a deadlock in terms of its inability to be represented, yet productive aspects, as discussed by Curtin also emerge. Furthermore, the progressive nature of technology ensures that many of the issues discussed by Houston (such as lack) are still present, but due to historical shifts in the nature of broadcasting models the concept of lack is now anachronistic in a televisual world where the agency of subscription services offers the viewer more choice than ever before with this excess drawing upon the components of *Jouissance* discussed further throughout chapters 2, 5, 6 and 7.

Furthermore, Houston possesses a predilection to discuss psychoanalysis from the perspective of a theoretical subject position. It is this theoretical subject position that has been reworked into a form of practical psychoanalysis where clinical practice has an effect on the development of theoretical psychoanalysis and vice versa (c.f., Fink 1999; Frosh 2010). Fink and Frosh's later studies assisted with the shaping of theoretical approaches to psychoanalytic studies through the practical application of Houston's ideas. These syntheses led to the development of practical psychoanalytic approaches by Tillman, Clemence and Stevens (2011) and Whitehouse-Hart (2014).

A synthesis of the ideas underlying the studies by Tillman, Clemence and Stevens (2011) and Whitehouse-Hart (2014) are central to opening a discourse connecting feelings, sensations, and affects to how young women articulate their responses and reactions to the televisual fictions and fantasies portrayed by the contemporary United States dramas, *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*. Furthermore, Whitehouse-Hart's study is inflected by an intersecting intruder; (what I mean by this is that full focus is not given to television as it is made to share the stage with film). Issues arise when an academic focus captures issues allied to two fields of study, as ultimately, through divided attention, one of the epistemological fields becomes dominant, leaving the other relegated to a category of lesser ontological importance, which leads to reductionist and surface level treatments.

Whitehouse-Hart's study offers unique insights through her conclusion which claims that television viewing is a psychosocial endeavour, a point elaborated on by Poscheschnik (2018) in his study of *A Game of Thrones*. When mentioning a viewer's experiences of watching a film on the television (when in the comfort of her own home) the underlying nature of the concept of *jouissance* emerges. This concept, mentioned in the Introduction, is a Lacanian concept that subscribes to the notion of pleasure and pain or pleasure in pain.

Thus, Whitehouse-Hart makes the claim that '[a] young mother is aware that something about it [the film] causes her to feel *uncomfortable*' (Whitehouse-Hart 2014, pp. 1-2; emphasis in original). The disturbing nature draws on *jouissance* (as discussed in chapter 2) as both a comforter and a disturber, allied to the respective phenomena of *jouissance*, as both trauma and an excessive or surplus enjoyment, (often given agency through long-arch narratives and the binge-watching practices attached to this form of consumption). *Jouissance* can be better understood through the work of Roger Silverstone (Silverstone 1994) to explore the dual tensions emerging between television as both a comforter and a disturber in general (allied to audience members' emotional reactions) and associated responses to U.S. drama on the subscription-based Netflix service in particular, which is useful for shaping theories pertaining to the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

Furthermore, in seeking to uncover the psychological attraction viewers have to particular shows as fans, it is useful to draw on Whitehouse-Hart's use of Geraghty in (re)appropriating the phrase espoused by Geraghty (1991) in asking: Do *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* provide 'particular feminine pleasures for predominantly female audiences?' (Whitehouse-Hart 2014, p. 6). In addition, Whitehouse-Hart argues that 'it is time that audience research looks more closely at the emotional nature of viewing and evaluates the idea[s] of pleasure and enjoyment' (*ibid.*). revealing the research of this thesis to be a timely intervention particularly as it concerns issues of ineffability and non-specularity which position interests as corresponding to "more than" representation.

In the next section this thesis discusses prior studies that engage with women's viewing practices. It is through an analysis of women's viewing practices that women's particular attractions to certain programmes can be captured. Haralovich and Rabinovitz (1999) point out that, 'television [...] as a mode of address and a cultural institution caters to feminine viewing positions' (pp. 4-5). In providing an explanation here, it is useful to draw on the work of Cavalcante, Press and Sender (2018) as this is central to fostering a better understanding of young women's experiences of televisual fiction.

Specifically, the edited collection examines feminist reception studies in a post-audience age. In providing an exegesis of what Haralovich and Rabinovitz call

'...feminine viewing positions' Cavalcante, Sender and Press, (in a special journal issue (2017) that presages the publication of their (2018) edited collection) draw on the seminal, psychoanalytically charged study of Herta Herzog who,

In 1941, [...] published what is often thought of as the first feminist audience study, the classic study of female listeners of daytime radio soap operas [...]. [Furthermore,] the first of its kind, the study centered on the role media plays in the everyday lives of ordinary women. From the one hundred interviews she conducted with women from New York, predominantly housewives, Herzog unveiled how listening to soap operas, or what her participants called "the stories," served diverse functions and offered various gratifications or pleasures, depending upon the model of reception one uses. [...] Herzog maintained that listeners borrow the extraordinary experiences of characters on soap operas in order to, for example, feel something typically absent in their lives such as excitement or desire (Cavalcante et.al., 2017, pp. 1-2).

In elaborating on Cavalcante, Sender and Press' analysis of Herzog, Herzog, in a time-period during the second world war shows how the notion of fantasy as a product of mediated fiction first entered the homes of women. The function of listening exposed the young women to an alien world, akin to Lacan's *Real*, an appropriation of 'extraordinary experiences whose function catalysed excitement and desire. This catalysation shows *The Real* as a productive force in the creation of new worlds (Koložova 2014) as opposed to the traumatic *Real* of prior radio studies three years earlier with Orson Welles' alien invasion drama, *The War of the Worlds*.²

In providing a concrete example of these stories, Monique Bourdage (2014) explains that feminine viewing positions are 'complicated and multiple ...' (p. 168) yet concrete examples are provided in the sense that for Bourdage,

The show's main female characters offer representations of various roles available to women inhabiting different subject positions (race, class, education, marital status, age, etc.) at the time. For example, the roles of housewife, the single girl, and the career woman are represented by Betty Francis (formerly Draper, played by January Jones), Joan Harris ne'e Holloway (Christina Hendricks), and Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss), respectively (*ibid.*, p. 166).

² In his 1957 book *Fiction and the Unconscious* Simon O' Lesser points out Herta Herzog's part in assisting with a book on a response to the moral panic and terror associated with the War of the Worlds. See Cantril, H., Gaudet, H., and Herzog, H. (1940) *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Thus, historical context [Bourdage focuses on the 60s, drawing on Matthew Weiner's, *Mad Men*] which plays a role in what subject positions are available. Thus, through a contextual focus on the 1960s and before the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* in 1963, progressive roles for women did not as of yet exist. Thus, the complexities afforded to the subject positions available at the time were limited and being exterior to thought, also ineffable or unrepresentable.

The male-oriented world of *Mad Men*, structured by discussions of patriarchal dominance corresponds to the Freudian-Lacanian feminist debates, which examine the tensions which arise from adopting Lacan to study women. To better understand young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction this point is important to consider because Lacan has often been criticised, following his predecessor, Freud as being antithetical to women, thus, these debates help in providing a corrective to these tensions.

3.5 The Freudian-Lacanian-Feminist Debates

This section of the thesis presents a balanced view in answering the critical question: what are the implications of utilising Lacanian theories in relation to human subjects who are women? To answer this question, it is important to note that the epistemological tensions inherent in Lacan's relationship with womanly subjects have been met with varying degrees of acceptance or resistance from feminist scholars. The historical label of second wave feminism points to an epoch where debates around the status of the phallus, misogyny, and patriarchy originated. The term second wave feminism is described by Buchanan (2010) as

A shorthand reference for the politically active form of feminism that emerged in the US and elsewhere in the 1960s. It was neither a unified nor homogenous movement, but it did of course have a common goal, however disparately this was conceived, namely the equality of the sexes (p. 426).

What follows is a three-fold analysis beginning with an examination of psychoanalysis, feminism and film theory which points out the discrepancies inherent in Lacan's approach by feminist detractors (see, for instance, De Lauretis 1984; Dworkin 1981 and Mulvey 1974). Secondly, feminist proponents of Lacan seek to use his theories in productive ways (see, for instance, Campbell, 2000; Ragland Sullivan, 2004). Finally, those who query Lacan point out the flaws in the approaches that misinterpret the original meaning of Lacan's statements due to an elementary

engagement with his theories.

In other words, the criticisms levelled at Lacan and his theories do not account for the subtle nuances allied to the polysemic ways in which Lacan can be read (see, for instance, Barnard and Fink 2002; Fink 1995 and Lacan 1975 [1999]). For instance, Barnard (2002) points out that feminist suspicions of Freud's patriarchal legacy are quite legitimate, through a superficial glossing and dismissal Lacan has been non- traditionally read leading to Lacan's best-known remarks on femininity being the most easily misread out of context. A great deal of this misinterpretation originated by conflating Lacan's views with those of Freud.

3.6 Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Film Theory

Following on from Buchanan's earlier definition of second wave feminism, critical, feminist debates of the time corresponded with patriarchy, misogyny and Lacan's use of the phallus as 'the imaginary or symbolic value or representation of the penis' (Buchanan 2010, p. 365), yet Lacanian critics did not interpret Lacan's usage in this manner. In pointing out what feminists deemed to be a non-egalitarian society where women were subsumed and oppressed under patriarchal control it is important for this thesis to examine Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. Mulvey argued that depictions of women were subjected to a controlling male gaze which objectified them (Mulvey 1974).

The physical apparatus of the cinema hails the woman (Althusser 1971) capturing and transforming them from historically situated women through their reconstruction and inculcation into the symbolic system of representation as 'woman'. Mulvey's critique of this position also points out that it is limited in the sense that its object of enquiry is 'the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle' (Mulvey 1974, p. 6) and this precludes subject positions which are not heterosexual. Furthermore, differentiation of the terms women and woman are important as Theresa De Lauretis (1984, p.5) argues that,

By "woman" [she] means a fictional construct. [...] women on the other hand [refers to] the real historical beings.

The point of view held by De Lauretis has implications. Reactions and experiences of women to on-screen depictions of the 'woman' are seen as real historical beings as opposed to performers, particularly in debates related to pornography (Dworkin 1981). Conflation of fiction with fact has caused Lacan to be misread as he makes clear that the phallus does not exist in material, bodily reality, it being relegated to the lesser ontological category of virtual subjectivity as a 'symbol of lack and signifier of desire' (De Lauretis 1984, p. 23). Furthermore, De Lauretis argues that,

questions of signification, *representation* and subject processes [...] *must be reformulated from a less rigid view of meaning than is fixed by Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (*ibid.*, p. 31; my emphasis).

This means that it is necessary to reconfigure binary structures associated with psychoanalysis in favour of more open-ended conceptualisations. This leads to the use of Lacan's concept of *The Real* for structuring and positioning new realities (c.f., Kolozova 2014). Contrary to De Lauretis, feminist scholars using Lacan and his theories in a productive manner refute the rigidity of which De Lauretis speaks. In repositioning and transforming the Lacanian detractors' views of the phallus it is important to turn to Jan Campbell.

Campbell's approach 'may help to undo the rather paralysed dichotomy with which they [the phallus in particular] have been associated with historically—[refuting the fact] that 'the paternal phallus [is] the only signifier of culture and symbolic identity, [...] (Campbell 2000, p. 76). In addition, critics of Lacan point out that his interpretation of the phallus mirrors Freud's. This notion is questioned by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (2004, p. 2) in the sense that,

Contrary to Freud, Lacan stressed that the "meaning of the phallus" is linked to the fact that the penis is not the phallus.

In the final part of this section proponents of Lacan seek to address an imbalance in the way Lacan is often ostracised by his critics, querying the ways in which critics have misinterpreted or misread Lacan's meaning. Fink and Barnard (1995, 2002) provide counterarguments to some of the surface level claims presented by feminist film and Lacanian psychoanalytic critics by drawing on Lacan's famous *Seminar XX On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (Lacan 1975 [1999]). For example, returning to the distinction between women and woman (De Lauretis 1984)

Lacan's claim that 'woman cannot be said to exist' is correct, because the term woman denotes a fictionally constructed subject position existing in the ontological realm of the virtual, not a materialistic, historically present body (we see that this is in opposition to the way this concept functions in *The Real*, see prior chapter).

As feminists equate women with woman Lacan is misinterpreted as being misogynistic, yet he does not mean that women are unimportant, he does not mean that they do not deserve a voice, and nor does he mean what he says in a literal sense, which reflects other similar quotations by poststructuralists such as Jean Baudrillard who once famously said, the Gulf War did not take place (Baudrillard 1995). One would think that the whole argument stemmed from such things like a simple matter of semantic difference, but De Lauretis (1984) makes a critical error in her argument of attributing epistemological and ontological roots to the use of her language in relation to a positivist/realist approach to psychoanalysis. The mistake is, that psychoanalysis has no attribution or is not faithful to any ontological or epistemological position (Dean 2000).

As a final point to end this section Fink (1995) queried the phallic function's relationship to women, pointing out De Lauretis' misreading of Lacan where she argues that the phallic signifier oppresses women. For Fink (1995),

A woman is not split in the same way as a man: although alienated, she is not altogether subject to the symbolic order. The phallic function, while operative in her case, does not reign absolutely. With respect to the symbolic order, a woman is not whole, bounded, or limited (p. 107).

A somewhat evident conclusion in answering the question of "what implications does psychoanalysis have regarding the use of women as subjects?", based on the evidence presented by this thesis, the answer is a simple one. It all depends on how Lacan is being read. The next section focuses on audiences of young women and their viewing, examining the nature of television soaps as a precursor to the millennial-centric fare that entertains viewers today. These studies are important, as they provide the bedrock for analysing and explaining how women as subjects were first 'hailed' in relation to the practice of interpellation (through a recognition of the self in the portrayal of the Other; see, Althusser 1971).

3.7 Women's Viewing

This section analyses women's viewing and the audience reception of soap operas, daytime television, and millennial programming to establish the similarities and differences as they pertain to a psychoanalytic thesis. Two studies act as the cornerstones of this analysis (Ang 1985; Press 1990). The first of the studies is used as a model to discuss issues of class in television. Ang's study achieves this by specifically focusing on the reception of the American television show, *Dallas*, with the general aim to '...introduce the interested [...] reader to theoretical perspectives on television and television serials, [...]' (Ang 1985, vii).

Taken in this context, the focus of the narrative depicts the portrayal of 'a rich Texan oil family' (p. 1). In pointing out the limitations (by Press) of Ang's study it is important to detail her approach. Thus, Ang focused on the connections between pleasure, enjoyment and ideology through the lens of women.

The attribution of gender provided the catalyst for enquiry, yet Ang fails to include class as a variable, something important, which Press acknowledges and provides a corrective for. The televisual content of the focus of this thesis has similar elements of focus in the sense that *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* have the affluent families of the Lodges (*Riverdale*) and the Hastings of Rosewood, Pennsylvania (*Pretty Little Liars*). The second study focuses on the American television show, *Dynasty* which draws attention to the limitations of Ang's study.

In her article 'Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women's Responses to *Dynasty*' Press (1990) addresses

how women of different social classes respond to, talk about and use television images, particularly the *images of specific television characters* in the prime-time soap opera *Dynasty* (p. 158; emphases added and in original).

Within her analysis Press points out that working-class women tend to identify with the fictional women in the show. It is important to acknowledge that similar responses form a part of women's responses to *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* discussed further in the data analysis chapters. Subsequently, by returning to the earlier argument concerning the limitations of Ang's study Press points out that her study

‘adds a class dimension to Ang’s less specific findings correlating viewer appreciation of *Dallas*, [...]’ (*ibid.*, p. 164).

Furthermore, following from her contribution a year prior Press conducts a full-length study titled ‘*Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience*’ (Press 1991). In setting out her agenda for investigation, Press explains that ‘It is *representation-and women’s continuing interaction with it*-that concerns me in this study’ (p. 5; emphasis added).

Furthermore, Press’ specific focus is on how television in particular heavily influences women’s identities in Western culture.

It concerns how women in our time use the images and ideas made available to them by televisual culture to construct their own identities in the world. Its use of snowball sampling and interviewing helped shape the methodological considerations of this thesis (chapter 4). With reference to the research agenda of this project, (due to the seminal nature of Press’s study), factors other than those of identification, representation, and identity politics are necessary to embrace the shift to studies of affect, often found in contemporary studies, in order to avoid approaches that rely too heavily on discourses which use established historical methods and do not diverge from these points of view. In continuing discussions related to feminist subject positions it is now useful to move on to discuss post-feminist matters in further detail, particularly as it pertains to the roles that women can adopt in a post-network era due to the choices and increased agency provided by the evolution of televisual technologies.

3.8 The Post-feminist

In defining the Post-Feminist, I turn to Angela McRobbie’s, *The Aftermath of Feminism* who explains that she

Envisage[s] [Post-Feminism] by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined. [...] I [McRobbie] propose[s] that through an array of machinations, elements of popular culture and perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and well-intended response to feminism (McRobbie 2009, p. 11).

Many women disagree with this notion claiming that it is unreflective of their on the ground experiences. In contrast, post-feminism as applied to technological choice is also seen as affirmative by Thompson and Donaghue. Further studies illuminate the importance of the post-feminist in relation to how, unlike previous generations, women are provided with a greater emphasis on individualism, choice, and agency (Thompson and Donaghue 2014).

This individualism, choice, and agency relates to the ability to access a wide-range of television shows on multiple devices at any time, through on-demand content. Despite this, it is important to note that post-feminism 'is a contested term and as such does not easily lend itself to a straightforward definition' (Budgeon 2011, p. 279). Subsequently, one must also account for the criticisms of Rosalind Gill when she poses the questions, '[i]s postfeminism irrelevant in these new times? Are we now *post-post-feminism*?' [*Sic*] (Gill 2016, p. 611; emphasis in original).

In attempting to answer such questions Gill 'seek[s] to respond to suggestions that postfeminism is outdated as an analytical concept' (*ibid.*, p. 612) because of the argument that social equality has already been attained. In turn, some scholars level criticism at those who claim the concept even exists. Furthermore, Gill's term will prove useful as a conceptual tool with regards to the analysis of the characters within *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* as it allows for articulations allied to the modern woman. As a further point of interest, appropriation of 'The Big Issues' (e.g., love triangles, inappropriate love, murder, etc) sheds a light on stories that 'are never going to be a part of their [the audience's] *direct* life experience[s]; [...]' (Hobson 2002, p. 142; emphasis added).

Studies like Hobson's are useful for this project because they provide a point of entry in helping to develop a robust epistemological and ontological framework where theoretical and methodological elements of this thesis can be developed (see the dual nature and tensions presented by *phantasy/fantasy as mediated fiction* contrasted with everyday life in the prior chapter, Chapter 2 and its role in the development of *The Real*, the development of qualitative, psychoanalytic methods (Chapter 4), alongside women's responses to on-screen fiction (Chapters 5, 6, and 7). In moving ahead to section four, the thesis examines the circulation of affect, emotions, and feelings within the context of post-network television arguing that both the cognitive and the somatic need to be analysed as a symbiotic relationship. This is

as opposed to arguing that they are disparate entities in the television viewing process. These insights provide another lens for capturing the complexities of television viewing in general and young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular.

As a precursor to discussions pertaining to affect, feelings and emotions I consider the role of Descartes and Nelson and their correspondence to the mind and the body or what Nelson terms the 'bodymind'.

3.9 The mind/body dichotomy

Extant conceptualisations and philosophical musings on the mind and the body see these aspects of the human being as distinct. Moreover, the mind and body is thought of as being either separate or not separate. The separation of these aspects corresponds with inveterate theories proposed by Rene Descartes who saw the mind and the body as distinct, the 'mind-body dualism' thesis.

It is not the aim of this thesis to solve this historical problem, nor is it to engage with scholarly works opposed to Descartes. Rather, Descartes' thesis is used as a conceptual tool to introduce, not the thesis of a 'mind-body dualism', but Nelson's concept of 'bodymind'. In essence, although conceived of as separate, throughout the process of experiencing television, particularly, televisual fiction, the pressure of affects on the mind causes physical sensations in and on the body, thus this reaction illustrates the mind and the body working in tandem during young women's experiences of viewing contemporary, televisual fiction.

Indeed, through an interrogation of women's experiences with fictional media personae a reconfiguration of previous definitions of affect can occur. Following Nelson's approach and contrasting this with Descartes' 'mind-body dualism' thesis

deployment of the term [affect] arises in the context of a renewed interest in the mid-1990s in [the] concept of [affect] mobilised to grasp an elusive but newly emergent kind of mindbody experience (Nelson 2016, p. 30).

The synthesis of mind and body or Nelson's concept of 'bodymind' is used as an explanation for the complexities of the television viewing subject. The concept can be used to point towards the historical complexities of technological evolution. Previous critiques and notions of television viewing were related to 'the glance' (*ibid.*, p. 32)

and glance theory (Hills 2005, pp. 112-14). Elaboration of 'the glance' argues that 'The spectator glances rather than gazes at the screen; attention is sporadic rather than sustained' (Ellis 1982, p. 24).

This kind of assertion was used by Ellis to point out that, 'glance theory' works by discursively fixing television as culturally inferior to film [...] (Hills 2005, p. 113). This kind of thinking is antiquated and anachronistic with general consensus among scholars that the distinction between so-called high culture and low culture is no longer useful, being somewhat of a false dichotomy. In addition, home television systems have advanced to the point where television set-ups can mirror the cinematic experience.

Glance theory has been used by Newman (2010) to argue that younger members of the population have low attention spans, with evidence existing that in the United States this is a particular issue. Conversely, Nelson (2016) provides a counterargument to this view drawing on evidence that,

[Y]ounger generations weaned on the Internet, not only watch television online in preference to the traditional domestic TV monitor, but they simultaneously converse virtually with friends about the programme by means of other devices—or other applications on a multi-platform device. Several windows, open and juxtaposed on a digital device screen, demand a capacity for dealing simultaneously with multiple sources of information. Indeed, an oscillating movement between screens itself suggests a complex dynamic, mobilizing [*sic*] a capacity to engage with the fragmented images in a dual mode, at once *distanced and deeply involved*. It may even be that younger generations are developing a sophisticated perceptual capacity well beyond the notion of the 'glance' (pp. 33-34; emphasis added).

Given this, several of the young women involved in the oral history interviews discussed their own preferences as part of the viewing process. There were clear points of differentiation in the results as reported in chapters 5, 6, and 7 with respects to Nelson's claim that viewers are at once both distanced and deeply involved. These deviations are interesting and should be analysed in further studies.

The third and final of Nelson's points illuminates the primacy of affect in the post-network era (Lotz 2009) establishing the need to integrate accounts of identification and its effects on identity politics in viewers' narratives of their encounters with fictional media personae. Nelson (2016, p. 33) draws on the scholarship of (Clough

and Halley 2007; emphasis added) who point out that 'Discourse around 'the affective turn' also notes a shift from meanings, *representations* and *effects* to affects.' This point supports a central claim of this thesis, not to subvert accounts of identification in young women's narratives of their experiences with fictional televisual media personae but to reposition identification as subsidiary in favour of affect, all the while ensuring that the two elements engage in a productive as opposed to disjunctive synthesis.

Moreover, notions such as Nelson's 'glance' and the distanced and deeply involved nature of viewer engagement, alongside concepts of the 'bodymind' can be synthesised so the complexities involved in televisual fiction and young women's experiences of it, can be better critically understood. Furthermore, in reviewing Clough and Halley's original source Hardt (2007) points out that a focus on affects certainly does draw attention to the body and emotions, but it also introduces an important shift. The challenge of the perspective of the affects resides primarily in the syntheses it requires. That is, in the first place, because,

affects refer equally to the body and the mind; and, in the second, because they involve both reason and the passions (Hardt 2007, xix).

Hardt's point reveals the limitations of a focus on the mind in viewer accounts of identification as expressed and articulated through *phantasy*. There is also a need to examine how the effects of affects reconfigure the subject's incorporation of the object into mental life, focussing on the effects the objects have on both the mental and somatic capacities of the viewer. Furthermore, Hardt's use of the term 'passions' is useful when repositioned to account for the passions a fan has for the respective television shows, *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*.

The repositioning of these theories as productive syntheses negates the tensions inherent in competing ontological positions. Through the synthesis of these concepts the complex nature of character-viewer interactions can be articulated in a manner that accounts for the subtle nuances present in such complicated sociotechnical systems of subject-object relations within the field of media and culture. Through the continuation of the Identification-Affect debate, earlier contemporary studies of affect

included Rebecca Coleman's investigations into '*Transforming Images Screens, affect, futures*' (2013).

In augmenting the argument that as a standalone method of enquiry, identification is retrograde to advancing studies of audience interactions, particularly with fictional television characters, Coleman points out that it is more important to focus on what images do as opposed to what they are of, allowing for new ways of theorising to emerge which eschew the problematics associated with representational thinking and the politics of representation. Coleman's point of view can be unpacked to account for how young women may form intimate relationships with fictional television characters [what images do] as opposed to what an image is of. In other words, Coleman explains that 'theories of affect require a shift from representation(alism)' (Coleman 2013, p. 30).

This section ends with a brief discussion of affect and its relationship to the media. Lünenborg and Maier (2018) draw on the (2017) scholarship of Reckwitz stating that 'Media can be understood as "affect generators"' (p. 1). Also, as detailed earlier Lünenborg and Maier point out that,

Some authors of affect studies (Angerer 2014) now reject psychoanalytic theories, ascribing the unconscious parts of affective relationships to media and environment (p. 2).

It can be argued that there is no denying that unconscious affects form a part of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Yet, to dismiss the role of psychoanalytic studies as part of the experiences of affect is a mistake.

Despite Angerer's point of view, the trajectory of this thesis follows,

the works of Sigmund Freud [in general] and Jacques Lacan [in particular] [whose] psychoanalytical conceptions of affect explain viewers' affects and emotions by means of *unconscious psychosexual processes*, which influence visual pleasure on a physical level (p. 2; see Stadler, 2014; emphasis added).

Later arguments explain that psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious, media and environment should not be at odds with one another. Through the process of engaging with *phantasy* (unconscious processes) become conscious thought or

‘media as fiction’ when *phantasy* morphs into *fantasy* within the domestic context of reception in the lived environment.

3.10 Theorising Feelings and Emotion Through the Work of Sara Ahmed and Beyond

In positioning the theorisation of feelings and emotions and their usefulness for studying young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction I draw on the work of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Firstly, I reposition Ahmed’s claim, applying it to the context of interactions between fictional characters and young women. Ahmed argues that the relationship between fictional characters and factual narrators (subjects to use the psychoanalytic term), ‘works through othering; [...]’ (Ahmed 2004 [2014], p. 1).

I argue that in ‘attributing ‘others’ [fictional characters] as the ‘source’ of our feelings’ (*ibid.*) women come into ‘contact’ with non-existent signifiers and these signifiers ‘are those who are ‘not us’, and who in not being us, [...]’ (*ibid.*) cause young women to desire. Yet what is important to remember here is that,

Emotions are intentional in the sense that they are ‘about’ something: they involve a direction or an orientation towards an object (*ibid.*, p. 7).

This orientation emerges throughout chapters 5, 6, and 7. Furthermore,

Descartes argues that emotions are reducible to sensations insofar as they are caused by objects [...] But Descartes offers a critique of the idea that objects have causal properties, suggesting that *we don’t have feelings for objects* because of the nature of objects (*ibid.*, p. 3; emphasis added).

This is a point where I do not concur, due to the specialised ontological status ascribed to fictional characters (as discussed in the prior chapter, chapter 2 and the concept of existence). Ahmed argues that ‘emotions are shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects, [...]’ (*ibid.*, p. 6) and [through] approaching an object [via feelings or emotions, neither one] presumes that the object has a material existence; objects in which [young women are] ‘involved’ can also be imagined (*ibid.*, p. 7). As a final point, attributed to discussions in chapter 7

on death, it is useful to note that with young women's correspondence to feelings and emotions,

Attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death (*ibid.*, p. 12; emphasis in original).

Given this, the death of which Ahmed speaks can be linked to the end of TV shows or the deaths of performers, whose actual deaths impact the fates of the fictional characters they play. Furthermore, it is important for this thesis to document Elke Weissmann's ideas concerning women, emotion and feelings by pointing out that she approaches this study via many avenues most notably via Laura Marks as it is Weissmann's appropriation of 'Laura Marks [that] offers an insight into how our experiences with primarily visual media, such as film, are deeply embodied' (2016, p. 91) and this can be applied to a televisual context also. The deep embodiment through feelings, emotions and affects sees the difference between feelings and emotions as '...more basic gut reactions [feelings ...] than the higher order, psychological emotions (*ibid.*, p. 90). In turn, affect is theorised as 'affect describes the bodily reactions' (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, in terms of methodological approach, the approach of this thesis inverts Weissmann's approach of 'emphasising the viewing experience, [where] the analysis is focused on the production of meaning within the text' (Weissmann 2016, p. 21), thus at the forefront of this thesis, the viewing experiences of young women are emphasised within the context of their responses to contemporary, televisual fiction. In further articulating the importance of feelings to the study of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it is of importance to reposition Simon and Nath's (2004) suggestion that an examination of 'the social contexts in which situations occur are crucial for [...] specific emotional response[s]' (p. 1170). Considering the limitations of Simon and Nath's study and their directions for future research, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, focusing on positivistic empirical patterns, their research nonetheless is useful as a loose framework when applied to the context of an online, virtual clinic (see chapter four).

In other words, Simon and Nath's assertions allied to elasticity can be applied, shaped and changed as part of a heuristic toolkit, taking account of the cultural context in which discussions of viewers' feelings take place. Before implementing any suggestions as to what feelings are, it is important to analyse the various ways in which feelings have been theorised, so that their importance to this thesis can be articulated. Thus, a contemporary understanding of feelings, '[...] [is] the *conversion of an affect or an emotion* into a form that can be symbolised' (Frosh 2010, p. 2; emphasis added).

This distinction is paramount in providing evidence that a differentiation exists between feelings, affects, and emotions and that *The Real* of affects and emotions can find an outlet for expression in mediated/indirect form through the body. In addition, earlier theorisations of feelings complicate matters further as they introduce the concepts of moods and sensations. It is not the aim of this thesis to engage in elaborate discussions of cognitive psychology, but as a starting point it is useful to draw on the work of R C Aitken who explains that 'Feelings are states of the self, [...]', however, it is important to note that '[...] words may fail to describe the exactness of the subjective experience' (Aitken 1969, p. 989; emphasis in original).

When in Aitken's terms 'words fail' the concept of affect is often used as a contributing factor to augment that which is unable to be articulated, which leads to linking the concept of affect with Lacan's concept of *The Real*. Moreover, before a discussion of affect and its relationship with *The Real* can take place it is useful to account for the fact that when approached from a psychoanalytical perspective, states not only belong to the self, but feelings can be directed towards objects. This echoes Frosh's commentary that feelings are affects or emotions that can be symbolised. It is by focusing on the symbolisation of emotion in particular that allows this discussion to transition into a discussion pertaining to emotions.

If feelings are emotions in a symbolisable form, then what are emotions? The concept of emotion(s) is theorised in contemporary scholarship as 'an aesthetic quality' (Gorton 2009, viii). This is a somewhat confusing definition considering the word aesthetic has multiple connotations. Gorton's use of the term is positioned as relating to the concept of aesthetic emotion(s) and it is these aesthetic emotion(s) which are felt through aesthetic experiences, with the act of experiencing television being one such aesthetic experience.

Gorton's concept being one of many utilised by this thesis results in the collation of an evolving vocabulary intended to capture the complexities inherent in televisual viewing experiences.

Subsequent theorisations of emotion have pointed out emotions as being 'attachments or about what connects us to this or that' (Ahmed 2004, p. 11). Specifically, these issues are examined in further detail during the process of interviewing young women using oral histories in the context of an online, virtual clinic in chapter four. Moving on now, this thesis discusses affect, arguably the most complex of the three terms of feelings, emotions, and affects.

Affect is a concept which provides alternative ways of theorising viewer interactions which are disconnected from extant theories relating to representation, identity politics, and identification. In turn, this lends credence to affect's position as a set of studies that assist with capturing the complexities of young women's experiences of televisual fiction, and as mentioned in the introduction, this thesis aims to synthesise the concepts of identification and affect with both conscious and unconscious responses as a step towards developing a framework for analysing viewers' experiences and developing a new model of contemporary, televisual experience that addresses televisual complexity beyond identificatory and affective models.

The next section focuses on the circulation of affect, drawing out the differences between feelings, affects and emotions in a post-network era.

3.11 The circulation of feelings, emotions and affects in a post-network era

One of the key debates concerning feelings, affects, and emotions is the tendency to articulate the concepts of affects and emotions as synonyms (Chodorow 1999) who states that 'affects *or* emotions help to constitute internal pictures and stories and shape psychic reality' (p. 1). In turn, however, Chodorow tends to rely on reductive strategies to explain complex terms. Angerer (2014) points out Chodorow's misinterpretation (and she is not the only scholar to do this).

For Angerer (2014)

The current debates on affect, emotion, and feeling often treat *affect* as a biological variable, *feelings* [are] delegated to psychology [with] *emotions* attributed to biographical data. The three terms are often used as synonyms with no regard for their respective historical and semantic connotations (2014, xx).

There are further debates concerning the Arts and Humanities practice of 'poaching' terms from the scientific community and using them for differing purposes with recent scholarship applying affect to the neurosciences (Solms 2015). It is now beneficial to situate and apply the concept of affect within the context of television. Affect can be situated through once again, drawing on the scholarship of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

Ahmed argues that "emotion' has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason' (Ahmed (2004 [2014], p. 3) with 'Emotions [being] associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement (*ibid.*). She further argues that,

One could characterize a significant 'split' in theories of emotion in terms of whether emotions are tied primarily to bodily sensations or to cognition. The former view is often ascribed to Descartes and David Hume [...] A cognitivist view would be represented by Aristotle, and by a number of thinkers who follow him (*ibid.*, p. 5).

This discussion articulates how these studies rely on the subjective effects of identification and its subsequent effects on the body as corporeal/materialistic. Following Clough and Halley (2007) and Coleman (2013) this thesis reconfigures previous versions of affect, arguing for what Nelson terms the 'bodymind experience' (2016, p. 30) which synthesises and differentiates between feelings, emotions and affects and how they circulate in a post-network era (Lotz 2009). This approach is taken so as to avoid making analytic distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be 'experienced' as distinct realms of human 'experience' (Ahmed 2004 [2014], p. 6).

Differentiating emotions, feelings and affects is important to help understand how the post-network era has precipitated a shift from passive to active to interactive audiences (Livingstone 2003) which has led to the embracement of theories that

transcend visual representation and portrayals associated with identification. In addition, the precipitation of these 'audience turns' pertains to an increase in the level of accessibility offered to programming based on the evolution of technology. Given this, the post-network era has provided increased agency to consumers where they are able to control what emotions they want to experience and how they want to feel. This agency has been provided to women in particular, offering choice and freedom, as women embrace Eva Chen's positioning of the terms which have been,

liberally appropriated in recent years by popular women's cultural genres such as chick lit, chick-flicks, makeover TV programmes and beauty adverts, to advance an image of the new, empowered woman confidently embracing [...] commodity culture (Chen 2013, p. 440).

Through the extension of Chen's ideas (a post-feminist argument) concerning agency, choice and freedom, this thesis describes the complexities of television through what I call 'affective services' where an amalgamation of feelings, emotions and affects treats streaming services as interactive catalogues. Moreover, by placing *The Real* at the locus of these operations (discussed in chapter 2) the unseen viscosity of these forces emerge through women's emotional experiences (e.g., sobbing, screaming, laughter) dependent on the genre viewed (see chapter 7) as 'objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension' (Ahmed 2004 [2014], p. 11). These experiences ensure that a pathway is cleared 'to celebrate a rhetoric of individual choice and freedom which often is measured in terms of commodity consumption' (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, the upcoming section on affect presents a theory of the processes involved in viewer engagement with televisual fiction, beginning with the theorisation of the shift from media effects to media affects. The section ends with a brief discussion of affect and its relationship to the media by drawing on the Editorial 'The Turn to Affect and Emotion in Media Studies' (Lünenborg and Maier 2018).

3.12 Theorising Affect

Affect – a complex theoretical term has been mobilised in a variety of ways within interdisciplinary scholarship within the academy (Massumi 2002; Leys 2011; Soler 2016; Wetherell 2012). One valuable appropriation of the term is presented by David Charles Wright-Carr who draws on the philosophy of Antonio Damasio. For David Charles Wright-Carr (2019, pp. 63, 67)

The affective dimension is *essential to the embodied paradigm*. Affect shapes cognition. [...] The affective dimension of cognition, including the aesthetic responses that often accompany the experience of visual language, is part of the embodied perspective. Affect is an inseparable ingredient of conscious and nonconscious processes, and it is a vital ingredient in aesthetic experience.

In repositioning Wright-Carr's adoption of Damasio, this thesis acknowledges Damasio's research as a valuable theoretical tool. When applied to the context of television Damasio's research is useful for mapping the relationships that occur between young women and on-screen fictions because of the interplay between non-fiction and fiction, cognition and embodiment, and the corporeal and virtual body.

Furthermore, Damasio's concept of cognition-embodiment echoes Grodal's concept of the Brain-mind as used by Cassidy (2020) and although similar in nature, the differences between the two aids in articulating the nuances of young women's experiences of televisual fiction as complex, sociocultural events.

As mentioned earlier, now is a good time for a brief detour to investigate the potential of affect and the unconscious and its relationship to *The Real*, before returning to further studies detailing the nuances of affect.

3.12.1 Affect, the Unconscious and The Real

The Real is the central concept at the forefront of this thesis. It is useful to investigate similarities that may exist between the two concepts of affect/unconscious and *The Real*, particularly as it pertains to R C Aitken's commentary concerning the failure of words. Essentially, the non-representational/non-symbolic nature of *The Real* revolves around an incapacity of expression, a lack of representation.

Despite this, as documented and captured in the data analysis chapters of this thesis the effects of *The Real* can be seen indirectly as manifested through speech, or a lack thereof, such as young women's inability to recall televisual events or accurately describe particular experiences. A turn to Lacan's extension of Freud's work on the unconscious reveals Lacan's usage of the term affect as corresponding to *The Real*. This correspondence is explored by Lacan in the sense that first and foremost 'Psychoanalysis is concerned with our unconscious desires and wishes and not with social reality' (Homer 2004, p. 85).

This brings the crux of the argument to the forefront of enquiry as Lacan saw the Unconscious as a failure, impediment or rupture in the symbolic chain (something that disrupts social reality). The disruption of social reality, this rupture in the symbolic corresponds to properties associated with *The Real*. This failure, impediment or rupture (as captured through unconscious affect) allows for the emergence of an interesting question: how is it possible for a non-existent object (for example, a fictional character or event) to profoundly affect the lives of viewers as manifested through their televisual experiences?

As a final point, a turn to the relationship between unconscious affect and identification is useful here alongside its correspondence with *The Real* as a void in the symbolic which is sutured via *fantasy (as a product of mediated fiction)*. If we trace the evolution of Lacan's conceptualisations of *The Real*, we find that as with *das Ding*, the *objet a* is, 'objectively' speaking, nothing. It only exists in relation to the desire it brings about or as (Hook 2018, p. 491) articulates it, it is "that "object" of amassed primal *jouissance*, which—like a black hole—corresponds to its own absence". This can be seen in chapter 7 with respects to discussions on death with *das Ding* and *objet a* having been discussed in the prior chapter.

The false consciousness of being swallowed up by the fantasy of being attracted to fictional characters through identificatory practices or longing for the intangibility of a fictionally hyperbolic representation/portrayal of a non-existent town or city helps *The Real* and its associations to function. It is useful to think of fictional experiences as either idealised fantasies or transgressive traumas. Focusing on the former of the two, idealisations are associated with imaginary dimensions. There also exists a symbolic dimension where both on-screen virtual character and viewing subject are

both lacking in different ways (e.g., lacking an experience and lacking tangible, physical existence).

Finally, there is always something more, particularly for women who are fans of the show in the sense that other, similar shows may possess dimensions of enjoyment, excitement, attractive characters, and compelling plots. The elusiveness and intangibility of attraction to that particular event or character, that something extra that cannot be grasped or articulated is the *objet a*—the *object-cause of desire*. It is as Fink explains,

The object (a) is the leftover of that process of constituting an object; the scrap that evades the grasp of symbolisation (1995, p. 94).

Taken in this context, the leftover scrap unable to manifest in actuality becomes incorporated into the psychic lives of women where it is expressed through feeling, emotion and affect, reflected through women's anxieties and desires. In addition, it is useful for this thesis to draw on Thompson's idea which this thesis repositions as an aspect of reality under which the viscosity of *The Real* resides. Although the *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* aspects of Lacan's tripartite structure of reality and unreality are privileged over *The Real*, Thompson's use of evoking the imaginary is a useful one, particularly as a means of capturing and accessing unconscious thoughts through speech.

Thompson suggests that,

...to imagine is to evoke "something absent" but "mentally present to [y]our attention," often in a "sensory or perception-like way" (2015, p. 179).

The physical absence, yet mental presence of *The Real* underlies the narratives of *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* both distancing and fostering women as implied viewers from the indirectly, mediated bodies on-screen, which ultimately, are not really there. Indeed, it can be argued that the a(e)ffectiveness of *The Real* provides the structuring support necessary for the suspension of reality. By utilising Thompson's ideas and synthesising them with Freud's and Lacan's, the complexities of fictional characters can be brought to light.

Returning now to further discussions around the circulation of the term affect, in determining just how complex the term is Gregg and Seigworth (2010) explain that,

[t]heir is no single [generalizable *sic*] theory of affect as [...] the concept of “affect” has gradually accrued a sweeping assortment of philosophical/psychological/physiological underpinnings, critical vocabularies, and ontological pathways, and, thus, can be [...] turned to all manner of political/pragmatic/performative ends (p. 5).

Gregg and Seigworth’s position, points towards the elasticity of affect. This thesis adopts the concept as a pragmatic theoretical tool to capture women’s reactions to stimulus they view through an examination of their facial expressions and other non-verbal cues (for example, ‘M’s’ response to death in chapter 7). In relation to the mind and the body or as was argued later, *bodymind*, (the joining of the two nouns indicating the inseparability and interconnectivity of the two terms) affect spans philosophical/psychological and physiological dimensions pertaining to pragmatic usage (philosophical), or in other words the effects of affects on the mind in relation to both conscious awareness and as an aspect of *The Real* connected to the capturing of the unconscious.

In turn, the physiological aspects of affect are positioned so that somatic responses/bodily sensations can be critically analysed. In addition, a focus on affect from a performative position allows for a conceptualisation of the workings of *phantasy/fantasy* as *mediated fiction* (chapter 2), particularly with the aim of fostering a critical understanding of the desires of women (see ‘I’s’ responses in chapter 6 and the metaphor of pink wrapping paper). Subsequently, mobilisation and positioning of affect as philosophical, psychological, physiological, pragmatic and performative allows for an engagement with the theories of Benton (1995) in relation to how women position themselves as it corresponds to the fiction they view, how they engage with fictional media personae and what they experience, and these experiences can be both comforting and disturbing as Wright-Carr (2019) points out that,

A valued object or agent attracts; a threatening object or agent repels’ (Wright-Carr 2019, p. 63).

This attraction and repulsion dichotomy corresponds to what women would and would not discuss during the oral history interviews. They did not draw on disturbing scenes from *Pretty Little Liars* or *Riverdale*—they did not discuss torture or rape. The questions were open-ended to allow them to draw on these scenes if they so wished, but they declined to do so.

Moreover, through an analysis of Benton's work it is important to draw on the concept of internal spectatorship. The adoption of this approach *eschews issues of identification and identity politics and assists with emphasising the audience and their experiences* which are frequently missing from televisual investigations of a similar nature. In addition, as a final point of discussion in this section, M. G. Benton's concept of internal spectatorship can be repositioned providing a window through which to examine and explain the relocation of the viewers' consciousness during the act of viewing televisual fiction.

Furthermore, internal spectatorship is used as a theoretical tool for questioning whether or not this creative act even exists and if it does, what haecceities of subjective experiences emerge from this wandering of the mind; and how that is manifested and subsequently captured (see chapters 4 and 'E's' responses to *Pretty Little Liars* and *American Universities* in chapter 6). Benton (1995) describes the process of internal spectatorship as

‘the sensuous immediacy of the aesthetic moment, upon the spectator as an ‘insider’, lost in a [television programme] (as in a book) in the sense of becoming absorbed for a time in the ‘world’” (p. 362).

As an ‘insider’, the viewer imagines themselves to be a part of the world, an onlooker of events. This is important as viewers are able to immerse themselves for hours or even days at a time in an alternate reality over the course of multiple seasons using Netflix. In turn, the appropriation of the concept of ‘Looking around’, (*ibid.*, p. 369) provides affordances for this concept to be mapped out as a mechanism for ‘describ[ing] the spectator’s imaginative participation and suggests the pleasures of exploration and discovery [...]’ (*ibid.*, pp. 369-370).

Returning now to the concept of affect, the historical roots of the term emerged from studies conducted in the 1960s by Silvan Tompkins (Tompkins, 1962; 1963) and Massumi (2002) and return, through Collette Soler’s account to Freud (2016). As this is not a Freudian thesis a brief summary concerning Freud’s relationship to affect will suffice in the sense that Freud’s interest in affect developed at an early stage during his work with Breuer on studies of hysteria (2004/1895). Freud’s relationship to the concept of affect and its meaning is further discussed by Soler (2016)

[t]he term “affect” – in German, *Affekt* with a *k* – was popularized [*sic*] in psychoanalysis by Freud who borrowed it from the German philosophical

tradition. He used it to designate a state that is pleasant or unpleasant along the pleasure-unpleasure axis, which is linked to manifestations of the drives (Soler 2016 p. 1; emphasis in original).

Given this, elaboration and differentiation between what drives are and how they differ from affects is beyond the scope of this thesis. Despite this they help with cultivating a better understanding of how both processes work in tandem in relation to viewing television as it is '...unconscious desire, and the drives [that] produces an effect' (*ibid.*, p. 3) which both Freud (and later, Lacan) equated with affect. This is taken in the sense that for them '...affect is an effect' (*ibid.*).

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has set out to reposition a theoretical body of work with the aim of cultivating a critical understanding of how televisual studies and its associated concepts can be utilised so that young women's experiences of televisual fiction can be better understood. It has positioned this project within a wider academic context examining the limitations and missed opportunities of prior studies. This analysis provides the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings necessary in the development of a framework that continues to support an examination into young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

More specifically, the contours of the argument have maintained a trajectory pertaining to discussions concerning the limitations of language *and* representation. In turn, the complexities of television in general and young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction have been highlighted in particular. Furthermore, discussions around the supplantation of affect from a visual perspective and its correspondence to representation has also formed an important part of this chapter.

Finally, the importance of prior studies of the unconscious was discussed through inveterate studies, which brought to light some of the limitations of earlier theorisations of psychoanalysis, television and the unconscious, where there were missed opportunities. Alongside this, was the consideration of the importance of feminist inflection in the Lacanian approach where Lacanian and feminist concepts were synthesised in order to capture young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. The next chapter examines the ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions that correspond with the study of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

Chapter 4. “Conversations Inside the Online, Virtual Clinic: Ontologies and Epistemologies Applied”

“Histories of subjectivity [...] operate with [...] transference and countertransference, whether or not this is explicitly understood by the historian. In any form of biographical research, [...] there is an emotional investment in the person being studied. Our choice of subject, and the significance given to particular evidence and aspects of experience [...], will depend partly on our countertransference, no matter how indisputable the historical significance of the individual or the intellectual relevance of the questions being asked” (Roper 2003, p. 30).

4.1 Introduction/Research Paradigm

Chapters 2 and 3 addressed the conceptual/philosophical and empirical bedrocks that assisted in shaping a study corresponding to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. This chapter is divided into a further thirteen sections. The first section articulates the optimum research paradigm through which to study young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

Section two defines the ontological positionality of the study, articulating which lens of reality the study is viewed through, whereas section four documents the underpinning bodies of knowledge designed to support a study into young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. The ontology section further covers issues pertaining to psychoanalysis as method, oral histories, television/televisual fiction and the development of a pragmatic ontology. In turn, section four expresses the conceptualisation of the online, virtual clinic and articulates the workings on transference and countertransference throughout the clinical process.

Section five defines and positions the notion of truth in the online, virtual clinic, while section six documents the role of trust and building trust within the contexts of psychoanalysis and oral history. Sections seven and eight document the strategies used to recruit participants and the sampling methods used, alongside an articulation of the practicalities of running a session, including a focus on the role of self-reflexivity within the process.

Section nine reflects on a form of practical ethics considering what it means from an ethical perspective to give consent online, alongside detailing whether or not psychoanalytically driven conversations online are ethical and what the ethical implications for disclosure/non-

disclosure is as it corresponds with exploring young women's unconscious thoughts, before transitioning to a consideration of the development of a Lacanian ethics. Sections ten, eleven and twelve respectively analyse the analytical approach used to interrogate the data, critical reflections of the validity and reliability of psychoanalysis and the oral history encounter are considered, and the conclusion details a preview of the role of secrets and their connection to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and their unconscious thoughts.

This chapter synthesises the methods of oral history and psychoanalysis within the context of an online, virtual clinic. These methods capture qualitative data corresponding to young women's conscious/unconscious experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Moreover, the methodological approach assists with answering questions pertaining to the Freudo/Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* and its associations with the *Object a/Objet Petit a*.

The primary paradigms associated with young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction fall into what (Carter 2001, p. 238) terms, a '...nonfoundationalist, (or antiessentialist, if you prefer) paradigm [...]'. I prefer to think of these using a third term—anti-foundationalism. Sim defines anti-foundationalism as

the rejection of the search for logically consistent, self-evidently, "true" grounds for philosophical discourse, and the substitution of ad hoc tactical manoeuvres as justification for what are quite often eccentric lines of argument (Sim 1986, p. 8; emphasis in the original).

Given this ad hoc status, and as a preview of the ontology section, anti-foundational approaches are commensurate with pragmatic viewpoints (c.f., Brint, Weaver, and Garmon 1995).

The overall approach of the thesis applies a qualitative methodology over a quantitative methodology. This decision was informed, (see introduction) by studies conducted by Ellen Seiter (2004) and Julie D' Acci (2004). Seiter's research was lifted from one context and repositioned/shifted to a new context (e.g., the signifier "people", (which is all-encompassing) is replaced. The signifier "young women" replaces the signifier "people", making the meaning clearer.

Looking at media in the context of everyday life presents many research problems. How can we study the way viewers interpret television programmes in routinely occurring settings, such as the home [...]? What is the best way to get [young women] to talk about the meanings they derive from television programmes when they may be unaccustomed to interpreting TV material explicitly? (Seiter 2004, p. 461).

Due to Seiter's focus on ethnography, it can be argued that oral testimony and television receive focus. Ostensibly, psychoanalytic ethnographic studies are also useful (c.f., Mimica 2007). In framing the research paradigm for this study, I ask: what are the three key variables associated with young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction?

There are three key variables that correspond with the rationale for why this study's ontologies and epistemologies were shaped the way they were. Firstly, there is a complex interplay occurring between psychoanalysis as method, the oral history testimony, and empirical studies of television. This interplay leads to a synergistic amalgamation of methods where the limitations of each method are strengthened through their correspondence with one another.

In what follows, I use constructivism as *both* an ontological/epistemological base, wed to other productive ontologies/epistemologies—pragmatism and interpretivism. Adom, Yeboah, and Ankrah (2016, p. 9; emphasis added) point out that,

Constructivism [as an] approach is [...] one of the best philosophical approaches that helps us in understanding the *complexities and multiplicity of phenomena* especially in this 21st century where creative ideas and inventions marking novelty [are] earnestly sought.

In line with Adom, Yeboah, and Ankrah (2016) Smith (2020) points out, that the '...interplay of different forms of knowledge [take place] on [a] messy and ambiguous

terrain' (p. 10), hence constructivism according to Adom, Yeboah, and Ankrah (2016) is useful for addressing messiness and ambiguity. Empirical accounts of television (chapter 3), oral history testimonies, and psychoanalytical theory (chapter 2) have been synergised through working towards the development of a new model of televisual experience. Due to the complex entanglements and epistemological tensions that naturally occur and underpin a study that focuses on the context of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and its dual case studies of *Pretty Little Liars/Riverdale* there is no neat way of conceptualising and isolating these three key variables of enquiry. Given this, it is important to note that overlap is bound to occur (Stanizai 2018).

The paradoxical and ambiguous nature of psychoanalysis means that its interplay with *both* oral histories/empirical/critical accounts of television is perplexing. By virtue of the spaces that are the preserve of psychoanalysis the most productive relationships are created. Subsequently, it is the emergence of this productivity that provides the catalyst for the excavation of the surprising and the shocking.

The three key epistemological variables will be worked through in the epistemology section (4.3). At this stage, it is useful to provide a preview of the issues/approaches that will form the discussions and positioning of the study's ontology in the next section (4.2). For this purpose, I draw on and apply the work of Kevin Floyd in explaining how psychoanalysis is undergoing a structural reification.

The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism (Floyd 2009) posits reification as the transformation that occurs when an abstract form takes on a material form. As has been exemplified in other chapters, psychoanalytic concepts undergo a process of reification when synthesised and applied to an empirical context—television for example. Videlicet, concepts of *Jouissance* and *The Real* become less enigmatic.

The following structure aims to guide the reader through the methodological argument. Firstly, I consider what the optimum ontological position might be for describing young women's experiences, providing a philosophical scaffolding, supporting the overall arguments of this thesis. Secondly, the epistemological context forms a bedrock for articulating underlying knowledge, underpinning the study of women as viewers of fiction, where my own positionality as a middle-aged, cis

gendered, white, male researcher is illuminated. Thirdly, the epistemological position moves from the general to the particular through the conceptualisation of the online, virtual clinic which deals with issues corresponding transference/countertransference, defining truth, applying Freudian and Lacanian case studies, detailing the operations and functioning of the space, alongside practicalities and the self-reflexivity involved in running a session. Furthermore, a rationale is provided for the synergistic positioning and synthesis of oral histories and the psychoanalytic session alongside the role of trust and trust building in psychoanalytic and oral history encounters, alongside considering the development of a practical form of ethics.

Fourthly, the theoretical is connected to the empirical through the articulation of a rationale for the size of the sample. This is followed by the types of sampling methods that were used, alongside an indication of issues that were considered when recruiting narrators to the project. The chapter continues by outlining the methods of data collection, along with a summary of the analytical approach used to interrogate the data.

The chapter concludes with a critical discussion, focusing on the validity/reliability of psychoanalytic/oral history methods. Finally, a conclusion provides a summary of the issues discussed before previewing the data analysis chapters which investigate the Netflix shows *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*, neither of which, to date, have utilised empirical evidence with human subjects (c.f., Hall, West and Herbert 2015; Halden 2016; Whitney 2017; Miller 2018; Crookston 2020; Brembilla and Checcaglini 2020; Burkhardt, Trott and Monaghan 2021). In turn, young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction requires engagement with various dimensions of critical interpretation, achieved through ontological/epistemological discussions. It is these discussions which form a part of the next two sections of this thesis.

4.2 Ontology

This thesis takes a constructivist-pragmatist approach. The rationale for this draws on Nørreklit (2013) who argues that ‘Constructivism [is] mainly considered a subjectivist and idealistic perspective...’ (p. 58). The constructivist correspondence to televisual fiction links to the fact that, ‘To construct the piece of fiction is to make it become real’ (*ibid.*). The act of ascribing physical characteristics to something abstract points back to the process of reification (mentioned in section 4.1).

Furthermore, psychoanalysis as method, oral history testimonies, and televisual fiction are all ontologically-constructivist positions. The next three sections briefly showcase evidence in support of each method being attributed to an ontologically constructivist position.

4.2.1 Psychoanalysis as method

The positioning of psychoanalysis as an ontologically-constructivist research method is contestable. These debates coincide with the application of a non-representational framework, where non-factual/non-empirical concepts are used to analyse factual/empirical instances of television. The notion of using the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance* and the *Object a/Objet Petit a* lead to instances of ontological doubt, as Lacanians do not fully trust their own methods.

The key methodological approach of using Lacanian psychoanalysis to read young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction comes from a unification of ontological fault-lines where the ontological limitations of psychoanalysis are tempered through the addition of other methods that are abundant. This doubt and non-ontology can be explored further by drawing on the scholarship of Alenka Zupančič. Zupančič points out that, ‘...psychoanalysis is *not* an ontology’ (Zupančič 2012, p. 3).

Furthermore, '...the relationship of psychoanalysis to philosophy (as ontology) remains much more interesting and intricate' (*ibid.*). This helps the ineffable nature of Lacan's concepts to be reified towards something more compatible with ontic reality. Subsequently, the establishment of a constructivist-pragmatist/pragmatic ontology is fraught with seeming contradictions, paradoxes, and incompatibilities. This claim is echoed by Professor Lennart Nørreklit whose enquiry into a pragmatic-constructivist perspective speaks of '...the idea that reality is a construct' (*ibid.*). He takes to task the subject of the reality of constructs, posing the question: 'Are constructivist and realist perspectives not incompatible?' (*ibid.*).

In answering this, he explains,

They [constructivist and realist perspectives] are often construed as more or less incompatible and competing perspectives: Constructivism being mainly considered a subjectivist and idealistic perspective while the opposite perspective, realism, is considered an objectivist or materialist perspective. However, the ordinary usage of the terms 'reality' and 'construction' discloses *no contradiction but a group of nicely interrelated concepts* (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

Here, it appears that Nørreklit conflates realism with a pragmatist point of view. In contrast to realism, Lincoln and Guba's approach (1985, p. 83) sees,

[t]heir constructivist philosophy [as] idealist; they assume, that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals.

Furthermore,

[Fictions] do not exist outside of the persons who create and hold them; they are not part of some objective world that exists apart from their constructors (Lincoln and Guba *ibid.*, p. 143).

Given this, the complex entanglement of an ontological constructivist-pragmatic position is clear as Denzin and Lincoln's Constructivist philosophy '...is also pluralist and relativist. There are multiple, often conflicting, constructions, and all (at least potentially) are meaningful' (Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 243). These complexities can be seen through analysis of the relationships between young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction being a part of material reality.

4.2.2. Oral History Testimonies

The oral history testimony and its connection to psychoanalysis creates a paradox where there are *both* similarities *and* differences between the two methods. Tonkin is useful to review, as she debates the nature of oral history, questioning whether it is subjective or objective. Her answer is that there is a paradox, taken from the sensibility that the two positions merge—recorded history is seen as objective, whereas the recorder of the events are ‘...fallible human subjects...’ and are subjective (Tonkin 1992/2012, p. 83). Moreover, [Freud] believed that historians

were, [...] sceptical of ‘unconscious motives and irrational forces’. They preferred recorded facts and evidence of rational motivation (Yow 2018, p. 33).

Subsequently, Dahl and Thor (2019) focus on the ontologically-constructivist position of oral history testimonies, exploring ‘...the possibility to combine a social constructivist perspective *and* oral history within one methodological framework...’ (Dahl and Thor 2019, p. 1). Furthermore,

In order to combine a social constructivist perspective and oral history in a fruitful way, we must be aware of this relation of power and explain to the interviewees what we are doing and why we are doing it (*ibid.*).

These assertions serve to dictate the notions of the informed consent documentation and information included on the PID [Participant Information Document], as well as the debriefing information after all interviews have concluded.

In addition, oral histories can be both compelling and affective. In what follows, I draw on oral history publications/methodologies to illuminate this compelling affectivity. Oral histories use the contours of a constructivist approach³ to extract exchanges of desire, trust, trauma, and other areas of enquiry such as sex and death.

Exchanges related to trust, trauma, and death emerge from scholarship on how to deal with and gain insights from emotions generated during oral history interviews (Gammerl 2015). In turn, exchanges of trust are also contoured through the constructive nature of oral histories

³ The philosopher most responsible for defining the contours of a constructivist theory of reality and cognition is Nelson Goodman (1984).

(c.f., Field 2007; Strandén 2009; Vrzgulová 2019) —researcher emotion and exchanges of trust are respectively covered in sections 4.8 and 4.9.

4.2.3 Television/Televisual Fiction.

The ontologically-constructivist position connects to the disjunction that occurs between unconscious and conscious thought. In other words, language and thought do not apply to, nor do they mirror/apply to the reality of the situation. Television constructs its fictional realities.

It is useful to acknowledge that Schwandt *in* Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 239) draws on Ernst von Glaserfeld's concept of "radical constructivism" (p. 239). Radical constructivism is helpful here as 'Glaserfeld's claims that '...we cannot speak of knowledge as somehow corresponding to, mirroring, or representing the world.' (*ibid.*). A brief example will help the reader navigate the potential cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) that occurs when young women's realities do not mirror what is seen on the television (see chapter 6 in particular).

The mediated nature of Bondai Beach (**figure 3** contrasts sharply with reality, **figure 2**).

Figure 2 Reality

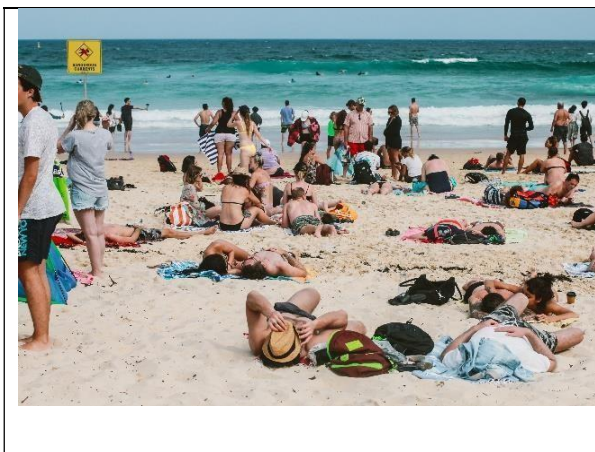


Figure 3 Mediated construction



4.2.4 Pragmatic Ontology

In terms of ontology and epistemology, pragmatism is not committed to any single system of philosophy and [*sic*] reality. Reality is actively created as individuals act in the world, and it is thus ever changing, based on human

experience, and oriented toward solving practical problems (Weaver 2018, p. 1288; my emphasis).

Weaver continues to explain that,

[t]he pragmatic paradigm refers to a worldview that focuses on “what works” rather than what might be considered absolutely and objectively “true” or “real.” [...] The pragmatic paradigm is useful for guiding research design, especially when *a combination of different approaches is philosophically inconsistent* (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

In highlighting the development of a non-representative framework applied to the empirical contexts of television and oral history testimonies through psychoanalytic theory, the conceptual aspects/key tools of this project can be situated as substitutes for the word pragmatism. What emerges from this (re)positioning of the psychoanalytic concepts is that, in terms of ontology and epistemology, *The Real/Jouissance/Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction/The Object a/Objet Petit a* is not committed to any single system of philosophy or reality.

4.3 Epistemology

Through contextualising the methodology chapter’s constructivist-interpretivist approach to epistemology I draw on the work of Schwandt *in* Denzin and Lincoln (1998). Firstly, in establishing a positionality Schwandt reports that,

[t]he constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. [Furthermore,] [...] at base, all interpretive inquirers watch, listen, ask, record, and examine. [...] [In addition,] [t]hey celebrate the permanence and priority of the real world of first person, subjective experience. [Finally,] [b]ecause they focus on meaning as primary, interpretivists construe the nature of social reality *quite differently from those who support empiricist social science frameworks* (pp. 221-223, 225; emphasis added).

Given this, empiricist/empirical approaches should not be confused. The paradox of these two viewpoints provides the rationale for a synthesis of the two approaches, where an abundance of one makes up for a lack in the other. For example, psychoanalysis is not empiricist as empiricism does not deal with inner experiences such as dreaming, imagining or fantasising. Therefore, empirical methods are deployed to access such unreachable areas.

Much like Schwandt, I decouple constructivist-interpretivist approaches with the intent of providing clear demarcations. In other words, constructivism is followed by interpretivism where the similarities, differences, and critiques of these approaches are discussed. Through the act of this de-coupling, I acknowledge that,

Interpretivist and constructivist persuasions have been somewhat artificially disentangled here to afford a closer look at the salient aspects of each. Yet it should be acknowledged that current work in these methodologies reflects the synthetic impulse of the postmodern zeitgeist (Schwandt 1998 cited in Denzin and Lincoln, p. 245).

Looking back at the construction of the constructivist-pragmatist ontology and the current constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, Schwandt's intention to create approaches that are synergistic is embraced. Thus, rather than epistemological tension, this synergy of approaches points to a productive harmonisation.

The three key epistemological variables of psychoanalysis, oral history testimony and television, connect to the epistemological variables of psychoanalytical thought, oral history testimonies, and empirical/critical accounts of television. The elaborate, enigmatic, and paradoxical interplay between the dimensions of this research framework speak to the complexities and tensions that emerge as a result of the synergistic melding of seemingly incompatible phenomena. The interpretivist aspect of the epistemological approach connects to the synthesis of the oral history testimony with the affordances offered by the 50-minute psychoanalytic session.

Furthermore, when analysed from the position of the relationship between psychoanalysis and the properties of television, an interesting outcome emerges through the retrofitting of the critical and empirical dimensions of television to psychoanalysis' non-epistemology/non-ontology. The over-coding of the non- definitional properties of psychoanalysis with the empirical/critical properties of television takes the constructivist framework of television and applies it to psychoanalysis in accounting for the limitations of psychoanalysis as method for not being faithful to any particular subject position. In addition, it is beneficial to explore

the limitations of psychoanalysis and provide scholarly evidence for how the empirical nature of television helps over-code and subsequently bolster the gaps and limitations of psychoanalysis with the next section rationalising this section's epistemology, both conceptualising and applying it to the implementation of the online, virtual clinic.

4.4 Conceptualising the Online, Virtual Clinic through Epistemological Rationalisation

4.4.1 What is the online, virtual clinic?

The online, virtual clinic⁴ is a safe space where young women can discuss their desires and anxieties. The underpinning epistemological positions which assist in driving the clinic's functions allude to the synthesis of the properties of psychoanalysis as method and the oral history/witness testimony. Unpacking how these two methods drive the operations of the online, virtual clinic is imperative for fostering a critical understanding of how one is able to access young women's unconscious, psychic experiences through their speech.

When appropriated as a method, the union of psychoanalysis and oral history results in the creation of a coterminous toolkit, meaning that their synthesis lends itself to the creation and exploration of the processes of transference and countertransference (discussed further in sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2). In positioning the function of the online, virtual clinic, I apply Roper's point (2003, p. 27) in arguing that,

The overall aim [of the online, virtual clinic] might [...] be to generate narratives or information about the past. Considering the interview as a 'total situation', however, involves not only working with the conscious and rational aspects of the encounter, but with the empathetic and unconscious as well, since all these elements structure our knowledge and understanding.

This approach reveals the productive synergy between the oral history testimony/online, psychoanalytic session. Furthermore, in articulating an epistemological approach to the online, virtual clinic I draw on Yow (2018) who in turn draws on William Langer (1957/8) to argue that,

⁴ The idea of an online, virtual clinic is not historically unique (c.f., Turkle 1995). The intricacies of this approach, adopting Lacanian methods and concepts, however, is. Furthermore, the question as to whether or not the interactions were tainted by not being conducted face-to-face, is posed. The answer provided, one with which I concur, is that 'considerations on the "real" or "virtual" nature of cyberspace are not relevant anymore' (Guelmami and Nicolle 2018, p. 363). More importantly, just '[I]like urban space, cyberspace is built according to logical considerations on human needs and thus depends on mental space (ibid., p. 362)'.

Psychoanalysis has long since ceased being merely a therapy and has been generally recognised as a theory basic to the study of human personality [...] how can it be that the historian, who must be as much or more concerned with human beings and their motivation than with impersonal forces and causation, has failed to make use of these findings? (p. 33).

This viewpoint, now dated, still serves as a central factor in shaping the operations of the online, virtual clinic. Yow goes on to argue that historians eventually put this finding into practice citing that these ideas were used for helping to understand ‘...individuals in history’ (*ibid.*, p. 34). Furthermore, evidence for the rationale for the integration of the psychoanalytic session and oral history can be found in Roth (2016, cited in Yow 2018) who ‘declares that ‘psychoanalysis is best read [...] as a theory of history’ (*ibid.*).

In addition, psychoanalysis also appropriates certain aspects from oral history in the sense that it is not common practice to record psychoanalytic meetings, yet with oral history it is. This common practice was also questioned in 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Self 2021), yet it is important to note that informed consent is required for both the oral history session and the psychoanalytic session. The use of the in-depth interview is one common practice that cuts across both disciplines as it is necessary to gain consent before interviews can occur.

With the use of the in-depth interview and staying with disciplinary differences Yow argues that,

the interviewers seek different kinds of information. Historians seek an *understanding of a culture, a way of living in a specific time*, changes which affect lives. They do not interview so they can improve the lives of their narrators, but to *improve an understanding of past lives*. The goal of psychoanalysts is to enable their patients to live now without inner pain, to cope with psychological problems. Still, for oral historians, there is often an emotional outcome with the in-depth oral history interview whether the interviewer seeks that outcome or not (*ibid.*, p. 33; my emphasis).

Through engagement with young women’s psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction (as well as their conscious, manifest experiences) an understanding of culture and a way of living in a specific time, frames the research in the direction of a better critical understanding of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Finally, the aim of an improved understanding of past lives often emerged during my interviewing of the young women as they often discussed their childhood experiences of these shows or their experiences of the shows when they were much younger. This shows, ‘...how

the past organically interweaves with the present' (*ibid.*, p. 35) in both psychoanalysis and oral history. Returning to the use of the in-depth interview '...both interviews in oral history and in therapy are based on narrative' and it is here I do not concur with some of Yow's statements as she claims that,

The oral historian seeks information to document the human condition in the past and present. The therapist seeks information to help the individual overcome personal problems stemming from the past so he or she can live in the present (*ibid.*, p. 34).

The context of the investigation of this thesis does not have clinical aims. Through the process of interviewing women, I am not seeking to help these women overcome personal problems stemming from their pasts by discussing *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. My contention with Yow is that when she says that the oral historian seeks information to document the human condition in the past and present, through my observations in the online, virtual clinic I believe this to also be true of oral history that has been inflected with elements of psychoanalysis, notably discussions concerning *phantasy/fantasy as mediated fiction*, *The Real*, *Feminine/Jouissance*, *Object a/Objet Petit a*. These concepts were the key tools and structuring principles that assisted with the construction of the in-depth interview questions.

The differences between psychoanalysis and oral history and the added elements that psychoanalytic inflection can bring to the oral history testimony is argued by Yow (*ibid.*) drawing on Roy Schafer (2006) as being determinate of another reality or giving access to another reality which oral historians do not usually tap into. For Yow,

One may say that psychoanalytic interpretation tells about a second reality. In this reality, events or phenomena are viewed from the standpoint of repetitive re-creation of infantile, family-centered situations bearing on sex, aggression, and other such matters. [...] The competent analyst says in effect, 'Let me show you over the course of the analysis another reality, commonsensical elements of which are already, though incoherently and eclectically, included in what you now call reality'.

Infantile and family situations were two aspects that arose in chapters 5, 6, and 7. Furthermore, case studies formed a large part of the content of the in-depth interviews because both clinicians and oral historians have a '...reliance on the case study' (*ibid.*, p. 35). Section 4.7 presents further details of the Freud/Lacanian case studies which

provided inspiration for the case studies on *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Moreover what is interesting at this stage is that Yow argues that,

Therapists are usually not using the interview for research data - an important difference from oral historians (*ibid.*).

What is important here is that the online, virtual clinic does not operate under the auspices of a clinical epistemology, but the theoretical application of psychoanalysis outside of the traditional clinical context. Thus, the interviews are being used for research data and this productive synthesis marks a congruence between the theoretical application of psychoanalysis as method and the oral history encounter/witness testimony. Drawing on Casement (1991, p. 7), Yow (*ibid.*, p. 37; emphasis added) explains the importance of conscious and unconscious experiences, which I apply to the context of the online, virtual clinic. She offers an argument as follows,

Casement offers a clinical definition of the inner world and the external world: 'For each person there are always two realities - external and internal. External reality is experienced in terms of the individual's internal reality, which in turn is *shaped by past experience and a continuing tendency to see the present in terms of that past*'.

Given this and based on evidence that the inner world of myself as interviewer is bound with the realities of the narrators, in the data analysis chapters, 'E' discusses her father, which belies a tendency to see the present in terms of the past. In turn, this approach sees a shift in emphasis among oral historians in the sense that, 'Until recently, [they] did not think that daydreams, night dreams or fantasies could offer evidence for a history (*ibid.*).' This point is also helpful in understanding how transference and countertransference works in the online, virtual clinic, which is the subject of the next section.

4.5 Transference and Countertransference in the Online, Virtual Clinic

4.5.1 Transference in the online, virtual clinic

therapists consider transference an important tool to work with, but oral historians assume this is information that psychoanalysts and psychologists should use, not historians (Yow 2018, p. 37).

For ease of accessibility and clarity this section will de-couple transference from countertransference dealing with each one in turn. Firstly, transference⁵ occurred within the context of the online, virtual clinic. Due to ethics, it is not proper to discuss exactly what form of transference occurred outside of the context of a professional clinical environment.

Furthermore, Roper (2003),

...demonstrates the value of thinking psychoanalytically about the oral history encounter. [He] argues that concepts of transference and counter- transference can be valuable resources, not only in helping oral historians to deal with difficult moments within the interview, but in interpretation. [The life story that results from this encounter is always informed by unconscious dynamics] (p. 20).

These unconscious dynamics [transference/countertransference]⁵ act as a bedrock for structuring the main locus of enquiry within the online, virtual clinic. An important epistemological tension that requires reflection is that Roper argues that we need to be,

aware of the difficulties that can occur when non-specialists export psychoanalytic concepts and methods from the clinical session (*ibid.*).

As a non-trained psychoanalytic clinician these epistemological tensions are negotiated through eschewing the usual *modus operandi* of the clinical session in the sense that I am unconcerned with improving the lives of my narrators, nor am I concerned with alleviating any symptoms of trauma they may have, as this type of work is commensurate with a very different context. Continuing with the theme of transference, Roper points out that the so-called 'reflexive turn', '...does not quite capture the more subterranean aspects of the interview relationship' and in relation to this 'reflexive turn' he continues to argue that,

Elements of *desire*, *memory*, and *primitive conflicts* - the realms of the psychic - seem curiously absent. Such accounts are rarely attuned to what would for the psychoanalyst be a fundamental feature of any such encounter; that is, the unconscious material which, on both sides, is being brought into the relationship (*ibid.*, p. 21; my emphasis).

⁵ Freud wrote about transference as an emotional reaction in an encounter between two people when one sees in the other the reincarnation of a Figure out of the past; consequently he or she transfers to this person feelings and reactions felt in the past (Yow 2018, p. 38, citing Freud 1949, p. 66).

The functioning of the online, virtual clinic ensure these 'curiously absent' issues are fully addressed. For example, desire is rife in the narrators' articulations of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. In turn, paternal primitive conflicts occur, and memory is also distinguished as an important shaping factor as many narrators used the safe space of the online, virtual clinic to discuss their childhood experiences of the shows. Furthermore, within the safe space of the online, virtual clinic my '...approach involve[d] encouraging the [narrator] through attentive listening, to develop their account in the way they wish[ed].' (*ibid.*).

As a final point before transitioning to a discussion pertaining to countertransference Roper (2003) draws on the work of Betty Joseph (1989, p. 157) in positioning transference as a tool, assisting with interpretation. He argues that,

Our narrators will convey 'experiences often beyond the use of words, which we can often only capture through the feelings aroused in us'.

This point follows the line of argument of this thesis relating to both the limitations of language *and* representation. Having discussed the usefulness of transference for data interpretation the argument now moves on to examine the role of countertransference in the online, virtual clinic.

4.5.2 Countertransference in the online, virtual clinic

In positioning the concept of countertransference, Roper argues that through,

experiencing something of what our interviewees experienced [...], we may in turn have to deal with countertransference, a triggering of anxieties and conflicts from our own pasts, brought alive by the material in the interview (*ibid.*, p.22).

The comfortable nature of the online, virtual clinic allowed narrators to open up more about events they may not have discussed during a present-in-person encounter. I dealt with 'E's' experiences of her fraught relationship with her father as it reminded me of my own non-existent relationship with my own father, a situation I have never had the interest in rectifying. Although 'E' said she didn't get along with her own father, the countertransference reminded me that I could have no feelings towards my own father due to my predilection to not want to know him.

In this context, Roper argues that,

the interviewer can become cognisant of countertransference by noticing that suddenly he feels different. Something the narrator said, or the way [s]he looked, has touched on an event or feeling or relationship the interviewer has known in the past. If the interviewer thinks about this, she or he may be able to reach back into the past and discover that something not thought about for a long time is now very much present (*ibid.*, p. 24).

Further to Roper's assessments, Racker (2007) assesses countertransference through drawing on various evidence from within the scholarly literature. One of the most useful assessments in explaining what happened during the sessions in the online, virtual clinic draws on P. Heimann's article from 1950. Racker explains that Heimann,

deals with countertransference as a tool for understanding the analysand [narrator].

The "basic assumption is that the analyst's [interviewers] unconscious understands that of his patient [narrator]. This rapport on the deep level comes to the surface *in the form of feelings which the analyst [interviewer] notices in response to his patient [narrator]*, in his countertransference." This emotional response of the analyst [interviewer] is frequently closer to the psychological state of the patient [narrator] than is the analyst's conscious judgment thereof (Racker 2007, p. 726).

This position is solidified by Racker's argument that,

...countertransference is the psychological response to the analysand's [narrators] real and imaginary transferences (ibid., p. 730).

Thus, be it real or imaginary (virtual or actual), even if it was my own imagination, the situation feels real and *is* real. Due to constraints of space, I refer the reader to Racker's article to find out more about countertransference. In the next two sections, the roles of truth and the application of Freudo-Lacanian case studies in sections 4.6 and 4.7 help to explain how truth circulates within the context of an online, virtual clinic and the case studies act as a lynchpin for structuring the virtual space of a face-to-face, clinical session.

4.6 Defining Truth in the Online, Virtual Clinic

Investigating truth in the online, virtual clinic, requires an appreciation that we are living in a post-truth era. In determining evidence in support of this statement I draw of Arteaga and Bandinelli (2022) who conduct a psychoanalytic investigation of the Post-Truth Era. Prior to engaging with this work, it is beneficial to define what is meant by Post-Truth.

Ralph Keyes (2004) claims that the term is not his, arguing that he '...first saw it in a 1992 Nation essay by the late, Steve Tesich' (p. 274, fn. 2). Despite this it is worth pursuing how Keyes himself positions the notion of Post-Truth.

we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth. [...] It allows us to dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest (*ibid.*, p. 16).

Furthermore, I position Arteaga and Bandinelli in outlining how post-truth connects to the psychoanalytic in general and young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular. Arteaga and Bandinelli '...investigate the relationship between truth and knowledge [...] by means of Lacanian psychoanalysis' (Arteaga and Bandinelli 2022, p. 95). It should be noted that there is no truth in any of

the paradigms used to investigate young women's experiences within this project due to the constructivist nature of the ontologies/epistemologies used.

Within the context of the online, virtual clinic my role as interviewer is to interpret/construct the truth of what the young women are saying. Their words are shifted and shaped in pursuance of the creation of a new reality. Furthermore, Arteaga and Bandinelli argue, using Lacan that there exists no natural correspondence between truth and knowledge claiming that,

It is in the rift opened up by this non-relation between knowledge and truth that Lacan situates the subject upon which psychoanalysis operates; namely: the subject of the unconscious (ibid., p. 102).

Given this, does this mean that one can get closer to the truth through investigating young women's psychic/unconscious experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction? This is something that is considered in the conclusion of this thesis. To end this section, I briefly focus on the link between post-truth and its correspondence to television.

Javier (2021) '...reflects on the need to investigate audiovisual texts within our current "post-truth" and "spectacularized" [sic] society' (p. 1). Looking back to when Tesich coined the term, 'Post-Truth', its correspondence to television is slightly more nuanced in the sense that it connects to ideas first presented by Guy Debord and his *Society of the Spectacle* (1967, [1994]) as well as Jean Baudrillard's⁶ notions of *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994). Furthermore, Javier draws on Jameson cited in Brea (2005 p. 14) to argue that "the transforming force of vision technologies has turned the image into the repository of the epistemological function of our time" (Javier 2021, p. 12).

The very act of treatment requires a great deal of trust, and the next section focuses on the role of trust and building trust during the oral history encounter.

⁶ For an in-depth account of Baudrillard's relationship to psychoanalysis, see the work of Victoria Grace (2022).

4.7 The Role of Trust/Trust Building in Psychoanalysis/Oral History

Trust and building trust are important factors to consider when conducting interviews with young women within the context of an online, virtual clinic. With the aim of making points clear and accessible to the reader, trust and trust building will be split/riven exploring its connections first to psychoanalysis, followed by the oral history encounter. There is an epistemological tension present when exploring young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual *fiction* as it is not fiction, but facts that connect to trust. Although, all fiction is in some way, or another grounded in some element of fact.

At this stage, it is important to point out that psychoanalysis is not a trustworthy discourse as it is built on a productive distrust connecting to issues corresponding to desire and trauma etc. So, when faced with this paradox, as is common to all aspects of psychoanalysis, how does one navigate this challenging area? One answer can be found through drawing on the work of Professor Caroline Rooney.

Rooney argues that "this project is impossible outside of the context of dialogue" (Rooney 2012). Furthermore, it becomes evident that focusing on a love of something, (with the intention of building a common ground), assists with overriding entrenched patterns of thought, allowing both interviewer and narrator to co-construct through the previously mentioned mechanisms of transference/countertransference, a new and mutually respectful environment where all contributions are equally valid. It is through the redefining of psychoanalytic principles that interviewer and narrator can become unified.

In spite of this, a word of caution is necessary concerning the content of the televisual shows, as not all narrators had a 'love' for *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. In this instance, an alternate strategy was adopted in the sense that it was the everyday 'small talk' before the interviews where a bond was formed, and trust and rapport was established and fostered throughout the interview process. This notion of 'small talk' will continue, alongside other considerations, as I now turn to the role of trust and building trust as part of the synthesis between psychoanalysis and oral history, where the focus is placed on the oral history encounter.

As with psychoanalysis, informed consent is integral for establishing and building trust in the context of the online, virtual clinic. Leavy (2011) describes this process as

...rapport building, which [as Leavy puts it] is integral to successful oral history practice. [Leavy] suggest[s] that the central role of rapport-building differentiates data collection in oral history from all other interview methods (in which rapport may be helpful, but less central to successful data collection). When the researcher and participant build rapport via non-verbal gestures (eye contact, head nodding), acclimating to narrative styles, and *developing trust*, then the participant is likely to speak more freely and at greater depth (p. 39; my emphasis).

Thus, pre-interviewing, for example, the aforementioned, 'small talk' is central for fostering and cultivating trust. Having established mechanisms for building trust and navigating the epistemological tensions and paradoxes presented by psychoanalysis I move on now to discuss who was sampled and why they were chosen.

4.8 Strategies of Sampling and Recruitment

This section considers the basic justifications for the sample of young women who were recruited to participate in the online, virtual clinic. My sample consisted of seven young women between the ages of 21-31. All of the young women interviewed identified as cis-gendered young women and some disclosed their sexuality which was either heterosexual/straight or bisexual in one case; subsequently, all young women were enrolled at university, two studying for undergraduate qualifications, three studying for master's level graduate qualifications and two enrolled in graduate-level/postgraduate doctoral research.

In comparison to studies that adopt a quantitative approach, the sample size was small. In providing evidence in support of utilising this small sample size I draw on the work of Joanne Whitehouse-Hart. Whitehouse-Hart used eleven interviews (Whitehouse-Hart 2014). This number provided a practical solution by constraining the analytical dimensions of enquiry, providing balance with complex, theoretical concepts such as The Real and Jouissance.

In addition, my own decisions pertaining to an optimal range/sample size are steered via Shari Dworkin who argues that,

there is indeed variability in what is suggested as a minimum [sample size]. An extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate (Dworkin 2012, p. 1319).

Dworkin argues that how many is the wrong question and instead rigour and saturation should be accounted for; yet by their very nature the amount of data generated by oral histories would give approximately over 6 hours of data for analysis. When applied to the scope of this project an appropriate saturation for the generation of thematic categories would emerge. Following on from explanations corresponding to sample and rationale the next section focuses on the types of sampling strategy used to recruit narrators to the project.

4.8.1 Sampling Strategy and Narrator Recruitment

The sampling strategies adopted for investigating women's experiences of televisual fiction are a hybrid of snowball/chain sampling (Noy 2008) and purposive sampling (Palinkas, et. al., 2015). In articulating a rationale for this choice, I draw on Noy's argument that '...snowball sampling relies on and partakes in the dynamics of natural and organic social networks' (Noy 2008, p. 329; emphasis in original). By accessing a colleague in the USA, I made enquiries as to whether his two daughters were able to participate.

My enquiry resulted in him sharing the contact information of his daughters, one of which was able to participate in the study (identified as 'L'). By accessing a colleague in the USA, this thesis draws on the natural and organic social networks of the researcher in finding subjects to participate. Noy's approach positions the term as corresponding to

when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants (ibid).

Purposive sampling is another form of sampling useful for psychoanalytic investigation and corresponds with

the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. [...] the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of

knowledge or experience. [...]. This involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2015, p. 2).

The interesting part of this quotation is the emphasis on deliberate choice. If the researcher is choosing the best cases this leads to selection bias which is important to minimise. Smith and Noble (2014) provide a counterargument to Etikan and colleagues' points of view stating that purposive sampling methods assist with the elimination of bias.

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling has advantages when compared with convenience sampling in that bias is reduced because the sample is constantly refined to meet the study aims (p. 100).

Smith and Noble point out that the recruiting of new participants into the study during data analysis is an accepted technique to use when eliminating bias from the study. Acknowledgment and documentation of the biases is helpful in articulating a cogent argument for the sampling methods used. A technique to reduce the bias is to not apply the technique beyond the sampled population (ibid., p. 151).

In turn, the first two narrators were recruited by different means. Firstly, 'S' responded to an e-mail advertisement I circulated on Newcastle University's ListServ, where she e-mailed me. In contrast, I recruited 'K' from a master's class I had previously taught in Media Analysis (before data collection began, I had conversations with 'K' (who was American) and she said she was able to help with *Pretty Little Liars*, but not *Riverdale*, the same was true of 'S' who lacked knowledge of *Riverdale*).

Subsequently, 'S' and 'K' became the first two interviewed, followed by 'N' and 'E'. 'L' and 'I' followed them, and 'M' was recruited last. Similar to 'K', both 'I' and 'L' were recruited from the masters class I had previously taught, with 'I', recommending her friend, 'E' to interview and 'M' being the roommate of 'S' who I had first spoken to. The next section considers what happened during a session outlining the practicalities of the online, virtual clinic and how my own self-reflexivity occurred during a session.

4.9 Practicalities and the Self-Reflexivity of Running a Session

The psychoanalytic practice of the face-to-face, clinical setting was transposed into the online, virtual setting of Zoom, echoing Sherry Turkle's prognostications of a virtual psychoanalysis (c.f., Turkle 1995; 2011). Furthermore, this novel approach echoes similar work on psychoanalytic ethnography (Mimica 2007) and attempts to articulate psychoanalysis online (Scharff 2013; Corbella 2020). When running the virtual sessions, the following considerations were integrated due to the theses data collection occurring during a lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is a four-fold consideration involving the following guidelines:

(a) narrators were asked to turn on their audio and video to heighten the level of immediacy within the online environment.

When asked to do this, all narrators complied with the request. I felt that it was sometimes necessary to switch from Zoom to Teams or an alternative platform capable of recording video as with one of the narrators, 'K' I believe, there were technical issues occurring which caused Zoom to be inoperable on the day of interview. 'K' was a very warm, accommodating narrator, as although I masked it well, when things don't go to plan (and I am an nth degree planner) I get flustered and anxious and this is exactly how I felt on this occasion, but I hid it well and the interview soon commenced.

It is important to point out that my own reflexive/subjective responses to narrators and events are an important aspect of psychoanalysis as it helped me to better understand my own influences upon and intrusions into the research context. By referring to Thomas Nagel (1974) I was able to appreciate the dynamics of sexual difference within the research context, as Nagel provided a way to open myself to experiencing something alien. This happened quite organically when asking a question about the idealised representation of femininity.

For a long time, I have an ingrained, intra-psycho script⁷, that I probably learnt from being a teenager from television, that blue-eyed, American blondes were the idealisation of femininity. My own belief that women also believed this, was shaken, destroyed, and rebuilt when 'E' chose Veronica Lodge (a brown-eyed, brunette) as her ideal version (see chapter 6), this led to further research discussed in chapter 6 concerning the existence of a duality between Rebecca and Rowena, which does not critically account for people who find red-heads like Cheryl Blossom from Riverdale, an idealised version of femininity.

(b) the oral history interviews were recorded as per participant/narrator consent.

The individualised, subjective responses of the psychoanalytic sessions were maintained in line with a Lacanian epistemology. Instances of the collective unconscious related to groups were eschewed as this could have led to a co-construction of meaning amongst narrators, which belies a Jungian positionality and is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Third, and (c) the sessions were recorded with the consent of the narrators involved, and

It was evident during the recording of the interviews that once the initial nerves had dissipated, on the whole, both I and the narrators liked to perform for the camera. I felt that we acted, said things, and perhaps behaved in ways that may not have occurred in a face-to-face, formalised interview setting. The context eased the nerves and allowed people's personalities to shine.

(d) mirroring the times associated with a 50-minute psychoanalytic session, each narrator was given 50 minutes of time, although most did not use the full allocation.

The Lacanian clinical session augmented the Freudian session through focusing on a variable as opposed to a fixed session. During the oral histories (and as discussed earlier) there were 50 minutes available as per Freudian arguments, but ultimately the narrators eschewed these in favour of the variable session, with one of the sessions lasting approximately 27 minutes. In providing a rationale for the use of variable sessions in

⁷ "Intrapsychic scripting" refers to the activity and content of the mind, like sexual thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, and emotions (Whittier 2007).

the oral histories Philip Harry Fenton Hill (2002, p. 185) explains that,

From the client's position it is often ideal if the clinical work is not time-limited; the client can finish when [s]he is ready, but this does not mean of course that some limited psychoanalytic work cannot be done in a time limited context.

Initially, when the narrators began falling far short of their allocated times, I was initially annoyed and then worried as to whether or not I had enough data to write three analysis chapter with. Once I read about the variable sessions within the Lacanian context and saw how much data was generated from one transcription my worries were put to rest.

Part of the mechanics of conducting a Freudo-Lacanian online psychoanalytic session through online oral histories/witness testimonies pertains to following an established set of guidelines in relation to 'Engaging the Patient in the Therapeutic Process' (Fink 1999, p. 11). Interestingly, attention is drawn here to the word 'patient.' Fink points out, drawing on the work of Lacan, that analysand is used as opposed to patient because patient '...tends to pathologize or stigmatize [sic] the person in therapy, ...' (ibid., p. 9). In utilising nomenclature for the context of analysis, preference is given to the use of the term 'narrator' (Quinlan 2011, p. 26) as opposed to analysand, patient, informant or interlocutor as it best captures the nuances of historical storytelling.

In deciding whether to have narrators lie down on a couch during the online sessions, the rationale as to why this approach was not taken has been argued by Fink (1999) in the sense that,

The preliminary meetings must take place face-to-face, and even people who have already been in analysis should not immediately be put on the couch (Fink 1999, p. 14).

Fink's comment regarding face-to-face preliminaries can be ignored here due to the circumstances under which the research was conducted. This kind of practice was avoided as the session lengths undertaken were all classed as what Lacan terms 'preliminary meetings' because as Fink points out,

...[I]t may well take a year of daily face-to-face meetings before the patient [narrator] can truly be said to be engaging in the analytic process (ibid).

In this sense, the time afforded to the research is not subject to such luxuries of a year to conduct interviews.

In framing issues of self-reflexivity when running the psychoanalytic oral history sessions within the context of an online, virtual clinic it is useful to highlight the work of Benno Gammerl (2015). Gammerl argues that,

If emotion is inseparable from cognition, then the researcher's feelings cannot be disconnected from the analytical process [and] Instead of pushing aside these entanglements, or empathetically reducing their complexity, researchers should, rather, reflect upon them (p. 153).

This evidence is used to highlight my own feelings during the research process as Gammerl's scholarship focuses on how to deal with and gain insights from emotions that are generated during oral histories (or in my case, psychoanalytic oral histories). Gammerl poses the question as to whether or not one is able to feel their own research results. The evidence weighs heavily in favour of the affirmative. Moreover, there are two instances mentioned by Gammerl that emerged during the psychoanalytic, oral histories within the context of the online, virtual clinic and these may be repeated elsewhere in the thesis in a different form to emphasise their importance to the research process and their connection to Gammerl's work.

For instance, Gammerl notes firstly, that it is,

...important to differentiate between the reported emotions and the emotions that accompany the report (*ibid.*).

For example, in chapter 5 'E's' emotions appear to be one of excitement when she talks of her experiences of New York City and her love of *Gossip Girl* and *Riverdale*. Lurking beneath the surface, however, are the latent, unconscious anxieties⁸ that accompany her wanting to study in America. Secondly, drawing on 'E' again it is possible to apply Gammerl's notion to her past experiences of her fraught relationship with her father, which in turn, transferred and triggered my own thoughts and feelings of indifference to the fact I grew up without a father figure. The connection of this event in the research process to

⁸ Roper (2003), pp. 24-26 as cited in this thesis, highlights the mutually amplifying anxieties that occur between interviewee and interviewer. This was particularly prominent when I spoke with 'M' about death as death really, really bothers me despite the fact I am a Christian.

Gammerl's work focuses on his argument that,

...one has to be aware of the interrelations between the feelings pertinent to the period under research and the emotions generated during the research process. [The key aspect that links to the connection of feelings between 'E' and I stems from the fact that] These are intertwined by the intricate dynamics of memory, as well as by the (re)constructive historiographical endeavour itself. [In this sense] ... *past and present emotions are distinct, yet not clearly separable from each other (ibid., my emphasis).*

This is an important connection to make as my past experiences of hate towards my father changed to indifference in the present as I got older, and 'E's' own present experiences appeared to be inflected with anxiety from the past and pity in the present. The use of emotional interpretation and consideration of my own emotions during the process (documented in the next section) leads to an acknowledgement of the workings of unconscious processes that in turn, assist with, the shaping and contouring of the development of a new model of televisual experience in the sense that inclusion of these emotional points '...enable empirical insights that would otherwise have remained unexplored (*ibid.*, p. 154). Furthermore, Gammerl reviews the work of Janet Holland (2007) in his scholarship which I engage with as a way of previewing in the upcoming section how my own emotions are intricately woven into the research process.

Holland (2007) argues that '...emotions are important in the production of knowledge and add power in understanding, analysis and interpretation' (p. 195). It is arguable that Holland assisted in shaping the later work of Benno Gammerl. Furthermore, I draw on Holland's appropriation of Valerie Walkerdine *et. al.* highlighting the importance of arguing for the psychosocial approach of Walkerdine and her colleagues, [that is] concerned with their own subjectivity in the research process and emotion and unconscious processes (*ibid.*).

These same issues help to frame my own experiences as a researcher within the context of the online, virtual clinic.

Thus, Holland (pp. 200-1) draws on Walkerdine *et al.* who,

wanted to engage with the place of emotions in the construction of research accounts through an understanding of issues that are concerned with surveillance, *truth*,

fictions and fantasies in the research process (Walkerdine et al., 2002, p. 178; my emphasis). They are looking at how the intersection of fiction and fantasy is lived for both participants and researchers, and how out of the intersection, certain research stories come to be told.

This is an integral study that assists with the framing of my own research because of the close connections between Walkerdine *et.al.*'s study and the content of my own study that focuses on truth, fictions, and fantasies. Furthermore, the studies of Walkerdine and colleagues are central in assisting me to shape my own research methodology as what,

Walkerdine and her colleagues are trying to do is to *research the social, cultural and psychic together, and to develop methodologies that respond to the demand for inseparability at the level of explanation* (2001, p. 88). To do this, and to attempt to understand and overcome some of the complexities and difficulties of the research process and to *work towards an engagement with the unconscious*, they show how they applied psychoanalytic concepts to the generation and analysis of research data, and to the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The psychoanalytic concepts they discuss are *transference, countertransference, projection and projective identification*, and denial (*ibid.*, p. 200; my emphasis).

Given this, my own research and methodological approach is very similar to that of Walkerdine's *et. al.* This inseparability links to my prior arguments concerning the interconnected nature of psychoanalytic concepts (c.f., Stanizai 2018). Moreover, the areas italicised in the above quotation relate to the areas of enquiry in my own work, as there were areas of projective identification (Cashdan 1988) present in the relationships (e.g., sexuality and ingratiation). Furthermore, throughout my own approach I try to approximate the three levels of analysis utilised by Walkerdine and colleagues.⁹

4.10 Reflecting on a form of Practical Ethics

Firstly, in navigating the challenging area of ethics it is necessary to address what ethical issues arise through conducting research online. In providing evidence in support of this question (along the way to constructing a potential answer) it is helpful to examine scholars who address questions such as: what does consent mean when it

⁹ They engage in three levels of analysis of their interview data: At the first, they attend to the *face value of the individual narratives* to ascertain the overall plot, the story that is being told. At the second level, *they problematise the narrative through exploring the unconscious projections, introjections, and transferences at play, paying attention to words, images and metaphors, inconsistencies and contradictions, omissions and silences*. At the third level, *the researcher is introduced as a subject and they take into account the feelings that the researcher had and any omissions and silences in the responses of the researcher and the young women, which were recorded in field notes at the time*. The research team reflects as a team on their individual responses to and interpretations of cases in an effort to shed light on 'unconscious to unconscious' communication. Here a lot of weight is being given to the researchers' emotional responses both in and to the interview via the later transcription and analysis. They emphasise that it is not just the interviewee who puts up resistance to difficult feelings, but that the researcher also tries to defend against such feelings (Holloway 2007, p. 201; my emphasis).

is given online? Are psychoanalytically driven conversations online, ethical? Did narrators receive disclosure that their unconscious was going to be explored and dependent on the answer what are the ethical implications of these respective positions? These questions will be addressed in turn.

4.10.1 What does consent mean when it is given online?

Due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19 consent for participation in this study was obtained in one of two ways. Either (a) narrators were e-mailed a Participant Information Document [PID] and subsequent electronic consent form which they signed using digital signatures or (b) when unable to receive and sign this form, consent was obtained at the beginning of the interviews where I read statements from a paper-based copy. Queries emerged on one or two of the seven occasions where the narrator asked for certain points in the document to be clarified. For example, a question was asked about the use of pseudonyms and what that meant, and clarification was given before interviewing commenced.

The consent was mediated. Specifically, and in conjunction with the operations of the online, virtual clinic, it is helpful to draw on the work of Jessica R. Sullivan (2012) who focuses on Skype. Skype/Zoom were two technologies used for capturing the online interviews. The technology that was used depended on which one was experiencing technical glitches on the day of interview, as this did occur and would have affected the quality of the interview(s) so an alternative method (e.g., Skype in favour of Zoom) was used to capture the interview data.

Sullivan identifies several issues pertaining to obtaining informed consent via email signature.

How does a participant give consent online? It might be next to impossible to have someone physically sign a form, and if consent is given via email, it might then be possible to identify the participant in the future. Is verbal consent appropriate? In relation to videoconferencing interviews, the answer is probably yes, but that all depends on the subject matter and what IRB has to say (Sullivan 2012, p. 58).

IRB, commonly associated with American Universities corresponds to an Institutional Review Board. All ethical roadblocks were negotiated during the process of obtaining permission to collect data from Newcastle University's Ethical Review process. I concur

with Sullivan's point about email, but one needs to be mindful of these issues and take appropriate steps to ensure the integrity of the data as even if emails are deleted, digital footprints or traces are still recoverable as nothing is really lost online.

4.10.2 Are psychoanalytically driven conversations online ethical?

In short, the answer is yes. It is not forbidden to conduct these kinds of sessions, yet as is the case with most technological services there are ethical arguments as to why one should not engage in psychoanalytically driven conversations online. Notably, Stoll, Müller and Trachsel (2020, p. 1) identify five areas of concern.

The top five ethical arguments against engagement in online psychotherapy were (1) privacy, confidentiality, and security issues; (2) therapist competence and need for special training; (3) communication issues specific to technology; (4) research gaps; and (5) emergency issues.

Of these five areas, one and five are most pertinent to this thesis.

Firstly, privacy, confidentiality, and security issues are addressed. These areas draw on information that forms a part of the Informed Consent document in the appendix.

4.10.3 The Ethical Implications of Disclosure and Non-Disclosure for Unconscious Exploration

This final section explores the notion that I did not explicitly disclose to the narrators that I was exploring their unconscious thoughts during the online, virtual clinic. The notion that this was lost in the review process conducted by the University's ethics committee, would initially see this as unethical. The oversight is, however, ameliorated when epistemological tensions between conceptual psychoanalysis outside of the clinical context and psychoanalysis within a clinical context are explored further.

Furthermore, the narrators were informed that this was indeed a psychoanalytic exploration, and they had the time and space to clarify what this meant, should they have had any concerns, but no concerns were raised.

4.10.4 Towards a Lacanian Ethics

In addition to the areas covered above, it is useful to link a Lacanian ethics with psychoanalysis in general and oral history in particular. The relationship between the researchers and the narrators who provide the information required to construct an oral history through the giving of witness testimonies are important collaborative relationships. These relationships can be fragile due to a real or perceived difference in power.

Due to the potential nature of such issues, I appropriate an ethical framework which from a Lacanian perspective, reflects the notion of codes as problematic. Thus, the appropriation of an ethical framework designed to increase trust and decrease familiarity then becomes the lynchpin for conducting oral histories and gaining narrator's witness testimonies in as professional a manner as possible. It is as Ritchie points out,

Whether as professionals or amateurs, all oral historians need to respect the dignity and autonomy of those being interviewed. Every oral history project should use legal release forms that define the interviewee's wishes for the recording and transcript [...] (Ritchie 2011, p. 15).

Within the context of the academy these forms make up the Informed Consent Document given to the participant (narrator) to sign before the research commences (see appendices). The Informed Consent Document details the procedures of (and the content involved during) the interviews. It involved the consent of the narrator via their signature that they are willing to participate in the study and that they are aware of any potential risks and can withdraw at any time. Interestingly, the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants goes against the rules of how oral histories used to be conducted.

Despite this, clear links with the Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic session can be seen, as it corresponds to the use of diminutive pseudonyms, if one consults the Freudian case study of Anna O, a pseudonym attributed to Bertha Pappenheim. These pseudonym measures are necessary to protect the identities of the individuals taking part. In addition to pseudonyms, further issues around ethics are discussed in this section, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its effect on the original plans for the research and the countermeasures put in place to combat this disruption.

Furthermore, aspects for managing information and data associated with the project and anonymity (see appendices for the Participant Information Document which covers most of these topics). Firstly, it is important to consider the unique challenges associated with the topic of consent and its correspondence with oral history interviewing, especially the consideration of additional factors such as the transposition of the project into a 'virtual clinical' setting. To begin, I turn to the topic of informed consent.

I adopt the "virtues approach" of Brenner and Cather (2015). It is through an adoption of such an approach that consent, boundaries, involuntary commitment and other considerations can be addressed. This is not to say that ethical and epistemological tensions do not occur as Riker (1997) points out that,

ethics is founded on a psychology which assumes that humans can come to know and master all their sources of motivation, while the psychology of the unconscious denies this fundamental assumption (ix).

In addressing this tension, young women's experiences of televisual fiction are addressed through the register of *The Real* and its relation to women's discourse, particularly the unconscious/psychic aspects of their experiences. It is the register of *The Real* that provides the means for exploring these tensions through the metaphor of impossibility. With this in mind, most interview processes follow a semi-structured approach, however, the unique features of needing to capture aspects of the unconscious through discourse results in a more open-ended structure. The next section documents the analytical approach of the thesis, specifically applied to the transcripts as a mechanism to examine the discourse and speech of young women.

4.11 Analytical Approach

The analytical approach of this thesis applies Lacanian Discourse Analysis, (hereafter referred to as LDA) as a means of interpreting the data that was collected on young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction within the context of the online, virtual clinic.¹⁰ Unlike content analysis, thematic analysis and narrative analysis which are common analytical methods usually applied to qualitative data interpretation, this approach's focus is on psychoanalysis as an

¹⁰ As with a contextual framing of any research interview, the reader needs to know something about the conditions in which it took place (Parker 2010, p. 158).

analytical method in general and its application to speech and non-speech events in particular. The analysis of empirical material and its conscious/unconscious dimensions are key.

At this stage, it is beneficial to outline what is meant by Lacanian Discourse Analysis, due to its esoteric identity. Drawing on Parker (2010) it is propitious to outline how the narrator's speech was analysed through negotiating the content of the interview transcripts both at a manifest (conscious, material) and a latent (unconscious, subterranean level). Parker points out that, '...conceptual elements derived from Lacanian theory can be used for analytic purposes' (Parker 2010, p. 156).

Parker continues by pointing out that,

...Lacanian Discourse Analysis puts a particular set of psychoanalytic concepts to work in our critical reading of a text (ibid., p. 158).

The interviews, (seven in total) were a complex set of encounters. As a starting point, I applied specific aspects of Parker's approach with the intention of interrogating the data. It should be noted that this was not done in an organised fashion, rather the data itself dictated what aspect of Parker's approach of LDA should be applied at any given point in time, thus the reader should not take the order of my points to be a formal sign of any structuring or organisational method. Firstly, I came across several instances where '...a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier' (Lacan 1998, p. 207).

Furthermore, there was evidence of '*nonsensical*' signifiers (Lacan 1998, p. 250; emphasis in the original). Some examples of these signifying functions include 'E's' reference to *Riverdale's* resident serial killer, The Black Hood whose personality reminded her of her own father. Conversely, 'nonsensical' signifiers emerged in the discourse of 'S' who claimed that some of the behaviours portrayed by the characters in *Pretty Little Liars* were ridiculous for their age. In turn, this aspect of Lacanian analysis was applied to 'I's' discussion of forbidden love being like 'pink wrapping paper' as the phrase, '...does not carry a determinate meaning' (Parker 2010, p. 161).

The next stages of analysis relate to what Parker calls the, 'Anchoring of representation' (*ibid.*). Specifically, I resituated Parker's claims from the genre of the Western, applying it to *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*'s genre, Teen Mystery/Detective fiction. Parker argues that 'The genre of the [Teen Mystery/Detective fiction] provides a clue to the fixed points the text might revolve around (*ibid.*).

Citing a 'Lacanian temporal logic to the text' (*ibid.*), when designing the open-ended questions to use as prompts for discussion in the online, virtual clinic there was a '...cluster of signifiers for death', [a cluster of signifiers for secrets, and a cluster of signifiers for American/U.S. culture. Thus, the term Teen Mystery/Detective fiction] '—the term that names that cluster of being of a certain genre—enables us to conceptualise how the motif[s] of death, [secrets, and American/U.S. culture] operates as one of its [...] *quilting points*, those points around which a text, a discourse or a life is organised' (Lacan 1966 cited in Parker 2010, p. 161). Both *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*, *Pretty Little Liars* especially, '...has a number of avatars in the text in the [narrator's] descriptions of [Alison DiLaurentis] as having died, as being dead, [and this] holds the text in place.'¹¹

As a final point in this section (and something I did quite often after the event) was to acknowledge that, 'How signifiers function is, in a crucial way for Lacanians, 'after the event' (*ibid.*, p. 162). This is described as '...a *retroactive determination* of meaning' (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original). This retroactive determination of meaning was put into practice several times where I returned to the data to try to analyse it through several different conceptual frames—notably, *The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *Mediated Fiction*, the *Object a* and the *Objet Petit a*.

Through the application of the practice of retroactive determination I was able to...'see this retroactive determination of meaning at work' (*ibid.*), when I reworked and transformed the topic of the dialogue through the application of the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, etc. to move from discussions of death to its associated factors such as trauma and immortality. Furthermore, in providing a rationale as to '...how the extracts from an interview [...] were selected and represented to make

¹¹ To function in this way as a quilting point it does not necessarily ever have to be visible as such, and it is a quilting point that we as analysts of the text construct from its different manifestations, manifestations that even include the reverse of death, perhaps, as in 'the hero lives' [This is true of Alison DiLaurentis and is mentioned several times by various narrators]. There is an important conceptual point here that bears on the way that Lacanian theory operates when it searches for the 'Name-of-the-Father' as a quilting point in [a narrator's] speech, and we need to take seriously Lacan's (1991) argument that latent content is not unearthed from manifest content by the analyst but is *constructed by* the analyst (Parker 2010, p. 162; emphasis added).

analytic points (*ibid.*, p. 163) I chose extracts that reflected the nature of those themes that were responsible for anchoring the representations of the texts of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. These themes corresponded to how the content of the interview questions were chosen as a means for answering the research questions and fulfilling the aims and objectives of the project.

As a further point related to what Parker terms, 'Agency and determination' (*ibid.*), the next point which guided my interpretation of the content of the psychoanalytic histories within the context of the online, virtual clinic was to be able to differentiate between '...what Lacan (1975) calls 'different registers' (*ibid.*). Indeed, Parker includes the notions of the '...*difference between the imaginary and the symbolic*' (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original). This is a notion I extended to include the register of *The Real*.

The Real materialises through the analysis and interpretation of the meanings, underlying the spoken words of the narrators—its content is latent, as opposed to manifest (see earlier discussions in chapters 2 and 3). This approach was applied as a means for '...negotiating the complex relationship between the subject and language' (*ibid.*) as this ties into the line of argument that discusses the limitations of language *and* representation, which can only be critically understood through *The Real*. There are several instances within the data analysis where participants appeared to have an emotional reaction to the fictionally constructed characters they were discussing, for example 'E's' empathy towards *Riverdale's*, Cheryl Blossom, and 'M's' disgust of her for digging up the corpse of her dead brother and placing it in the family crypt at the Thornhill Estate, as well as 'S's' disclosure that she wanted the *Pretty Little Liars* character of Ezra Fitz to 'be her boyfriend'.

In all cases it is important to note that '...the relations between the two of them are structurally asymmetrical' (*ibid.*).¹² Furthermore, '...the imaginary relation, the communication between the two of them' (*ibid.*), as [Living human beings and fictionally mediated constructs] is [...] important as this one-sided emotional reaction to fictional characters, the feelings they stir up, is central to the affective and depersonalised dimensions of psychoanalysis itself. Furthermore, '...Symbolic aspects of that kind, absences that structure the one-sided discourse running between [non-fictional and fictional characters] are precisely what we might understand as the *unconscious* of the text, that which Lacan (1973, p. 131) defines as

¹² The difference is marked in a number of ways, and attention to the different registers of language that position them in different ways can here provide some fruitful resources to the intersection of different forms of subjectivity in psychosocial research. The difference between the register of communication and that of structural relations is characterized [sic] by Lacan as the [...] *difference between the imaginary and the symbolic* (Parker 2010, p. 163; emphasis in the original).

[...] '*the discourse of the Other*' (Parker 2010, pp. 163-164; emphasis in the original).

As a final point to conclude this section it is important to note, drawing on Parker's assimilation of Lacan (2006) in relation to 'Positions in language' and '*no metalanguage can be spoken*' (ibid., p. 166; emphasis in the original) that as a man studying women, when analysing the data, I am '...simultaneously intimately involved and excluded' (ibid.). This point can be extended through drawing on what Parker refers to as 'Deadlocks of perspective' (ibid., p. 167) with specific attention paid to Parker's use of Lacan (1975) what he terms, '...the optic of *sexual difference*' (ibid., emphasis in the original) where,

attention to sexual difference, symbolically organized [sic] as a deadlock of perspective, invites us to map it with respect to other symbolic forms. This requires theoretical elaboration to enable us to appreciate how our feelings are part of the process we are analyzing [sic] (ibid., p. 168).

This points back to feelings as part of the research process in the section on self-reflexivity, see section 4.9. Due to space considerations I have been unable to apply all of the dimensions and all twenty-one points of Parker's LDA, but it is hoped the reader now has a flavour of how LDA is used to interpret young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Having discussed how the data is analysed, the penultimate section of this chapter focuses on validity and reliability, critically reflecting on and applying these dimensions to the methods of psychoanalysis and oral history.

4.12 Critical Reflections on the Validity and Reliability of Psychoanalytic and Oral History Methods

This section will disconnect validity from reliability with the aim of providing a clear direction of travel for the reader, which will be achieved through a four-fold approach. Firstly, the validity of the psychoanalytic method will be followed by the connection of validity to the oral history method. Subsequently, the third and fourth aspects of enquiry will cover the reliability of the psychoanalytic method, followed by the reliability of the oral history method.

In adopting this approach, this section also critiques the non-scientific reasoning ascribed to reflecting on the validity and reliability of psychoanalytic methods. Firstly, I focus on validity and its correspondence with psychoanalysis.

4.12.1 Critical Reflections on the Validity of the Psychoanalytic Method

Firstly, psychoanalysis deliberately antagonises the area of validity. This statement is supported through the analysis of validity relative to Freud's case histories. For Karl Popper, psychoanalysis is not a valid form of scientific enquiry. He argues that he, '...began to feel dubious about their claims to scientific status' and that,

...though posing as sciences, [psychoanalysis] had in fact more in common with primitive myths than with science; that [psychoanalysis] resembled astrology more than astronomy (Popper 1962, p. 33).

In a modern-day context, the author who is most vehemently opposed to psychoanalysis is Frederick C. Crews (2017). Crews seeks to extend and build on Popper's refutation of psychoanalysis which he does through stating that,

the hallmark of pseudosciences is precisely a refusal to be bound by common standards of validation.

It is important to note here that Crews is referring to the clinical case, as opposed to a case structured through psychoanalytic concepts. It is the empirical aspect of the synthesis of psychoanalysis with the oral history method that ensures its attributability to validity and credibility. Furthermore, it is useful to draw on von

Glaserfeld 1991, p. 16, as cited by Schwandt *in* Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 240) as he explains that,

The validity of a knowledge claim is not to be found in the relationship of reference or correspondence to an independently existing world; rather, a claim is thought to be valid if it is viable or *if it provides functional fit*, that is, *if it works to achieve a goal*. The relationship between knowledge and reality is instrumental, not verificative: To know is “to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen (emphasis added).

Given this, the signifying chains, ‘if it provides functional fit’ and ‘if it works to achieve a goal’ corresponds with the pragmatist ontology discussed earlier in the chapter. In turn, Schwandt (*ibid.*, p. 246) points out that,

the *truth*, worth, or value of a claim, theory, interpretation, construction, and so forth, is ultimately determined by something *beyond* the claim, theory, interpretation, construction (emphasis in the original).

Thus, through attributing and connecting psychoanalysis to the empirical these questions of validity can begin to be productively addressed. As a final point before moving on to the next section, Stephen Frosh (2010) points out in relation to theoretical/conceptual psychoanalysis and its synthesis with the empirical that,

Asserting the validity of a psychoanalytic concept [...] requires both recognition of the way psychological ‘reality’ is *impossible to pin down*, because it fluctuates and is *reconstructed continually* as it is enacted and produced in different contexts, and an appreciation that some ‘readings’ of the unconscious are more forceful than others and can be observed to be so because of their resonance in the participants, their capacity to communicate experience more richly [through the] deepening of emotional states. [...] appreciation of *the multiple ways in which understanding, and interpretation can become manifest* still allows one to claim that *some of these ways are more meaningful than others* (p. 72; my emphasis).

The next section examines the correspondence of validity to the oral history method.

4.12.2 Validity and the Oral History Method

Drawing on the seminal article of Hoffman (1974, p. 25)¹³,

[v]alidity [...] refers to the degree of conformity between the reports of the event and the event itself as reported by other primary source material, such as documents, diaries, letters, or other oral reports.

In the case of young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction the primary source material are the shows themselves, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

Hoffman points to a problematic associated with '...the fallibility of human memory' throughout this process (ibid., p. 23). Indeed, narrators' memories were fallible, yet I knew that what they were saying (i.e., the factual information attributed to the fiction) such as the ages of the characters and when the show *Pretty Little Liars* first aired etc. was false.

My point here is supported by the following evidence presented by Hoffman that, '...the story may or may not be a valid representation of the original events as judged by comparison with other sources' (ibid., p. 25). Thus, I knew from watching the original recordings that what some of the narrators were saying was untrue. Validity can be corrected through checking with the source of origin.

¹³ There are different forms of validity, not all of which can be discussed in detail. In the main there are a) construct validity, b) internal validity and c) external validity. Quintão, Andrade, and Almeida (2020) elaborate on these terms positioning construct validity as needing to use multiple cases involving several participants (there were 7 young women interviewed) about two different cases, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Internal validity is not valid here due to the research being exploratory. Finally, the objective [of external validity] is not a statistical generalisation, something that is not possible in single or multiple cases, but [...] analytical generalisation. In analytical generalisation, we seek to have a process of generalisation of empirical observations into theory, rather than population (Levy, 2008). Good practices to ensure external validity include: (i) presentation of the reasons for the case study selection; (ii) presentation of the context of each case study; and (iii) identification of patterns that allow the subsequent generalisation of the results obtained (p. 270). These elements have been discussed throughout the thesis.

4.12.3 Theorising the Reliability of the Psychoanalytic Method

Much like validity, psychoanalysis also deliberately antagonises the area of reliability. Hanly in Hinshelwood (2013) points out that a, ‘...problem confronting psychoanalysis has been uncertainty about the reliability of clinical observations...’ (xi). Thus, the next step is to consider how to ‘...enhance the reliability of clinical observations’ (ibid., xiii). As this thesis does not deal with clinical observations per se, what is useful is to apply Hinshelwood’s ideas of reliability to the single cases of each of the narrators who were interviewed.

In negotiating and dealing with the deadlock that occurs through the fact that I only ever interviewed each narrator once I draw on Hofmann (1974) who sees this as being problematic in the sense that they argue that,

‘...reliability can be defined by the consistency with which an individual will tell the same story about the same events on a number of different occasions’ (p. 25).

This definition is problematic in this context, leading to an epistemological deadlock as each encounter with individual narrators within the online, virtual clinic occurred only once. A turn to Quintão, Andrade, and Almeida (2020) reveals a strategy for addressing this problematic. Their focus rests on a corrective for increasing/enhancing the reliability of each single case.

Quintão, Andrade, and Almeida (2020) argue that reliability of a single study case can be enhanced through the application of several different techniques. These techniques include, ‘...recording the interviews, coding the responses, or employing analytical methods of data analysis’ (p. 270). The interviews were recorded, but although the responses were not coded, as this does not lend itself to a psychoanalytical/oral historical method/approach, analytical models of data analysis were employed through the use of Lacanian Discourse Analysis [LDA]. In turn, application of these techniques would assist as closely as possible with ensuring the ‘...replication of the study by another researcher’, I say as closely as possible in relation to the technical and practical issues/types of questions asked. Furthermore, even though I only interviewed each narrator once, there were multiple narrators

interviewed (seven in all) which is indicative of what Quintão, Andrade, and Almeida (2020, p. 269) call, ‘...a process of triangulation of the data.’

A more radical approach is also offered through the research of Thomas A. Schwandt (Schwandt 1996). The concept of reliability can be challenged here through seeing reliability as a regulative norm determining the nature of a practice. In turn, this requires a challenge to the criteriology approach¹⁴.

Schwandt (1996, p. 59) argues that,

The logical positivists and their successors, the logical empiricists, argued that it was only by means of applying logical (and empirical) criteria that we are able to distinguish genuine, objective knowledge from mere belief.

In critiquing this approach, drawing on the constructivist-pragmatist ontology, the concept of reliability [and validity] can be challenged, albeit, also improved, as mentioned above.

Moreover, Schwandt argues (ibid.) that,

[He] attempt[s] to summarize [sic] a defensible stance for the aim and practice of social inquiry that takes seriously the contemporary postfoundationalist confusion. [Schwandt] hope[s] to show how this kind of enquiry can be defended without recourse to criteriology, that is without insisting on the necessity of regulative norms [validity and reliability] for removing doubt and settling disputes about what is correct or incorrect, true or false.

As Schwandt’s argument continues, he explains that,

Given the influence of positivist epistemology, we have come to equate being rational in social science with being procedural and criteriological: To be a rational social inquirer is to observe and apply rules and criteria for knowing. We believe that it is method and method alone that produces findings (ibid., p. 60).

Given this, and drawing on my constructivist-pragmatist ontology, Schwandt states that, ‘...a concern with praxis and practical reasoning [beyond method alone] characterizes [sic] not only the object of investigation of social inquiry but also the practice of social inquiry itself’ (ibid., p. 64).

¹⁴ This also works for validity but from the standpoint of an oral history context, in this instance, the dimension of validity is clear and does not require challenging.

Subsequently, before drawing this section to a conclusion the way to avoid prescriptive regulative norms such as validity and reliability is to embrace Schwandt's (1996, p. 70) use of Feyerabend (1987, p. 118) where he argues,

the social inquirer as practical philosopher must endeavour to prepare accounts of cases that are useful in training the capacity for practical wisdom. In part, this means that the texts of this kind of social inquiry must once again be seen as part of what [is] called the historical (vs. the theoretical) traditions. They will be texts that produce regional, or with respect to conditions, relative knowledge- [...] texts that rely on lists, *stories*, and asides; *reason by example*, analogy, and *free association*; and use 'logical rules' *when it suits their purposes* [...].

The use of stories, reason by example, free association and the use of fitness for purpose embraces the ideologies connected to the oral history method/witness testimony, conditions of psychoanalytic enquiry, and the foundational underpinnings of a constructivist-pragmatist ontology.¹⁵

Finally, moving on from Freud's case studies it can be said that there is no validity and reliability in transference and more so in the Lacanian clinic—there is no validity or reliability when it comes to desire or *jouissance*. This is because, echoing earlier sentiments by Frosh (2010, p. 72) [desire and *jouissance* '...fluctuates and is *reconstructed continually* as it is enacted and produced in different contexts' (emphasis added)].

4.12.4 Theorising the Reliability of the Oral History Method

This section ends with the brief theorisation of the reliability of the oral history method. Since oral history became linked with the tape recorder in the 1940s, practitioners have defended its reliability in the methodological literature (Lang and Mercier 1984, p. 82, fn. 2). The online, oral histories in the virtual, clinic were digitally recorded for posterity and fact checking/transcribing as a primary source.

In addition, Lang and Mercier point out that,

¹⁵ Saying farewell to criteriology means abandoning the pursuit of autonomous, indisputable criteria for distinguishing legitimate from not so legitimate social scientific knowledge (Schwandt 1996, p. 70).

Whether a narrator's memories are filled with fantastic stories or with detailed descriptions of the smallest events, *the expression itself is reliable*. [...] Reliability in oral history *refers to the fundamental honesty of the product*. [...] If the interview is true to canons of historical inquiry, true to the personal wishes of the narrator, *true to a sincere recording of an individual's personal memories*, [...] then *it should be considered reliable* (*ibid.*, p. 83, emphasis added).

The connection of truth to an individual's personal memories is important as I mentioned earlier that some of the facts reported by narrators were incorrect, yet if they believed them to be correct, this makes their assertions valid because, '*Reliability is not a litmus test for the accuracy of statements made by narrators*, nor is there a test of reliability that can guarantee interviews are unimpeachable' (*ibid.*, emphasis added). Having briefly connected the oral history/psychoanalytic interview to reliability, this chapter now concludes.

4.13 Conclusion

A number of considerations go into preparing, conducting, and reflecting upon the witness testimonies provided by the narrators within the context of the online, virtual clinic. The potential for an original methodological approach to flourish is fruitful in the sense that the non-ontology of psychoanalysis and its synthesis with the empirical allows for the reification of abstract concepts. This moves the methodology towards a more practical form of psychoanalysis, one that embraces the use of pragmatism in giving form and shape to non-representational concepts.

This in turn, allows not only for a practical form of psychoanalysis to be developed, but drawing on the aims and objectives of this thesis, also allows the research to take steps towards the development of a new model of contemporary, televisual, fictional experience. The next chapter examines the relationship of *The Real* to the subject of secrets, drawing on the responses of several narrators and their correspondence with the two contextual examples of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. It is within this next chapter the lines of argument central to understanding televisual complexity, women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and the importance of the voice and discourse in unconscious articulations of *The Real* are considered.

Chapter 5. “Got A Secret Can You Symbolise It? Young Women’s Negotiations and Interpretations of the Secret through the Discourse of Popular Televisual Fiction”

“Got a secret, Can you keep it? Swear this one you’ll save. Better lock it in your pocket, Taking this one to the grave. If I show you then I know you Won’t tell what I said. ‘Cause two can keep a secret If one of them is dead.”

– The Pierces, *Pretty Little Liars* theme tune (Pierce & Pierce, 2007).

...yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets. —
Ann Oakley (1981, p. 41; emphasis added).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the first part of a Lacanian analysis of the data collected through the 7 psychoanalytic histories conducted with young women in the context of an online, virtual clinic. As explained in chapter 4 all interviews took place over Zoom. All oral histories were recorded and transcribed verbatim and analysed using the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*.

Subsequent analysis used aspects of Lacanian Discourse Analysis with the aim of providing further context and application of the Lacanian method. During this first analysis on the topic of secrets key findings linked to the relationship between *phantasy* and *fantasy* as a *product of mediated fiction* through the concept of reification. Findings in particular relate to the limitations of language *and* representation through women’s discussions of secrets as corresponding to the ineffable, the divine and religiosity. Furthermore, in attempting to express *The Real* young women resort to the use of metaphors in order to attempt to physicalize, reify or actualise examples of the divine nature of secrets with one case involving a narrator who sings to express and communicate the nature of secrets, which again links to the mechanism of the voice and worship.

The previous three chapters (chapters 2, 3, and 4) examined terminology and concepts (*The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction* and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*) which act as a series of frames to explore how young British, American, and European women view specific instances of contemporary, televisual fiction within the contexts of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. This chapter engages with the strands of argument set up in the earlier chapters mentioned through focusing on the ineffability or

limitations of language *and* representation as I map out the secret's connection to *The Real*. Subsequently, the ways in which secrets are used to add to the complexities of contemporary, televisual fiction is given focus because the interplay of ineffability, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of mediated fiction and its correspondence for developing a new model of televisual experience underpinned by the keystone of the unconscious.

Moreover, the notion of the voice/auditory over the visual as the primary mechanism through which secrets are delivered, carried and disseminated (through the process of revelation) sets up how secrets provide the affordances/agency for the emergence of unconscious thought in young women's stories. The first part of this chapter maps the connection of the secret and *The Real* through language, representation and the ineffable. At this stage, it is important to point out that although it is necessary to provide a definition of the secret, this has been positioned as a footnote to ensure that the original aspects of the thesis and its analytical argument are not detracted from, with the next section resituating the concept of the secret and its connection to *The Real* by drilling down into how young women negotiate issues of complexity and epistemological tension through speech.

Furthermore, it is important when conducting an analysis to consider appropriate ideological notions and the ways in which these ideologies, (for example women's experiences, not men's experiences) frame and shape how women come to articulate their understandings of *The Real* and its equivalence with secrets. Through developing my argument Milagro Cid Sanz points out that,

the secret is fundamentally *linked to the unconscious* and holds a fundamental place in psychoanalytical thought (Sanz 2020, p. 61; my emphasis).

In what follows the discourse of several respondents are analysed, utilising theoretical and analytical tools which fall under the preserve of psychoanalysis and oral history. These tools help foster a critical understanding of the narrators' articulations through an analysis of their experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

5.2 The Correspondence of the Secret and its connection to *The Real* in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*

In resituating the concept of the secret and mapping out/applying its connections to *The Real*, I draw on 'E's' discussion of secrets in *Riverdale*. For 'E', when asked about the theme of secrets and its affinity with *Riverdale* she explained that,

...it's this all-American sort of glossy exterior [Riverdale], but underneath there's a lot of dark, secrets going on' and '...its been romanticised and this idea of erm, of having secrets ... of having dark, dirty, secrets. This is seen as something exciting and something that all of these beautiful people in this beautiful town have. But at the end of the day, it resulted [*sic*] in the downfall of the main characters, you know, or what not.

In drilling down and drawing out the psychoanalytic connections of the secret to *The Real* and the lines of argument corresponding to the unconscious, the ineffability of language *and* representation, the complexities of televisual fiction and the mechanism of the voice over, and the visual as the carrier of secrets, which allows for the emergence of the unconscious I focus on the signifying phrase 'sort of'. In interpreting this point I draw on the work of Mark Murphy (2023) to explain that 'E' is experiencing '...a clo(u)d of unknowing, an ineffable encounter with the divine' (p. 2). The preceding signifiers correspond with the concept of *Fantasy as Mediated Fiction* and it is this interplay between that which fails to be expressed through visual representation *and* the vagueness of 'E's' language, 'sort of' and 'glossy exterior', which can be understood in the context of 'E's' ineffable encounter with the divine, if in this case, divine comes to mean a place that stands apart from reality (in the sense that *Riverdale* is a fictionally constructed simulacra unlike any other town we may encounter), as the town's 'glossy exterior' and its population of what 'E' calls 'beautiful people' and the anthropomorphic and pulchritudinous qualities of the town.

Alongside the interplay of *The Real* of 'E' as a participant and her experience of it, the riven articulations 'E' uses where 'glossy, romanticised and exciting' are juxtaposed against 'dark, dirty, downfall' conjures a metaphor reminiscent of the way in which the Garden of Eden is infected with the notion of Sin. This links to Spero's (1996) argument, who draws on Lacan (1964) to state that,

This “original sin,” as we will come to understand it with Lacan’s assistance refers to this unique element which enables psychoanalysis to account for the link between *lack*, *symbolization*, *language*, and the *emergence of self*, both as depicted in the Eden myth and as pertains to the analytic consulting room (pp. 501-502; my emphasis).

Spero’s use of Lacan enables direct connections to be made to the complexities of latent meaning that are hidden in standard articulations of human experience, and I note that it is the power of the online, virtual clinic that allows for ‘E’s’ notions of theology to emerge¹⁶. Furthermore, the use of the signifier ‘downfall’ also links to Spero’s interpretation of Lacan’s notion of Original Sin in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977/2019). In concluding this portion of the analysis, and having covered the complexities of contemporary, televisual fiction and the limits of language *and* representation, I focus on the notion of the voice/auditory over the visual as the primary mechanism through which secrets are delivered, carried and disseminated (through the mechanism of revelation). This, in turn, sets up how secrets provide the affordances/agency for the emergence of unconscious thought in young women’s stories.

With this in mind, ‘E’ says that ‘this resulted’ as opposed to ‘results’. Resulted is grammatically incorrect, thus being an error. This is telling when transposed against the downfall of the main characters, as unconsciously through parapraxes (slips of the tongue) the unconscious emerges. What this is telling of, I cannot say, but my interpretation of it would be that ‘E’ is seeing the main characters are being more human, as opposed to fictional characters (this is not the first time she shows empathy to a fictional character, see later).

Subsequently, the notions of romanticisation pertain to unconscious phantasy as Kinley (2010) points out that, unconscious phantasies, and their accompanying tendency to romanticise, infantilise or villainise others, can grossly contaminate treatment if left unexamined. Finally, an expression of *feminine jouissance* can be seen through the use of the signifiers that ‘E’ uses such as ‘dark secrets’ or ‘dark, dirty, secrets’ which she says are ‘something exciting’. In linking this to *feminine jouissance* and the line of argument that secrets are better expressed through the revelatory mechanisms of the voice/auditory over the visual, I draw on Apollon (1993, p. 101) who suggests that,

¹⁶ The theological underpinnings of the argument and the notion of *Original Sin* could be usefully applied in further studies as a new show, *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* which released its first season on July 28, 2022. As of the time of this writing, a second season: *Pretty Little Liars: Summer School* has been commissioned for release sometime in late 2023.

...the signifier determines the unconscious relation of the subject to enjoyment (*jouissance*).

Given this, 'E's' *feminine jouissance* relates to her voice, through expressions such as 'dark', 'dirty', 'secrets' 'something' and 'exciting'. Taken in this context, the mediated nature and expression of the secrets which 'E' views are subject to metonymic displacement as the signifiers 'dark', 'dirty' and 'secrets' cannot be easily defined due to their ineffable nature. Furthermore, the 'something' 'E' refers to as 'exciting' (a manifestation of *feminine jouissance*) is enigmatic and as this chapter proceeds is indicative of visual ineffability where I argue that the structural properties of the secret are similar in nature to those of *The Real*. In continuing with 'E's' experiences of the secret in relation to mediated notions in contemporary, televisual fiction I turn to her discussions of one of Riverdale's central characters, Cheryl Blossom.

Other storylines would be like, erm, Cheryl Blossom's relationship with her family...again, just family stuff. But I thought that was quite interesting and just moving because yeah, you just **feel for her**. Like, **poor thing**, she was just **ostracised** by everyone. Her family was just a bunch of drug dealers and murderers. I just felt...**I felt bad for her**. Erm, I think that when ... when there's a family dynamic like that where the main character is **feeling left out** or **abandoned** or whatever...it really **tugs at my heart strings**.

It is here that 'E' continues to try to make sense of how the notion of the secret operates through its link to family. Psychoanalytically speaking, the relationship between family and secrets are pertinent to psychoanalysis and oral history particularly Rashkin (1992, p. 5) whose study focus is on '...unspeakable family dramas...'. It is 'E's' use of the signifiers 'family stuff' which corresponds to this point as the word 'stuff' is a slippery concept, unable to be pinned down. She ('E') does manage to highlight the fact through an articulation of manifest content that 'Her family was just a bunch of drug dealers and murders'—far from being an expression of *feminine jouissance* of which there are copious amounts in this excerpt, this links to the previously mentioned work of Murphy (2023) and his concept of apophasis and its correspondence with apophatic psychoanalysis.

This particular sensibility situates the term as analogous to a mechanism that is used to discuss a taboo subject. Furthermore, 'E's' use of the phrase, 'tugs at my heart strings' is a metaphor indicating 'E's' experience of *The Real*. Without metaphor she lacks the words in language to describe exactly how this kind of a depiction affects her. Conversely, the conversation is saturated with instances of *feminine jouissance*.

The instances of *feminine jouissance* correspond to the signifying phrases, 'feel for her', 'poor thing', 'ostracised', 'I felt bad for her', 'feeling left out' and 'abandoned'. The signifying phrase 'feel for her' connects to earlier arguments that were discussed in chapter 3, and it is here that applying Sara Ahmed's scholarship is useful for connecting 'E's' experiences to televisual complexity through Ahmed's connection to television and her subsequent connection to psychoanalysis. In her 2004 article Ahmed says that '...[she] will not be discussing the ways in which feelings can be 'feeling for' [...] others as with, for example, feelings of sympathy or compassion...' (Ahmed 2004, p. 27). It is with this in mind that I extend Ahmed's undertheorised points, as 'E' says she 'feels for', Cheryl Blossom. This 'feeling for'/'feels for' provides a frame through which to understand *feminine jouissance* through sympathy and compassion, things Ahmed fails to address in her own work.

Moving on to the next section, the conversations with 'E' are concluded. It is here that trauma is linked to the concepts of *The Real*, my original interpretation of *Feminine Jouissance* and connections to *fantasy* as a form of *mediated fiction*.

5.3 The Impossible: Trauma and Televisual Fiction

[...] Pretty Little Liars, the theme [trauma] is obviously at the centre of the show ... the disappearance of Alison ... finding her body. Figuring out who 'A' is. There's a lot of repeated trauma throughout the show to these four girls ... They've all gone through various different things like being attacked by this 'A' person or stalked [...] Trauma is treated as just a normal thing in Pretty Little Liars almost ... you see, they kind of address it ... they talk about it; but it's just like these four girls ... five girls ... go through a ridiculous amount of trauma ... repeatedly, and you don't think about it, watching it as a teenager, you just think '...yeah, great! This drama, we love it!' Erm, but in terms of like thematically and from the perspective of the writers ... it feels as if they're just putting the characters under as much trauma as they can fit into an episode.

Firstly, when coupled with the signifiers 'repeat' and 'repeatedly' the signifier of 'trauma' is allied to *The Real*. Southworth (2020) points out that,

Lacan suggests that actual Trauma occurs not at the moment of encountering The Real but later through attempts to activate symbolic meaning. Unassimilated at the time, the traumatic event *returns* in phenomena, such as dreams and flashbacks, which *repeat* and reappear yet are unavailable to consciousness (my emphasis).

Taken in this context, 'E's' own encounters of *The Real* emerge through a language that she is unable to articulate. The signifiers 'kind of' attribute her experiences of trauma as being something she does not fully comprehend. The subsequent connection of *mediated fiction as fantasy* and its connection to *The Real* of trauma emerges as a result of 'E' saying that 'Trauma is treated as just a normal thing in *Pretty Little Liars*' and that the characters 'go through a ridiculous amount of trauma'. Extending 'E's' discourse to examples of episodes of *Pretty Little Liars* it can be argued that fiction tends to normalise the abnormal' (Erickson 2008; Penfold-Mounce 2016; Rothe 2011).

As a final point for this section, a focus on the emergence of 'E's' *feminine jouissance* through her speech focuses on the signifying phrases of 'drama, we love it' and 'it feels as if they are just putting the characters under as much trauma as they can fit into an episode.' With these points in mind, I conceptualised *feminine jouissance* earlier as corresponding to levels of intensity. It is clear from her use of the earlier signifiers 'ridiculous amount' that this is something 'E' tries to reconcile—the epistemological tensions between normalisation and the abnormal and their synergistic relationship with fantasy/mediated fiction and reality.

Furthermore, the signifying phrase, 'drama, we love it!' links to both the relationship of *feminine jouissance* and love and is allied to earlier discussions by Sara Ahmed where 'E's' use of the word 'we' as opposed to 'I', conjures the notion of 'collective feelings' (Ahmed 2004, p. 27). These collective feelings, for Ahmed, are also 'feelings-in-common' (ibid.), which 'E' points out, in the sense that other women may share her experiences of these events. Finally, the interplay of *feminine jouissance* and love in relation to 'E's' experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be better critically understood through the repositioning and resituating of Amy Hollywood's (2002) scholarship where she points out that, '...love is rendered impossible' (p. 169). Given this, her feelings toward, Cheryl do not exist as Cheryl herself is impossible, ex-sisting as opposed to existing.

Structurally, this epistemological tension can be overcome as 'E' acknowledges the fictitious nature of Cheryl as '...a fantasmatic object of desire, an object a [object- cause of desire]' (ibid.), and due to this, '... [only when] the fantasmatic nature of [the] relationship[,] between [viewer and fictional character] is recognized [sic], does love of the Other become possible (ibid., p. 157).

At this stage it is important to point out before moving on to the next section that the conversations pertaining to the Impossible and Trauma that were started in this section will continue in Chapter 7 where these notions are linked to the topic of death. The conversation in the next section moves on to the experiences of 'S' who discusses keeping secrets from adults.

5.4 The Real as a Shaping Factor in Young Women's Understandings of Fictional Realities

'S' points out that,

...something I've never understood about these shows is ... you know ... you have these teenagers who are caught up in improbable ... like ... apart from the fact that they're improbable ... caught up in these situations and yet none of them seem to think to go to the police as if they do then they'll get caught up in ... I'm like you're only going to make it worse. So, to keep these secrets from all of the adults around you I thought was ... uh ... was an interesting aspect. I thought if I had been caught up in a murder when I was sixteen (16) I would have gone to my parents. But ... uh ... the fact is ... I know that ... that's what drives the show forward ... is the idea that you don't tell the parents because if you do, they'll shut it down and the show is over. Um ... but it ... it lays out ... the ... the ridiculousness of keeping secrets when ... when it's only going to do you more harm than good.

In this excerpt, 'S' tries to make sense of the complexities of televisual fiction that are at odds with her own understandings of how the world works. 'S's' use of the signifying phrase that she has 'never understood' why teenagers in shows like *Pretty Little Liars* tend to keep secrets when it will do them 'more harm than good'. This lack of understanding and its connection to *The Real* can be interpreted by drawing on the work of Mandal (2022) who points out two areas related to Lacan and understanding. Firstly, Mandal (2022) argues that 'As opposed to understanding, Lacan promoted "interpretation" (p. 97) and 'Given the Lacanian binary of interpretation (truth) and understanding (*fantasy*), (ibid., p. 99) Mandal can be resituated to show the mechanisms at play within the context of televisual fiction, pointing to 'S's' lack of understanding as connected to the realm of fantasy.

Furthermore, 'S's' point concerning the teenagers keeping secrets from adults falls into the realm of *fantasy* as *mediated fiction*. The signifier that these actions by the fictional characters are 'ridiculous' is an important point. 'S' points to the characters' attitudes when their secret is revealed which serves to further reinforce what she terms the 'ridiculousness' of the situation in the sense that this would be scandalous as the characters are arguably acting in a manner that transgresses the implications of such events in the "lifeworld" (Buchanan 2010). Furthermore, Horbury (2015) explains how secrets are often tied to events of fantasy when staged as something purported to be non-transgressional, often in direct antithesis to how events would occur outside of *fantasy* when depicted as *mediated fiction*. Drawing on Laplanche and Pontalis (1988, p. 314) Horbury (*ibid.*, p. 74) explains that,

...fantasy is [...] the staging of a scene in which something foreclosed or forbidden is made possible.

In turn, it is the use of the word forbidden which paints secrets with their negative connotations and links them to *The Real*. In addition, Koch's (2014) nod to 'ridiculousness' and 'S's' use of the term conflates the concept within the context of *fantasy*. Koch specifically places the concept of ridiculousness in paradoxical tension with reality which is the same space wherein circulates *The Real*.

Finally, 'S' points to keeping secrets in the show *Pretty Little Liars* as doing 'more harm than good' and once more this links to 'S's' interpretation of the complexity of what she is watching and its correspondence to her worldview. In this regard, *Jouissance* is entwined with *The Real* in a decadent dance of life and death in the sense that the dual functioning of *Jouissance* corresponds to pleasure ('Good') and pain ('Harm') (Žižek 2006) which links to pleasure and pain in television (chapter 2). Furthermore, Tsai (2008) and Javier Moscoso (2012) can be applied via a productive synthesis to interpret 'S's' interpretations of her *feminine jouissance* in relation to secrets and the subsequent *Real* of her experiences.

Firstly, Tsai (2008, p. 195) points out, drawing on Salecl (2000b, p. 313) that *feminine jouissance* is "usually perceived as the highest 'happiness' that the subject can experience" applied here to 'S's' notion of 'Good' or 'Goodness' which has latent undertones of the divine. Conversely and secondly, 'S's' nod to 'harm' connects to Moscoso's point that,

experience is articulated in such a way that one can, among other things, recognize [sic] pain as pain and suffering as suffering; but it also makes possible, on the contrary, *taking pleasure in harmful experiences* (Moscoso 2012, p. 8).

Given this, 'S' does not differentiate between pleasurable experiences or painful ones when discussing her interpretation of the secret as taking pleasure from harmful experiences may be beyond conscious thought.

5.5 Locating *Feminine Jouissance* in young women's experiences of the secret within contemporary, televisual fiction.

With the aim of locating *Feminine Jouissance* in young women's experiences of the secret within contemporary, televisual fiction I turn to the discourse of 'L', examining her attachment to the theme tune of *Pretty Little Liars*.

Well, yeah. *Pretty Little Liars* is easy. I mean it's like in the theme song like... (begins to sing) there's a secret can you keep it, you know? Erm, and I guess in both shows I just feel like people are constantly hiding things from each other. Erm, which leads to some interesting plotlines, I guess. But it always keeps viewers on their toes because you might not know something, or you might know something that a character in the show doesn't know [...]. I kind of like ... when that happens ... um ... but, yeah, it's just interesting in *Pretty Little Liars* specifically, like how the four girls are kind of like um ... going through this and they're the only people who know about the 'A' thing. Like they're getting all these text messages, and they don't ever really bring their parents into it ever or like tell the authorities ... which is what I would do.

Within this excerpt an interesting occurrence happens in the sense that during the interview, 'L' begins to sing. In revealing the meaning of this act, it is useful to turn to Leikert (2004) who explains that '...the single and most penetrating aim of music [is] to produce *Jouissance*' (p. 9). Thus, this is an expression of L's enjoyment of *Pretty Little Liars* as a television show. With this in mind, Leikert makes another salient point explaining that,

...as long as the Real of the notation is not infected with the other Real, the bodily Real of the voice, music remains dead as far as the subject's enjoyment is concerned. Music produces *jouissance* only when it sounds. Only when a singer lends it his [sic] voice, or when a musician lends it the voice of his [sic] instrument, is it actualised (*ibid.*, p. 10).

This speaks to the manifestation of *The Real* as an auditory event which supersedes *The Real* in the dimension of the image, as the image lacks the representative capacities to actualise *The Real*, yet the 'voice', as aforementioned, through metaphor, has the power to do so (for more on *The Real* as auditory see Kittler 2009). Furthermore, Leikert points out that,

...the sound, [...] is referred to as the "object" of music even as it evades, in its vagueness and amorphousness, all objectlike consistency. And yet it is this *objet sonore* that [...] is of interest to psychoanalysis (*ibid.*, p. 10).

This echoes the importance of 'L' singing as,

...music is one of the last psychic strongholds that have remained closed off to us and that have evaded the comprehensive grasp of psychoanalysis (*ibid.*, p. 9).

Moreover, 'Ls' singing of the Pretty Little Liars theme tune during the course of the interview allows for the emergence and analysis of *Feminine Jouissance* which is both an integral part of *The Real* as is also veiled by it. The power of *Feminine Jouissance* has the capabilities to transpose the auditory over the visual, which reconfigures the order in which these objects of enquiry are usually positioned, particularly in terms of their efficaciousness and application to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. I resituate Norman (2008) who points out that *jouissance* (male) can act as a cipher for the silencing of women, yet far from acting as a cipher for the silencing of women, in 'L's' regard *feminine jouissance* gives her the agency to integrate herself into the text of *Pretty Little Liars* through the mechanism of song.

Furthermore, Leikert points out that *sounds* are vague, amorphous and avoidant of all objectlike consistency, yet the *objet sonore* is a central interest of psychoanalysis. As voice over-codes gaze in terms of importance (Salecl and Žižek 1996), the vocal *jouissance* (Poizat 1992) expressed by 'L' is important as it is by consuming the textual lyrics of *Pretty Little Liars* that 'L' seeks to (re)gain access to the lost object (Schaeffer 1966/2017). It is through vocalisation that the *objet sonore* [sound-object] (*ibid.*) can be transformed from a recorded sound to an actualisation of *The Real* through the performative and expressive capacities of 'Ls' voice through her body. Moreover, her voice acts as the mechanism for the dissemination and actualisation of *The Real*. This expression enacts a form of enjoyment unable to be discerned through a visual register.

I apply the term 'translational metaphor' (Kirschner 2015) to describe the process of electronic representation (recording) to actualised expression, whereby, through *Jouissance* 'L' is able to actualise *The Real* using the expressive capacities of her body and voice, in the sense that her body and moreover, her voice are the instruments that provide the catalyst through which this can be achieved. As a final point I examine the signifiers 'hiding things' and the signifying chain of phrases 'it always keeps viewers on their toes because you might not know something'. Both of these examples link to *The Real*.

In drilling down into this point I draw on and resituate aspects of Hamza's scholarship in Flisfeder and Willis (2014) to argue that with correspondence to 'hiding things', 'The Real here should be read in the Žižekian-Lacanian sense: the Real is that very non-identity, the impossibility to become "itself" it is that something that resists symbolization' (p. 34). Secrets expressed by 'L' as related to the fact that the characters in *Pretty Little Liars* are always 'hiding things', conflates secrets with Eagleman's (2011, p. 50) useful definition, and it is here I argue that 'L's' interpretation of secrets as hiding things is used to draw attention to the fact that in relation to the secret's relationship with the ineffability of language *and* representation as expressed through *The Real's absence from language*, Eagleman points out that,

We have useful scientific frameworks for understanding Parkinson's disease, color perception, and temperature sensation—but none to understand what it means for the brain to have and to hold a secret.

The Real's absence from language is telling, as is 'L's' ability to articulate what is happening as 'L' does not have the language capacity to express what it means to have and hold a secret, thus by evoking the metaphor of 'hiding things' secrets can also be seen as an unattainable object of desire (*objet petit a*) in the sense that through their connection to *The Real* and 'L's' point that 'we might not know something'. This lack of knowledge can be explained by drawing on the notion of '...hiding things in plain sight, [...] [making them] ...impossible to spot' (Beaumont in Flisfeder and Willis 2014, p. 80).

Continuing to investigate the strand of dualism that corresponds to *Feminine Jouissance*, an example is provided by 'N' relating to the duality of secrets and their portrayal on television.

Yeah, I think secrets is probably one of the biggest themes in *Pretty Little Liars*. It's like in the title track, the song at the beginning. Erm, and there's this quote [*sic*], like in one of the first episodes [...] Ali [Alison DiLaurentis] says that secrets keep them close. It's like what makes them close friends. It's actually really interesting 'secrets a lot [*sic*] actually does keep the four girls together throughout the whole thing it's like the secret of this stalker and like all the things they find out. It's like all these secrets are what ties them together because they hadn't spoke [*sic*] to each other for so long so when they got these texts and these secrets started to appear it's what kind of kept them together. So, secrets I think in *Pretty Little Liars* is, its ... its seen as a bad thing, but it's also what brings the characters together as well.

'N's' assessment speaks to the limitations and gaps of psychoanalysis, when used as an empirical tool for interpreting a particular phenomenon. The content of 'N's' interpretation does not fit neatly in any pre-defined category. In attempting to connect *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction*, or the *Objet Petit a* none of them fit into the analysis of 'N's' experiences of the secret in particular or her wider experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in general.

Furthermore, taken in this context, the secret is defined as a pseudo-object of communication; it is the missing object of communication that falls into the space of non-representation. Indeed, this means that the links to the *objet petit a*, *The Real*, and *Phantasy/Fantasy as Mediated Fiction* that the ineffable nature of these concepts, that which cannot be 'seen' or 'viewed' in material and visual culture, can nonetheless be 'felt' and 'experienced' unconsciously. Given this, 'N' says that 'secrets keep them close', 'all these secrets are what ties them together', 'secrets [...] kept them together', and 'brings the characters together'.

This invisible energy, even though the object is missing in a physical sense, is an unspoken acknowledgement and bond between the characters in the shows and this is what 'N' is hinting at, yet she lacks the language capacity to be able to coherently articulate this. In turn, the concept of the secret acts as a metaphor that stands in for 'N's' desires to be closer to her own friends, as during her interview in the online, virtual clinic she disclosed that ... Finally, the *object a*, as the object-cause of desire functions alongside *feminine jouissance* as it is the emergence of the show's antagonist, 'A' who knows about the girls' secrets. This causes the girls' to move from being alienated from one another, having as 'N'

says ('Not spoken to each other for so long'). The girls' desire to stay safe and re-connect for their own protection is what enables them to stay together.

Subsequently, 'K' articulates the complex nature of keeping secrets stating,

The theme of secrets? Erm ... I think secrets is the kind of thing that really puts all our ... err ... imperfections out there because even though we all pretend that we're like good people all of us have kept secrets at a time. We've all had little white lies. Err ... there are things that we don't want people to know, and I think when you watch shows where people are holding on to secrets it kind of helps us realise that we are not alone when holding on to secrets because there are still things about us that we don't share with friends, we don't share with family members, we don't share with loved ones. So, I think it's kind of a concept that we all ... we're all sort of ... we act like we're good people, we have Facebook pages that look like our lives are perfect. We have ... you know ... in the outside world we look like our lives are together, but there are secrets that we are kind of holding on to beneath the surface that we don't really share and so I think when ... when we see it, when we hear it, we feel like we're kinda not alone.

'K's' experiences of the secret is one of the most psychoanalytically complex assertions that occurred during the course of the oral history interviews inside the online, virtual clinic. The first substantive claim 'K' makes is that 'I think secrets is [*sic*] the kind of thing that really puts all our ... err ... imperfections out there...'. Firstly, the use of the signifying phrase 'kind of' corresponds to a vagueness that does not possess a fixed meaning, this void is knowledge corresponds with 'K's' encounter with *The Real* as a participant in the context of the online, virtual clinic because as Braunstein (2020) points out, 'It is the confrontation with a void: [that] what cannot be said [...] therefore remains a secret...' (p. 2).

Subsequently, through the application of Braunstein (ibid., p. 70; my emphasis) it is through 'K's' experiences that,

the thread of desire moves; through the demands repeated to the Other from whom the subject receives signs, manifestations, and attributes that, because they have to be put into words, *cannot fill the open void of jouissance*. It is not because the Other is malevolent; it is simply that *the Other cannot respond to what is demanded*, and "limps" (*ça cloche*) *due to the lack of a signifier*, which is barred (*barré*). Given that *the Thing is unrepresentable*—an empty scene, a *space beyond the impassable surface of the mirror*—a virtual space emerges that is nothing more than an illusion; the objects that wished to substitute, populate, and furnish that space can achieve only an imaginary, spectral status (mirages).

Given this, the application of Braunstein speaks to 'K's' encounters with a fictional character that cannot attain corporeal status, thus it lacks ontic reality. The 'impassable surface of the mirror' representative of the television screen points towards why it is that 'K' lacks the knowledge necessary to articulate her experiences in this context. Furthermore, in determining the effects of *The Real* on 'K' and her lack of knowledge it is useful to resituate Chiesa's point (Chiesa 2016, p. 131) from a '...real hole/void in knowledge...' to *The Real* hole/void in knowledge' making *The Real* concomitant with K's void in knowledge.

Subsequently, if a juxtaposition occurs between 'K's' use of the phrases 'secrets puts all our imperfections' and 'out there' there is a tension between the psychic nature of anxiety and the externality of the world 'out there'. It is only through secrets being disclosed that 'K's' imperfections could be known. In explaining this further I draw again on Kathryn J. Zerbe who points out that,

The impact and complex nature of keeping secrets deserves greater scrutiny within psychoanalysis (Zerbe 2019, p. 185).

In addition, 'K' repeats the use of a particular phrase or a certain variation on a particular phrase, one that links to her connection to others and their experiences at least eight times throughout the course of the interview. She says, 'we *all* pretend that we are good people, *all* of us', 'We've *all* had little white lies', 'helps *us*', 'we are not alone', look like *our* lives are together,' 'look like *our* lives are perfect', 'when we see it' and 'when we hear it'. The repeated use of the signifiers 'we', 'all', 'us' and 'our' links to a form of universality of experience; some shared, all-encompassing collective that is arguably indicative of sisterhood.

For this argument to be supported it is necessary to draw on Janet Sayers who I connect to 'K's' use of plurality in language. It is this plurality, I argue, that ties women's experiences together, 'on the basis of a shared sense of Universal sisterhood' (Sayer 1982, p. 91). Due to this basis, 'K' moves beyond a teleological framework for attempting to understand the notion of secrets to a phenomenological understanding (based on events and experiences) which is deeply entwined with the unconscious (Bodea and Popa 2020).

In continuing with the subject of the unconscious 'K' says that 'there are secrets we are holding on to beneath the surface', 'when you watch shows where people are holding on to secrets it kind of helps us realise that we are not alone when holding on to secrets because there are still things we don't share with friends, we don't share with family, we don't share with loved ones' and 'when we see it, when we hear it, we feel like we're not alone'. 'K's' discourse relates here to the unattainable or unobtainable object of desire—the *objet petit a*. Before delving into the intricacies, ineffability, and enigmatic nature of the *objet petit a* I return to the first signifying chain where 'E' comments that, 'there are secrets we are holding on to beneath the surface'.

Given this, the installation of the signifier 'we' as opposed to 'I' as in 'K' does not say, 'there are secrets I am holding on to beneath the surface.' The use of 'we' points to a collective unconscious, at odds with the Lacanian appropriation of the same term; in turn, the notion of a collective sisterhood appears to link to Carl Jung. I refute this notion preferring instead to see the dissolution of 'K's' individual identity, transitioning to an identity based on a collective to be a synthesis of shared experiences (Momigliano, and Robutti (1999) and Richard Erskine's life scripts and unconscious relational patterns (Erskine 2018).

Furthermore, 'K's' use of the signifiers 'holding on to' [secrets] corresponds to the use of metaphor which imbues secrets with properties that make it an object. If the question, what would happen if 'K' let go? was posed this leads to an analysis of the relationship between the lost object (*objet petit a*) and the unconscious.

Finally, as we live in a visual culture 'K's' choice of privileging the visual over the auditory requires a corrective applying to it. It was argued earlier that we lack the capacity to be able to 'see' secrets, so it is not possible to 'see' or reify a non-tangible essence which is what connects secrets to possessing properties that are both ineffable and ephemeral. The corrective of replacing the focus on the auditory properties of *The Real* was discussed across chapters 2 and 3. Thus, as opposed to 'when we see it, when we hear it' this requires transposing and extending to 'when we hear it, when we feel it'—it is these capacities possessed by the secret that leads to its layers of complexity and inability to be adequately conceptualised which once again requires the reiteration of Eagleman's (2011, p. 50) point that,

We have useful scientific frameworks for understanding Parkinson's disease, color perception, and temperature sensation—but none to understand what it means for the brain to have and to hold a secret.

Given this, psychoanalysis, (as discussed in chapter 4's methodology) is not affiliated with any particular framework, worldview, or purview, especially not positivism that utilises the scientific framework.

5.6 Secrets and Emotions

The final section of this thesis chapter applies the ideas of Sara Ahmed (2004) to wider psychoanalytic discussions corresponding to the notion of emotions and how these emotions form a part of young women's viewing experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Before investigating the application of Ahmed's concepts, connecting the notion of secrets with emotions, I specifically analyse (returning once again) to the speech of 'K'. 'K's' use of the signifiers 'there are things we don't want people to know', corresponds with '...provoking unconscious shame, guilt, and narcissistic vulnerabilities' (Zerbe 2019, p. 186). The notion of shame in this context links to 'K's' understanding of secrets¹⁷

Taken in this context, 'K's' assertion that, 'there are things we don't want people to know' corresponds with Simon Archer's (2002) proclamation that 'A wish to be hidden indicates unconscious shame' (p. 142). Furthermore, the concepts of guilt and shame and their association with secrets sees guilt and shame as things that are 'felt' and experienced as opposed to 'seen'; all three concepts have an air of ineffability about them—both guilt (Malreddy 2019) and shame (Newsom 1983).

The structural inability of the limitations of psychoanalysis to reify feelings, consigns these concepts into the void of *The Real* wherein, the ineffable of language and representation circulates. Finally, what is interesting is Malreddy's (2019) point (drawing on Wúshner 2017) that 'In guilt, the ineffable feelings of shame find a medium of expression that also quantifies them' (p. 314) and this paradox, contingent with psychoanalytical thought, aids in the development of my new model of contemporary, televisual experience.

¹⁷ In turn it can be argued that I can also link unconscious fantasies to the operation of the secret by drawing on Benjamin Kilborne who argues that there inevitably exists a link between shame and secrets. Kilborne further points this out when he explains that 'The word *shame* is derived from the Indo-European root *skam* or *skem*, meaning "to hide" (p. 278; emphasis in original).

Returning now to Sara Ahmed (2004) the connection of Ahmed to television to psychoanalysis was explored in detail in chapter 3. As a further example of shame it is useful to connect Sara Ahmed's ideas to the discourse of 'S'. Within the context of the online, virtual clinic 'S' explained that the fictional character, Emily Fields and her coming out as a lesbian, allowed her ['S'] to connect secrets to shame and vice versa.

'S' explains that,

[Secrets are connected to] Emily's shame at the very beginning of the series leading towards [her] admitting that she was a Lesbian [and] by keeping it a secret there's an element of shame to it which is just a common theme with ... with anybody who has had to come out.

Drawing on Morrison (2007) it can be argued that when 'S' mentions shame and lesbianism, she immediately adds that she is not saying that there is anything wrong with being a lesbian, as she mentions 'I don't want to go down that road'. In essence, she is negating her own shame and expressing that there would not be anything wrong with either coming-out as a lesbian or keeping it a secret if that is what one so desired.

In further capturing the unconscious and its correspondence to secrets and *phantasy/fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction* it is useful at this stage to re-position the work of Rizzuto (2008). This will allow for the connection of secrets and unconscious *phantasies* to become clearer. Rizzuto argues that,

the conceptualization [sic] of shame in the clinical situation may gain clarity by linking the emergence of shame to unconscious fantasies (Rizzuto 2008, p. 53).

Rizzuto goes on to say that,

The concept of unconscious fantasy allows in its broad latitude for the understanding of experienced shame as a result of conflict affecting the sense of self and narcissistic self-evaluation in the presence of a significant object (*ibid.*).

Given this, 'S' may have self-corrected herself earlier due to her experiencing shame herself as she thought it sounded as if she were saying that lesbians should keep the fact, they are lesbians a secret. If she felt this misinterpretation would not arise, the correction would not be required. Furthermore, the televisual depiction of Emily Fields caused 'S', in the words of Rizzuto to undergo a 'narcissistic self-evaluation in the presence of a significant object' (*ibid.*).

The significant object in this instance was the fictional character of Emily Fields who acted as the catalyst for 'S's' recollection and connection of shame and secrets. Furthermore, the type of shame that 'S' points towards corresponds with Zerbe's (2019) point that when it comes to secrets, due to keeping her sexuality a secret because she feels it is shameful, the link to '...the benign and helpful to the *malignant and destructive*' (p. 187) is of importance here. Given this, and drawing on Sara Ahmed's point that, '...attributing 'others' as 'the source' of our feelings' (Ahmed 2004/2014, p. 1) points to 'S' shifting the focus from the fictional character Emily's, malignant and destructive *jouissance*, to a reconfiguration of 'coming out' as a 'benign and helpful' *jouissance*. This re-situation and reconfiguration allows an insight into how the drama of televisual fiction and reality are at odds with one another. Furthermore, this context highlights the congruent and incongruent nature of contemporary, televisual fiction with reality, something that is pursued further in chapters 6 and 7.

5.7 Conclusion

This conclusion has applied the work of Eagleman (2011) in evidencing the original claim of how secrets are represented on-screen within the context of contemporary, televisual fiction. This chapter has also connected Sara Ahmed's concept of emotion to existing scholarship on the correspondence between emotions, secrets, and psychoanalysis, particularly as it pertains to the notions of the secret and its connections with shame and guilt. Furthermore, the notion of the voice/auditory over the visual was positioned as the primary mechanism through which secrets are delivered, carried and disseminated (through revelation) and this sets up how secrets provide the affordances/agency for the emergence of unconscious thought in young women's stories.

This chapter has also mapped the connection of the secret and *The Real* through language, representation and the ineffable. Furthermore, in the next chapter (Chapter 6) depictions of U.S. suburbia, the All-American Girl/Girl Next Door, and the influence of Hollywood ideologies on appearances are all examined through the lens of the psychoanalytic

concepts of *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of Mediated Fiction, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *The Real*, and *The Objet a/Objet Petit a*. The notion of non-representation continues to bind the areas of enquiry through the concept of the ineffable.

Furthermore, the thesis continues to analyse the discourse that emerged from the online, psychoanalytic oral histories within the context of the online, virtual clinic. In analysing young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction as well as critiquing the limitations of both language *and* representation the next chapter continues to provide evidence in support of the development of a new model of televisual experience.

Chapter 6. The Ineffability of U.S. Culture: Reconfiguring Representations and Ideologies in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*

“What makes a place feel like home? Is it warmth and familiarity? Some idealised make-believe version of the American Dream? Is it love and acceptance? Or is it simple safety?” – Forsyth Pendleton III, “Jughead” Jones’ Narration – *Riverdale*

1x07: In a Lonely Place.

Lucas discusses Hanna’s beauty and why girls like her wouldn’t approach him during a Rosewood High School Abstinence Class— “I don’t have to know how to rebuff the advances of a genetic splice between Barbie and Shakira” – *Pretty Little Liars*

1x06: There’s No Place Like Homecoming”.

“Jughead: You’re a cheerleader for God’s sakes. You’re the perfect Girl Next Door.

Betty: I hate that word.” – *Riverdale* 1x10: The Lost Weekend.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the second part of a Lacanian analysis of the data collected through the 7 psychoanalytic oral histories conducted with young women in the context of an online, virtual clinic. As described in the previous chapter and chapter 4, all oral histories took place over Zoom. The previous topic of secrets identified approximately three themes (namely, the limitations of language *and* representation, the nature of the divine, religiosity, the ineffable and worship, and the use of metaphors to attempt to express the inexpressible).

This second part focuses on U.S. culture and ideologies, more specifically analysing The All-American Girl/Girl Next Door, American Suburbia and the effects of Hollywood’s ideologies on the construction of appearances. Overall, this analysis gives insights into the lack of congruency between what is portrayed on-screen and what the young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction are in reality.

This chapter examines young women’s critical interpretations of the concepts of U.S. suburbia, the All-American Girl/Girl Next Door and the influence of Hollywood on the construction of appearances through the contexts of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. Moreover, the concepts of *phantasy/fantasy as mediated fiction*, *The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance*, and the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, act as a series of frames for

repositioning/reconfiguring dominant ideologies. These contexts were selected due to their ability to destabilise and reconfigure hegemonic ideologies, captured through young women's discourse and the emergence of their unconscious within speech. In addition, it is through the complexities of feminine subjective experience and its associations with young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction that this thesis works towards the development of a new model of televisual experience that acknowledges and integrates, yet also moves beyond, identificatory and affective models of television.

Harnessing Freud's method of bringing 'under outside observation what was inside,' (Figlio in Bainbridge *et. al.*, 2007, p. 26)

Freudo/Lacanian concepts form part of women's psychic lives and are used to capture how women's subjective experiences are coterminous with the construction of on-screen realities and ideologies. The first section examines how U.S. suburbia shapes young women's subjective experiences.

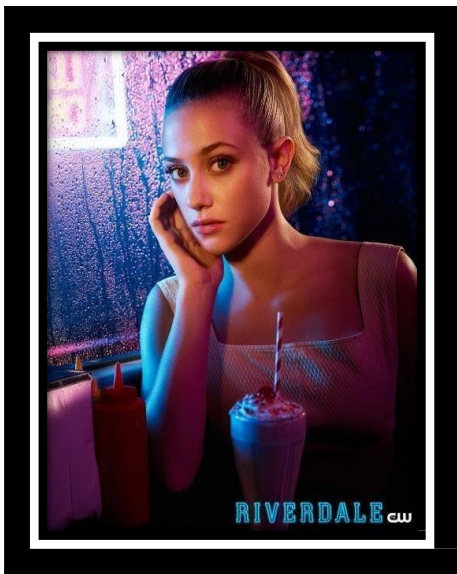
At this stage, it is useful to define subjective experience. Robin Lee Hatcher's definition of subjective reading provides this knowledge. Hatcher argues that,

Reading is subjective. People bring with them a whole set of experiences *and emotions* that can make them read different things into a story, things the author [including TV producer] didn't mean or intend (Hatcher 2009; emphasis added).

Hatcher uses the term emotion, yet we must remember (see chapter 3) that emotions, feelings and affects are theorised separately. It is this separate theorisation that allows for the complexities of contemporary, televisual fiction to be further investigated. Section two examines the place of the All-American Girl in U.S. culture focusing on historical changes in representation, meaning and interpretation, whereas section three delves into the competing ideologies of American popular culture, constructing on-screen portrayals of beauty as ideologically influenced Hollywood representations of perfection or hyperbolic, antithetical misrepresentations of reality.

Ideologically idealised representations of beauty can be seen through the fictional archetypes of Betty Cooper (*Riverdale*) and Hanna Marin (*Pretty Little Liars*) (See **Figures 4 and 5**, below).

Figure 4 Hanna Marin & Figure 5 Betty Cooper are the ideological idealisations of the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door played respectively by Ashley Benson and Lili Reinhart.



Furthermore, drawing on Michael Rustin's contribution in *Culture and the Unconscious* (2007) this chapter examines the relation of the role of the unconscious in culture. Due to the unique relationship culture and the unconscious share and following the lines of argument on televisual complexity and the ineffable (established earlier through the limitations of representation *and* language) many topics discussed as a part of culture are difficult to represent. This is no doubt because Rustin points out that,

Freud described the unconscious as the locus of primary mental process, of desires, fantasies and wish fulfilments, where the reality principle and the laws of logic do not rule (Rustin *in* Bainbridge *et.al.*, 2007, p. 1).

Moreover, as a brief precursor to the first section, it is useful to clarify what is meant by U.S. Suburbia, as this will provide insight into differentiating actual and fantasy-based portrayals of the term.

6.2 Conceptualising and Depicting U.S. Suburbia

U.S. suburbia is a pluralistic term. To maintain simplicity, U.S. suburbia will be conceptualised through the terms 'spaces of suburbia' and portrayals within popular culture (Archer *et. al.* 2015 and Huq 2013). These categories are useful for extending discussions of U.S suburbia which are referenced both explicitly and implicitly (e.g., U.S. high school experiences, fashion, affluence and poverty). In addition, it is useful to examine U.S. suburbia within the context of televisual fiction as this allows U.S. suburbia as an actual term and U.S. suburbia as depicted in mediated fantasy portrayals to be differentiated.

Although representations of U.S. suburbia within the context of televisual fiction are not new (Douglas 2003; McCabe and Akass 2006; Ulaby 2006; Vermeulen 2014; Arabian 2020) prior commentaries tend to place popular culture depictions of U.S. suburbia into two categories: utopian affluence or dystopian poverty. The positionality of these categories creates opposing and equally problematic binary relationships due to the limited possibilities these categories present for understanding interpretations that do not conform to either of these polarising viewpoints. A corrective to this problematic is offered by drawing on the scholarship of Patricia Clough who explains,

...a new ontological perspective to reconfigure [these binary relations] [that] might be understood in terms of *diffèrantial* relationships rather than oppositional or even dialectical ones (2000, p. 11).

In harnessing the power of the concept of *diffèrantial* relationships and to provide a corrective to the categories of affluence and poverty that structure popular culture depictions of U.S. suburbia it is propitious to consider the oft ignored middle, a liminal space charted only by utilising the tools of psychoanalysis. With this aim in mind, examination of the discourse of 'S' illuminates the binary problematic associated with

utopian affluence/dystopian poverty. 'S' (an American woman) discusses the portrayal of U.S. suburbia from the contextual standpoint of U. S. popular culture. Her comments reveal the complexities inherent in her individual experiences of televisual fiction as her discursive responses address a range of topics including fashion, socioeconomic status, and cultural ideology. Drawing on *Pretty Little Liars* 'S' discusses her experiences of U.S. suburbia.

I remember being very critical of their...amazing spot-on wardrobes [...] [T]hey didn't seem to be rich kids. Maybe one of them was. But they seemed to be, you know, pretty standard suburbia, suburban kids...and err...but they somehow managed to have like uh ... Hollywood-level outfits.

By engaging with the show's characters both manifest and latent content emerges. Dissection of 'S's' first claim: 'I remember being very critical of their...amazing spot-on wardrobes' reveals that the aesthetic choices of the show's producers do not appear to conform to 'S's' own worldview or experiences. Despite the level of criticality held by 'S' if focus is given to the signifiers 'amazing' and 'spot-on' a certain level of unconscious enjoyment is present in her response which Rickert (2007) incorrectly associates with *Jouissance* ascribing it to unconscious enjoyment.

As a corrective to Rickert's point, the emergence of *The Real* and its expression through *Jouissance* can be seen in 'S's' response where words fail her—her words begin 'to resist definition or interpretation' (Longstaff 2019, p. 75) through the use of 'errs' and 'uh'. This corresponds with my reinterpretation/repositioning of what Derek Hook (2020) terms 'empty speech'. This inability to represent speech what is termed 'unrepresentable' belies Lacan's belief, following his predecessor, Freud, that through signifiers access to the unconscious can be gained.

Indeed, 'S's' use of language—'seem to be/seemed to be' and 'maybe' is vague at best which drawing on Hook's notion of 'empty speech' belongs to the register of the imaginary. 'S's' strivings to capture an uncapturable *Jouissance*, to grasp an elusive piece of *The Real*, ultimately fails and this may unconsciously reveal something more significant allied to her choice to discuss fashion in the sense that perhaps for her,

[she] perceives [...] something that she actually does not have, *the object a*, *object cause of desire*. [She wants] some particularity that distinguishes her from other women and, as a result, she will desperately try to enhance what she thinks is special about herself. [...] [T]he fashion industry encourages

[women] to always look for another product that would make them unique [yet this leads to an *objet petit a* or unattainable object of desire as such an object does not exist] (Salecl 1997, pp. 25-26; emphasis added).

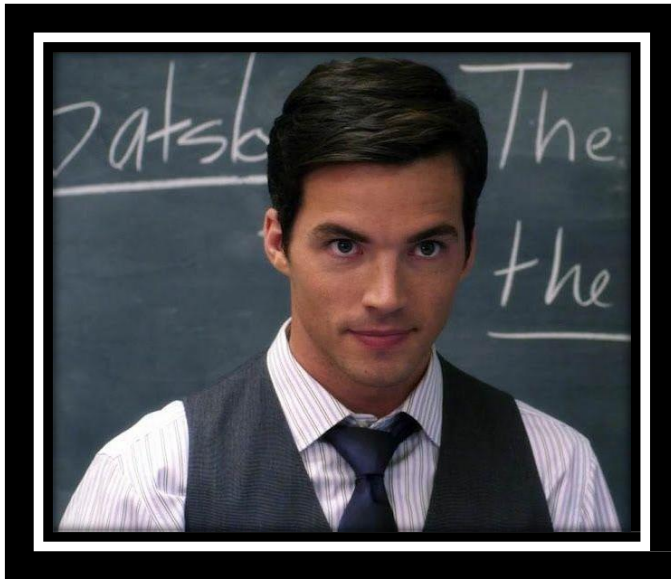
Interestingly, it appears to be a lack of agency (be that money, self-confidence or some other issue) that prevents 'S' from styling herself in the ways that Aria, Hanna, Emily and Spencer do, (see **Figure 6** below).

Figure 6 L to R - Aria Montgomery (Lucy Hale), Spencer Hastings (Troian Bellisario), Emily Fields (Shaye Mitchell) and Hanna Marin (Ashley Benson).



One could see this as a tenuous link, but during the oral history 'S' confessed that she was unpopular as a teenager and that she was never invited to parties, whereas she sees this life she never experienced occurring on the screen. In addition, 'S's' search for her unattainable *objet petit a* continues later when she discusses her attraction to Ian Harding's character, Ezra Fitzgerald (See **Figure 7**, below).

Figure 7 Ian Harding plays Ezra Fitz



Further examination of 'S's' commentary that they didn't seem to be rich kids is arguably a "conscious manifestation of the unconscious" in the sense that when the signifier 'rich' is combined with the example of 'Hollywood-level outfits' 'S' is unconsciously conflating ideas about suburbia with agency and affluence. The phrase 'standard suburbia' and more specifically the linguistic signifier 'standard' captures the complexities and tensions of 'S's' viewing experiences. It is doubtful she is aware of it, but her assertions regarding a status quo or egalitarian landscape as it pertains to suburbia through her use of 'standard', begins to open up a suture in the dialogue.

At this stage it is useful to apply Patricia Clough's notion of *diffèrantial* relationships to the binary dualism of U.S. suburbia as depicted through either affluence or poverty. The application of Susan Edmund's term, the 'Classless Middle Class', refuses to acknowledge the positionality of rich and/or poor (Edmunds 2003) acting as a keystone for the creation of a continuum of future possibilities and interpretations for describing the ways in which young women talk about U.S. suburbia in the context of the actual world. Furthermore, mediated fictional depictions of U.S. suburbia normally

draw on middle class portrayals.

The transition to the actual world shows progress beyond dualistic binaries as Edmunds (2003) draws on Seguin (2001) in determining that such matters of a middle class used to be colonised to the realms of American fiction and fantasy which adds further credence to the perpetuation of the myth that connotes U.S. suburbia as being either only rich or poor. The emergence of this surface-level/manifest content reveals the complexities of televisual experience as for 'S' there is a transcendence beyond the level of external identification with the characters' aesthetic appearances to something much more complex where 'S' questions what is being presented on-screen in terms of underlying ideologies. The imaginary reality on-screen is incongruent with 'S's' worldview.

This calls 'S' to question what her epistemological frames of reference are for shaping her knowledge of the relationship between socioeconomic status and style/fashion. This results in a dissonant/discordant experience (Festinger 1957). In addition, 'S's' psychic reality masks the false consciousness created by the producer's adoption of dominant ideologies by drawing on *phantasy* (Anderson 1983).

To better understand how her subjective experiences are shaped in the actual world, the very act of embracing the *phantasy* creates internal, albeit incongruous tensions which reveal her own desires. The embracing of *phantasy* results, for her, in the emergence of a lack of identification, where 'S's' subjective rationality diverges into the adoption of cynical reason (Sloterdijk 1987). Drawing on Buchanan's appropriation of Slavoj Žižek, cynical reason is associated with 'acting as if nothing is wrong' (Buchanan 2010, p. 107).

Furthermore, 'S's' adoption of *phantasy* in favour of reason, corresponds with Buchanan's appropriation of Žižek's critique which aligns '...false consciousness with fantasy' (*ibid.*, p. 162). This process is important because it not only extends the notions of identification and affect but reveals the inherent complexities inculcated into viewer subjectivities by the normatively dominant ideologies of western culture.

Moving on to an examination of the next independent clause, ‘S’ says, ‘[T]hey didn’t seem to be rich kids. Maybe one of them was. But they seemed to be, you know, pretty standard Suburbia, suburban kids...’.

As before, ‘S’s’ response appears straightforward in the sense that upon analysis of the surface-level/manifest content, she offers an alternative point of view to prior scholarly works that conflates U.S. suburbia’s socioeconomic status with either affluence (Brzenchek and Castaneda 2017) or poverty (Kneebone and Berube 2013). Upon closer examination it can be argued that the complexities inherent in U.S. suburbia are captured in the emergence of ‘S’s’ latent or unconscious thoughts, as it appears that her mind oscillates from rationality to fantasy in the signifying chain. It is useful to extend the signifying chain to dissect the capriciousness of ‘S’s’ patterns of thought as they move from rationality to fantasy.

Table 2: Capturing the rationality/fantasy oscillations in expressions of subjectivity/responding to the reception of televisual fiction.

Aspect of the Signifying Chain	Viewpoint	Latent (subtextual) or Manifest content
I remember being very critical [...] ...	Rational – sets up what appears to be a discussion about improbability.	Manifest (Conscious).
... of their...amazing spot- on wardrobes [.]	She begins to embrace and sink into the fantasy presented by the televisual fiction.	Latent (Unconscious subtext) due to the use of the signifiers ‘amazing’ and ‘spot on’
[T]hey didn’t seem to be rich kids. Maybe one of them was.	Rational.	Manifest (Conscious).

But they seemed to
be, you know, pretty
standard suburbia,
suburban kids...

Rational.

Manifest (Conscious).

[...] but they
somehow managed
to have like uh ...
Hollywood-level
outfits.

Fantasy.

Latent (Hollywood could be
manifested as an
unconscious ideology
pressuring the conscious).

The second sentence to the table's far left conflates signifiers that have positive associations 'amazing' and 'spot on' with the rational signifier 'critical' which has connotations with the in-depth examination of infinitesimal details. It can be argued, but not substantiated that the combination of rationality/fantasy and manifest/latent content creates a paradox. This paradox corresponds with and extends the notion presented by Karen E Dill-Shackleford that the technology we use influences our thoughts, feelings, and behavior[s] (Dill-Shackleford 2009/2016; Dill-Shackleford *et. al.*, 2016).

When questioned as to how her behaviours are impacted by technology in terms of the experiences she has, 'S's' response is in direct opposition to Dill-Shackleford's assertions, as 'S' explains that,

I wouldn't say it impacted ... I mean I think err...the way that we watch TV these days on our computers I don't think it...it makes it any different [*sic*] than having watched it on the television. Actually, on the contrary, I think it would have been even more annoying with all the adverts.

It is important to point out that 'S' appears to be more concerned with *the nature of the experience she has* as opposed to how her thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are affected. This can best be explained by repositioning Jason Mittell's concepts of the 'forensic fan' and 'drillable engagement' (Mittell, n. d.).

‘S’ does not forensically examine the television shows she is a fan of, preferring to enjoy surface-level entertainment as opposed to ‘drillable engagement’ (*ibid.*) where ‘probing beneath the surface’(*ibid.*) is not a concern.

When viewed through the lens of the unconscious, ‘S’ supplants prior theories of conscious, televisual affect in favour of the nature of the experience. This is arguably more complex as through her engagement with the show’s characters, ‘S’s’ critical stance points towards her own underlying desires, which are revealed by her reaction to the fashions worn by the characters through her use of signifiers such as ‘amazing’, ‘spot-on’, and ‘Hollywood-level’. Her reactions to the representations of fashion in the show create a frame through which to understand her connection to what I call ‘the familiar within the fantasy’.

This corresponds with Alison Bancroft’s claim that,

They [clothes] also remind the viewer that they are not outside this process, viewing its representation in popular media, but are instead actively participating in it themselves through their engagement with the images (2012, p. 49).

Although ‘S’s’ opinion is a critical one, as a viewer, her engagement with, identification of, and memories of the fashions in *Pretty Little Liars* has left an impression. This is important as ‘S’ makes further points about her experiences with the televisual fictions of *Pretty Little Liars* as Daniel III and Musgrave (2017) explain that “[t]hese “synthetic experiences” can change beliefs, *reinforce preexisting views*,

or even displace knowledge gained from other sources for elites as well as mass audiences” (p. 503; my emphasis).

6.2.1 U.S. high school as an aspect of American suburbia

‘E’ (an English woman) articulates her experiences of *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* through the frame of U.S. popular culture focusing on depictions of U.S. high school culture as an aspect of American suburbia. The distinction between these two facets of enquiry are provided respectively by Susan J. Douglas (1995) who focuses on the messages sent to women by TV. Subsequently, U.S. high school culture as an aspect of American suburbia is discussed by Bulman (2005) and more specifically by Terzian and Ryan (2015, p. 2; emphasis added) who argue that,

The *repetition of key tropes about schooling in television* [...] tend to *reinforce such images as normal* and discourage critical questioning of their *veracity or desirability*. Teacher–student relations have comprised one notable object of investigation. Such studies have considered [...] the recurrence of romantic themes between teachers and [students].

These issues are considered in more detail in this section by ‘S’¹⁸, but I return now to ‘E’ as her understanding of the underlying ideological content of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* reveals how her own subjective experiences are both moulded and clouded by the messages she receives at certain points throughout her life course. Her acceptance or resistance of this ideological content appears heavily dependent upon the shape of her own *Jouissance* which she says changed as she matured.

Veronica. She’s kind of the epitome of this rich, New York girl; like very *Gossip Girl*. I remember being younger and thinking, ‘I wish I was [*sic*] like that’ and that’s very much brought to life in *Riverdale*. And yeah, lots of like themes around that sort of High School Americanised drama and the All-American girl and like Archie as the Jock and stuff and they’ve got that in there as well, so I think maybe it reflects a lot of desires that young teenagers have and wish that’s what their lives looked like and that’s brought to life on the screen for those teenagers.

‘E’s’ responses here relates to a coterminous relationship between the psychoanalytic concepts of *Jouissance* and *The Real*. Elaboration of the coterminous relationship between the concepts of *The Real* and *Jouissance* can be explored through their link to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Firstly, coterminous corresponds to having the same boundaries of extent in space and time. Indeed, Lacanian scholars theorise the coterminous nature of *The Real* and *Jouissance*.

¹⁸ ‘S’ holds pre-existing views about herself and in my estimation lacks self-esteem. Through viewing televisual fictions that present life as something inaccessible to her, her pre-existing beliefs are reinforced. She negotiates these tensions by pointing out the ridiculousness of the fictional characters’ situations, which may well be a defence mechanism.

In drawing on evidence in support of this statement, I appropriate Žižek (1989, p. 184, emphasis added) who argues that,

If we define the Real as such a paradoxical, chimerical entity which, although it does not exist, has a series of properties and can produce a series of effects, it becomes clear that *[T]he Real par excellence is jouissance*: jouissance does not exist, it is impossible, but it produces a number of traumatic effects. *This paradoxical nature of jouissance* also offers us a clue to explaining the fundamental *paradox which unfailingly attests the presence of the Real*: the fact of the prohibition of something which is already in itself impossible.

Linking this to my original notion of *The Real* as associated with a sharing of space between *The Real* as a fictional character and young women's subjective and reactive experiences to these characters, *The Real* (fictional character) is capable of producing and activating bodily *Jouissance* in the viewing subject through using feelings and emotions as catalysts. This, as Žižek claims, '...can produce a series of effects ... it produces a number of traumatic effects.' Furthermore, the television screen acts as a protective element from the viewer directly apprehending *The Real*, thus, the prohibition of unmediated access to fiction is itself impossible and prohibited due to the coterminous context of the different metaphysical planes on which viewer and character sit.

This protective screen creates a barrier '...between the subject and the raw Real' (Žižek 2001, p. 176). Moreover, it is E's longing (that she 'wishes' she were like a non-existent character), which is impossible, that fuels her desires and her nightmares. E's desires are discussed further in chapter 7 when she speaks about the traumatic nature of the Black Hood serial killer reminding her of her father.

Furthermore, the dimensions of anxiety and desire also play important factors in the texturing of her responses. The signifier 'wish' corresponds to a mind-dependent *phantasy* associated with affluence. Moreover, in linking the 'wish' to *The Real* and *Jouissance* 'E' desires to be the epitome of a rich, New York girl like Serena Van der Woodsen, the protagonist from *Gossip Girl* (see **Figure 8** and Veronica Lodge, see **Figure 9**).

Figure 8 Blake Lively plays teen socialite, Serena van der Woodsen in *Gossip Girl*.



Figure 9 Camila Mendes plays Veronica Lodge in *Riverdale*.



‘E’ hints at the temporary displacement of her English *Jouissance* with an American *Jouissance*, as being English, she has a fascination with American life (which she gains access to from watching U.S. television). Subsequently, American culture (which although similar, is very different to English culture). This links to Lacan’s notion of the “metonymy of the want-to-be,” (Lacan 2001, p. 303).

Furthermore, this need of E's to be American and experience American *Jouissance* corresponds with the fact that 'E' 'wishes' she were like *Gossip Girl* due to the void created by *The Real*—an unreachable, unattainable, idealistic goal—Fink both argues that 'desire gets caught up in the pursuit and preservation of a beautiful ideal,' (Fink 2016, p. 132) and 'desire is always for something we do not have, in order for desire to persist in a relationship, there must always be something we do not have, that we do not yet have, or have not yet received' (*ibid.*, p. 182). Through watching shows like *Gossip Girl* in her past, 'E' can temporarily experience an American *Jouissance* through living vicariously through the fictional characters of Serena van der Woodsen and more so in the current time, through Veronica Lodge. Furthermore, what 'E' says indicates that these objects were missing from her life in her youth. The synthesis between missing objects, anxiety, wishes and desires corresponds with the fact that,

desire is always for something impossible: to attain an unattainable status (e.g., perfection, omniscience, or immortality), to complete an uncompletable project, or to possess what [...] cannot [be] possess[ed] (Fink 2016, p. 27).

'E's' speech is inflected with aspects of both desire and anxiety in response to the emergence of *Feminine Jouissance* which is directed at the fictional characters Veronica Lodge and Serena Celia van der Woodsen. The 'wish' aspect relates to a series of polymorphous *phantasies* 'E' experienced during her childhood, which she identified with through viewing televisual fiction as mediated *fantasy*. To restate this aspect of her speech, that is inflected with both desire and anxiety and a series of multiple fantasies concerning Jocks and High School drama 'E' says,

I remember being younger and thinking, 'I wish I was [*sic*] like that' and that's very much brought to life in *Riverdale*. And yeah, lots of like themes around that sort of High School Americanised drama and the All-American girl and like Archie as the Jock and stuff and they've got that in there as well, so I think maybe it reflects a lot of desires that young teenagers have and wish that's what their lives looked like [...].

Moreover, it is the constant metamorphosis of her desires and identifications that correspond with the signifier of the wish as a mental or psychic frame of reference unable to be anchored to any one signifier that results in 'E's' ideologies being transient, unrepresentable, capricious and ephemeral; all qualities which align with the complexities of contemporary, televisual fiction and the ineffability of ideology, language *and* representation.

Given this, her desire is metonymic in that in childhood it cathected itself to the protagonist of *Gossip Girl* and in adulthood cathected itself to the protagonist of *Riverdale* through a series of displacements. It is these displacements that betray 'E's' search for an object of desire intended to fill the void in her reality, a reality destabilised and torn apart by the emergence of *The Real*. Indeed, the alignment of *feminine jouissance* to aspects of *The Real*, desire and anxiety correspond with Lacan's *Seminar X* where he argues that anxiety sits between *jouissance* and desire claiming that,

the structure of anxiety is not far from [...] *fantasy* (Lacan 2014, p. 3).

This explains 'E's' need to engage with fictional characters, as *fantasy* is capable of assuaging anxiety due to familiar formulas and the comforting sense of familiarity provided by the characters which corresponds with why nostalgia or comfort TV is preferred over the age of prestige TV which offers unlimited choice (c.f., Waldron 2013, p. 105, Introduction). Furthermore, in *Culture and the Unconscious* Karl Figlio argues that,

we can reconstruct the elements [that] have fallen into unconsciousness, [tracking] their evolution in experience [...] through a dream-like openness to childhood memories, which ultimately regress and shade into the collective memories from which our current knowledge has arisen: old memories of experiences and feelings waken in us, [...] (Figlio 2007, p. 28).

It is here that Figlio draws on Ernst Mach who 'connects these unconscious ideas with Freud and Breuer' (*ibid.*). These ideas are repositioned in arguing that the unconscious can be accessed through childhood, and it is this catalyst that shapes the desires and anxieties felt by 'E' as she transitions from her memories of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Gossip Girl* to her future desires of attending University in America. Furthermore, the fictional characters of Serena van Der Woodsen and Veronica Lodge can be thought of as impersonal forces that intersect in 'E's' individual experiences 'emotionally moving her' because as Lacan argues, the emergence of anxiety in a subject is affected by two factors.

Firstly, '...anxiety is felt, properly speaking, as that of the Other's *jouissance* (Fink 2016, p. 61). Given this, the *Jouissance* experienced by the Big Other[s] of Serena and Veronica in the assimilated figures of the mediated imaginary/virtual-symbolic are both alien to and

indicative of a 'foreign jouissance' (*ibid.*). Secondly, '...anxiety is not *objektlos*, it is not without object' (Lacan 2014, p. 157). This point confirms that the imaginary substitutes utilised by 'E' to assuage the tensions experienced by lacking or not possessing what she wants are psychically cathected in her mind as the amalgamation of a psychic complexity whose components are an entanglement of memories, trauma, and lack. At this stage it is useful to briefly pause to draw attention to 'E's' traumatic memories.

'E' explains that there were tensions in her relationship with her father during her childhood.

Betty's storyline with her dad being the Black Hood was something I really related to, and it really moved me ...not the theme because my dad's not a serial killer, but not a pleasant human being to say the least. I'll not really go into it [...] I could relate to how she was feeling and how she worried [...].

Furthermore, 'E's' intense focus on the lifestyles of Veronica and Serena indicates a symptom aligned to anxiety and what Lacan terms 'narcissistic capture' (*ibid.*, p. 10). This corresponds with an ego-centric investment in an object. Subsequently, 'E's' desires to attend University are metonymically re(dis)placed via an *objet petit a* which in its emergence causes anxiety.

The anxiety texturing her response emerges because the fictional figures of Veronica Lodge and Serena van der Woodsen as attending American institutions stand in for 'E's' apparent and immediate inability to do so. 'E' experiences American culture vicariously. Given this, Lacan argues that under these circumstances,

The object [is] something that, in its essential function, steals away at the level of our grasp (Lacan 2014, p. 102).

The object to which 'E' gives purchase is slippery, elusive, and enigmatic. The effects of these displacements correspond to substitutes. The use of these substitutes reveals the effects of the unconscious. Drawing on the work of Lacan, it is possible to illuminate a potential connection between 'E's' visit to New York City, and due to being unable to return, finding comfort in the New York characters of Veronica Lodge and Serena van der Woodsen.

As Lacan puts it, it is likely that 'E' experiences a longing to return to America, communicated through her aspirations of attending University because 'anxiety appears in separation' (Lacan 2014, p. 166). 'E' communicates her desire to attend University when she says, she attended the place where *Gossip Girl* was filmed in New York and that she wants to attend a U.S. University in the future. She was particularly interested that I had done this during my youth. Furthermore, Lacan points out that '*Only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire*' (*ibid.*, p. 179; emphasis in original). Given this, 'E's' anxiety-ridden *jouissance*, expressed as strong desires emerge as a result of a prior comment of hers during the online analysis where she claims,

[I]n school, when I watched *Pretty Little Liars*, [...] I was obsessed with it [...] One Christmas all of my presents were like *Pretty Little Liars* themed. [...] And erm, my mum got me a signed copy of the script. Erm, and I would ... I loved how complex the storylines were. I loved that. I loved how it was just a big web. I had full on documents where I'd try to write all of my theories out. And I tried to figure things out ... and I guessed who 'A' was and I was so proud of that (laughs). And yeah, I just ... loved it so much. Erm, and I'm going to stop, because I could keep going forever.

The emergence of 'E's' *Jouissance* is reflected once more by the repetition of language. She mentions she loved various aspects of the show on four separate occasions and uses the pronoun 'I' thirteen times. This corresponds with Lacan's proclamation that to 'speak of love is in itself a jouissance' (Lacan 1998/1999, p. 83).

Furthermore, Freud (2005, p. 28; emphasis added) points out that,

If an object is a source of pleasurable sensations, there arises a motor impulse to bring it closer to and incorporate it into the ego; we then speak of the 'attraction' of the pleasure-giving object and say we 'love' the object.

There is also a tension present here between obsession and love as 'E' comments that she was 'obsessed' with the show. Her obsession corresponds with collecting objects [bookmarks, scripts] and equates to what is termed display culture (Kiendl 2004). Furthermore, love and obsession are differentiated by their respective levels of intensity, yet neither are representable.

This intensity unconsciously manifests in 'E's' response that she 'could keep going forever', indicating a true passion and commitment to the show, expressive of infinity. What is interesting here is that Bogdan Wolf comments that interpreting Lacan's statement in *Seminar X* '...love is independent of the other who may or may not love me in return' (Wolf 2019, p. 119). If one transposes the small 'o' to a large 'O' then other becomes the Big Other of the virtual-symbolic, meaning that Wolf's interpretation of Lacan would change, as the world of *Pretty Little Liars* cannot love, thus 'E's' '...love is independent of the other who may [...] not love me in return (*ibid.*), and it is this void that allows *The Real* to appear and cause 'E's' anxiety-ridden desires; yet it is important to note that according to Lacan, '...love would be out of the question were it not for culture' (Lacan 2014, p. 179).

In providing qualification to Lacan's statement, we can draw on him again so 'E's' experiences of *Pretty Little Liars* can be better critically understood. Her love of the show pertains to what Lacan calls the idealisation of desire in the sense that 'Love is made from the idealisation of desire' (*ibid.*, p. 190). Furthermore, Lacan argues that,

...desire is a mercantile thing, [...] there is a pricing of desire that one pushes up and down culturally and the pattern and the level of love depend on one minute to the next on the price one sets on desire in the marketplace (*ibid.*).

The 'pricing of desire' transcends the boundaries of the show itself, giving 'E' access to further *Jouissance*. This is heightened through her mother buying her gifts at Christmas. Thus, 'E's' desire, love, and ultimately obsession for the show when she was a teenager is fulfilled through her m(O)ther with 'E's' *feminine jouissance* corresponding to her m(O)ther's agency of being able to fulfil her desires.

This has a temporary effect on tempering her desires, a phenomenon I develop as an original concept known as 'ephemeral media mollification' because '– desire always wants something else, something new, something different. Desire is based on metonymy, and keeps flitting from one thing to the next, from one object to the next – until, that is, its course is stopped by *object a* (*ibid.*). As a final point further, observations are raised when 'E' says, 'I wish I was [*sic*] like that.'

Her use of the term 'wish' corresponds to commentary by Vogt (2013) who draws on underpinning philosophies first advanced for consideration by Freud (1900). For Vogt,

Modernly, an interesting trend has emerged: the need for “wish-fulfillment.” Viewers are turning to their televisions not only to be engaged and intrigued, but also to find a bit of peace and happiness that remains elusive in our everyday lives.

For Freud, wish-fulfillment occurs through surface-level or manifest content and latent content or the unconscious. This unconscious aspect as present in dreams is discussed by ‘E’ in relation to her childhood where she identifies as wanting to be like a character in the show which reveals her aspirations. Furthermore, ‘E’ utilises U.S. cultural vernacular (she is English) when she mentions the phrases: high school, Americanised drama, Jock, and All-American girl.

An examination of the origins of the terms ‘All-American’ and the All-American girl are considered in order to provide insights into the ways in which ‘E’s’ subjective experiences and interpretations of U.S. culture are shaped in the next section. In concluding this section, thus far this project has examined young women’s experiences of U.S. suburbia, highlighting the place of U.S. high school culture. Drilling down further, the conversation now turns to how mediated depictions of *fantasy*, the *objet petit a*, *jouissance*, and *The Real* act as doorways, allowing access to the unconscious thoughts of young women’s experiences as it pertains to the portrayals of mediated depictions of student-teacher relationships within the U.S. high school setting (with particular emphasis paid to the inappropriate and transgressive elements of these relationships), depicted through the use of televisual tropes.

The word ‘trope’ originates from the Greek word ‘tropos’, which means turn, direction, manner or style, as well as already carrying the current meaning of the term: turn or figure of speech. This was the basis for the Latin ‘tropus’, and the English word ‘trope’, which appeared in the 1530s, also had the meaning ‘figure of speech’. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms says that a trope “uses words in senses beyond their literal meanings,” and gives metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy as examples. The second meaning of the word as common theme or device is a fairly recent creation (Börzsei 2012, p. 3).

Börzsei refers to tropes as ‘recurring patterns and conventions in literature and entertainment media’ (2012, p. 1). By drawing on further sources such as the TV Tropes website, Börzsei refers to the fact that “*Tropes transcend television. They reflect life.*” (*ibid.*, p. 2; emphasis in original).

The underlying ideology acting as a foundation for structuring this statement can be destabilised and refuted particularly when applied to 'L's' comments that there were no girls who were 5' 11" models in her high school. Far from reflecting life they are the antithesis of 'L's' subjective experiences. Lacan's insistence on the symptomatic point of non-recognition—the declaration "this is not me", is an integral part of subjectivity (Vranešević *in* Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017, p. 103).

It is 'L's' encounters with these fictions that bring to light 'the creation of a different world, not only a strange world, but an irreducible [O]therness' (Rasmussen *in* Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017, p. 114; emphasis added). Furthermore, in navigating these fictions, transcendence occurs in the form of anti-ideological pronouncements, reflecting issues of anxiety and calling forth Julia Kristeva's (1982) notion of 'the abject [which]—breaks down the boundaries between subject and object, [and] creates havoc' 'that "absorbs [...] horror into the subject's [psyche]" which can be both unsettling and traumatic (Hylèn, Franzén *in* Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017, pp. 127, 133). This underlying unsettling trauma appears further in the discourse of 'K', and alongside further examination of 'L's' comments, these are discussed in this chapter's penultimate section.

Returning now to student-teacher relationships, this section begins by pointing out that many of the young women interviewed implicitly, and thus, unconsciously, discussed the tensions brought about by *Jouissance* and its correspondence with issues that are transgressive, taboo, and forbidden. Generally speaking, women's experiences continually pointed to the fictional relationship between Aria Montgomery and her high school English teacher, Ezra Fitzgerald and allusions to statutory rape. Even though such issues are accessible to conscious thought the taboo nature of the subject is frowned upon and indeed, the admittance of wanting such a relationship is worse.

As a way of experiencing the transgressive nature of such issues, the women interviewed drew on a special form of *Jouissance* to vicariously experience and talk about that which should not be named (or indeed, thought). In essence, the tempering and mediation of these issues can be experienced through the virtual- symbolic. Moreover, it is useful to draw on *Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1997) to investigate these mediated, transgressional experiences, but

firstly, let us examine a series of excerpts from the online psychoanalytic sessions.

‘L’ commented that she

[W]as very interested in her [Aria’s] romance with Ezra and that was like one of my *favourite parts* of the show and like ... looking back I was like ... *that’s really gross*’... It’s like, very gross, err ... and I’m surprised that they were able to like get ... get away with something like that it ... it’s very unethical. Erm ... but I didn’t really like, make that connection when I was a bit younger. Erm ... and I just thought like, wow, he’s so attractive, they have, like this *forbidden romance* ... how spicy, you know ... erm, so yeah.

The tension between the signifiers ‘favourite’ and ‘gross’ indicates that the fantasy of the virtual-symbolic keeps ‘L’ at a safe distance from that which is taboo or forbidden. She can experience this transgression of the law through what I alluded to earlier in *Seminar VII*, which is the act of suppressing what Lacan calls, a ‘*malevolent or evil jouissance*’ (Lacan 1997, pp. 184; 189) through what Žižek refers to as the virtual-symbolic, discussed in chapter 2.

This process would be what Lacan refers to as ‘the taming of perverse *jouissance*,’ (Lacan 1997, p. 4; emphasis in original).

The transgressive nature of ‘L’s’ commentary corresponds with Lacan’s notion that ‘without a transgression there is no access to *jouissance*,’ (*ibid.*, p. 177; emphasis in original). Moving on, I now examine ‘I’s’ contributions where the allure of an older man appears to be a common desire as it pertains to young women, but it is bound up with major tensions allied to statutory rape, ethics and morals (Crookston 2020; Korbel 2020). Indeed, for ‘I’ she explains that:

...high school and teenage life is portrayed and *completely twisted* from what it is in reality [...] I don’t think often producers whoever, writers, directors realise how much effect ... of how [much] of an effect it has on young people and how they are impressionist, impressioning [*sic*], how it is that their pressured from what their [*sic*] seeing on the screen so all of the relationships, the way they are portrayed, especially in *Pretty Little Liars*, like Aria’s kind of relationship with the teacher. It is portrayed ... so heavily kind of romanticised but obviously very wrong, like she was a minor at the time, and it was like that one small detail that was portrayed in just a kinda like, you know ‘*pink wrapping paper*’ that probably means that *little girls’ kind of ache* for something like that.

This particular form of *jouissance* is termed ‘malignant *jouissance*’ (Lacan 1997, p. 18; emphasis in original). This *jouissance* is directed with bad intentions by the characters in *Riverdale* as well as *Pretty Little Liars* as Miss Geraldine Grundy pursues, ‘Archie’ Andrews in *Riverdale*. These pursuits of malignant *jouissance* are not historically unique as they also appeared earlier in *Dawson’s Creek* where a fifteen-year-old boy is pursued by a thirty-six-year-old woman (teacher).

‘I’ uses the connected signifiers (condensation) to articulate the phrase ‘pink wrapping paper’ to uncover the components of malevolent *jouissance*. The malignance and malevolence underlying the character’s intentions are suppressed by ‘I’ in the form of an aversion where romanticisation acts as a façade for the suppression of this unacceptable enjoyment. In addition, the phrase ‘little girls’ kind of ache for something like that’. ‘I’s’ use of the term ‘ache’ as in the noun ‘a continuous and prolonged dull, pain’ and its corresponding term ‘pang’ expressed as ‘a sudden sharp pain or painful emotion’ reflects something deemed to be missing from the lives of the girls that ‘I’ is referring to, something that they cannot have and this emerges through the fact that they are not naming what this ache is, due to the limitations of language.

Subsequently, ‘I’s’ response brings into focus inveterate debates associated with the different effects media has on young people and how they are pressured from what they see (Spillman and Everington 1989; Holmstrom 2004; Karsay *et.al.*, 2021; Tonellato 2021). Furthermore, the conflation of romanticisation in youth expressed as ‘the unrepresentable [which] is what can only be shown without being seen, what can be said without being clearly understood’ (Sibony-Malpertu *in* Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017, p. 40).

The pink wrapping paper metaphor allows for the emergence of the unconscious in ‘I’s’ speech. This substitute acts as a placeholder for the surfacing of *The Real* and its associated dimension of *Jouissance*—an illusion that although appealing in appearance, belies what Kristeva terms a ‘fascinated horror’, beneath its façade (Kristeva 1982, p. 23) and when worked through with reference to the scholarship of Crookston (2020) and Korbelt (2020) is reflective of ‘the horror of a sickening human condition’ [paedophilia, statutory rape], (Kristeva 1982, p. 138). Furthermore, ‘I’s’ comments regarding the yearning of young girls conforms to what Illouz terms ‘...an idealist [...] approach to love’ (1997, p. 154).

The idealist approach confirms the absolutist claims of love and passion *and has strong affinities with the capacity to construct fantasies* (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

Most mature, educated narrators conform to the principle of realism where ‘the romantic experience that “simulates” the love stories that are the staple of Hollywood and television’ (*ibid.*) are destabilised in shows such as *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*. Relationships are more volatile (e.g., characters’ experiencing and having forbidden relationships/having affairs). Furthermore, ‘I’s’ use of the adjective ‘twisted’ corresponds with Žižek’s notion of the moëbius strip as ‘I’ unconsciously points towards her own subjectivity. The linguistic intensifier ‘completely’ preceding the adjective ‘twisted’ serves to reinforce the differences between what ‘I’ experiences on-screen in contrast to the subjective experiences she has in her actual life.

For Žižek, the moëbius strip represents ‘...*two sides* of the same phenomenon which, precisely as two sides, can never meet.’ This is due to the fact that ‘I’ and the events subjectively experienced on-screen ‘...move in different temporalities...’ (Žižek 2006, p. 4; emphasis in original). Subsequently, ‘M’ points out a broader treatment which corresponds to issues of representation in U.S. culture and the inherent problems this practice causes¹⁹, which are detailed both below and further in this chapter before we transition to the conclusion.

I think *Riverdale* really shocked me when I realised just how young these people were supposed to playing [*sic*]. In the first season, I think they’re maybe supposed to be fourteen (14) or fifteen (15) and erm, I think having these people in their twenties (20s) in such a sexualised and played for sex kind of way urm I think can really contribute to the hyper-sexualisation of teenagers erm and ... oh, yes, because in the first season they had the storyline with Mrs [*sic*] Grundy, right? And this was very much played for sex with this teacher-student relationship, and it didn’t seem so bad because you’re watching two people in their twenties (20s) but then within the story of the show this is supposed to be like a young teenager and their teacher and it... it really lacked a lot of self-reflectiveness as a show about how that was being portrayed on the screen.

¹⁹ The phenomenon in question is known as the Lolita Syndrome and the Nymphet Effect, which although not directly related to paedophilia in the sense that Ezra was 24 and Aria was 16 and not 12, is still problematic. The pursuit of Archie Andrews by Miss Geraldine Grundy corresponds in turn with the Cougar Effect. For more information on these effects and syndromes the following resources may prove useful: Loftus, J. (2020/2021) *Lolita Podcast*. [podcast] Available at: <<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/lolita-podcast/id1536839859>> (Accessed June 03, 2021), Nabokov, V. (1955) *Lolita*. Paris: Olympia Press, Sinclair, M. (1988) *Hollywood Lolitas: The Nymphet Syndrome in the Movies*. London: Plexus Publishing and Vanderheiden, E. (2021) “A Matter of Age?” Love Relationships Between Older Women and Younger Men: The So-called “Cougar” Phenomenon’, In: C-H Mayer and E. Vanderheiden (eds.), *International Handbook of Love Transdisciplinary and Transcultural Perspectives*. Switzerland: Springer, pp. 369-390.

With reference to repetition, the signifier “sex” appears twice, alongside sexualised and sexualisation. In explaining this phenomenon, Lacan puts it like this ‘the return of the same signifiers is proof of the unconscious’ (Miller 2011). Alenka Zupančič concurs with Miller’s assessment in the sense that for her, ‘it is by means of the repetition of a certain signifier that we have access to *jouissance*’ (2006, p. 158; emphasis added).

The signifying phrase, ‘played for sex’, which appears twice, is an odd and interesting phrase the meaning of which corresponds to tensions that arise for ‘M’. For her, even though this is fiction, ‘played’, (e.g., the excessive sex in the shows serves no purpose in driving the narrative forwards) and in its gratuitousness is what Žižek calls ‘Surplus Enjoyment’ (2022) which he argues is necessary for society to function.

Additionally, the signifier ‘played’, or its abbreviated form ‘play’ are coterminous with the signifier, sex, and this links back to how ideologies of love and sex are ‘twisted’ through the consummation of a romantic utopia and a pink wrapping paper yearning, discussed by ‘I’.

This section ends with an examination of the role of student-teacher fantasy constructions in adulthood and how they allow one to access a particular form of *jouissance*. ‘S’ articulates how fantasy constructions play a role in relation to her own expectations and desires. She explains that,

Expectations or desires in the sense that *whoever the guy is that played Ezra*. I’d very much like *that* to be my boyfriend because he is just so attractive (my emphasis).

‘S’s’ desires are communicated through ‘marginal or residual phenomena [...]’ (Lacan 2019, p. 3) with ‘slips of the tongue’ (*ibid.*). being one such unconscious manifestation. It is important to note that just as is the case with dreams, the content of desire is both latent and manifest. The desire captured by the emergence of ‘S’s’ manifest content corresponds with Lacan’s argument that desire relates to

[a] spontaneous and conscious need tending [...] toward a known or *imagined end* (*ibid.*, p. 8; emphasis added).

The imagined end here is to have Ezra Fitz (if he existed) as her boyfriend. Lacan does, however, point out that 'with reference to objects alone' (*ibid.*, p. 10) it is difficult to situate and analyse desire. As objects are external representations, ideologies of desire are subjectively situated for each individual. Desire stems from a psychic locus, making it very difficult to be represented or to remain anchored to any one particular signifier so it becomes a 'floating signifier' (Mehlman 1972).

Furthermore, 'S's' slip of the tongue appears to reveal some form of transgressive secret. Instead of saying 'I had a very attractive teacher when I was in High School' she says 'I...I have had a very attractive teenager when I was um...very attractive teacher when I was in High School um ...' which is quickly corrected by saying, 'but I never would have thought that it would be appropriate for anything to happen, even though, you know, you might dream of that kind of stuff.' The transgressions here pertain to the phrase 'have had' which is slang for having been intimate, yet 'S' cannot find the words to communicate these traumas due to an absence of language when she says 'um' after each mention of teenager and teacher, indicating a defence mechanism. 'S's' slip of the tongue corresponds with Bruce Fink's argument (Fink in Barnard and Fink 2002, p. 24) that,

The enunciating subject is the one who may let slip something that is revealing as to his or her feelings, desires or pleasures.

In addition, 'S's' speech corresponds with Lacan's proposition that the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan 2002). Lacan doesn't think that people can have what they desire due to, utilising the vernacular and eponymous title of Frederic Jameson's book, being stuck in the prison-house of language (Jameson 1972). Unable to grasp the reality, they are removed from the signified. Thus, with an arbitrary relationship existing between the signifier and the signified 'S' is aware that the signifier of 'Man' is represented by the substitute signifier 'Ezra Fitz'.

When 'S' says '...whoever the guy is that played Ezra' there is a distinct dismissiveness to her tone in the sense that she wants Ezra Fitz, not the actor. Furthermore, 'S's' usage of the word 'that' completely de-subjectivises and de-humanises the concept of man into nothing more than a sexual object. Indeed, this brief articulation by 'S' shares many other analytical complexities that correspond to her experiences of contemporary, televisual

fiction, especially as the interpretation pertains to connections with Lacanian concepts which I shall now explore further providing an exegesis of their connection to both the complexities of televisual fiction and the ineffable in terms of the lines of argument corresponding to the limits of language *and* representation.

A complex interconnection exists, resulting in tensions between *The Real*, *Jouissance*, the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, and *Phantasy/Fantasy as a product of mediated fiction*. Taking the tensions between 'S's' *Feminine Jouissance* and the *Objet Petit a*, it becomes clear that 'S's' *Feminine Jouissance* is aligned to the ineffable, in the sense that 'S' experiences it, but knows nothing about what or why she experiences what she does. This becomes more apparent through her inability to control her desire toward the *virtual-symbolic* figure of Ezra Fitz as her fascination with a fictional character makes no sense when measured against the yardstick of reality.

Genevieve Morel points out *in* Barnard and Fink (2002, p. 91) that this relates to 'the condition of her ['S's'] recognition and enjoyment of a man'. It is here that care needs to be taken in differentiating *Feminine Jouissance* from affects or emotions, as in accordance with Lacan's point of view, *Jouissance* is neither. *Jouissance* is a '...superabundant vitality, that the subject perceives as something that [she] cannot apprehend by means of even the most elementary of affective movements' (Lacan 1997, p. 237).

From this vantage point, it is useful to interrogate Barnard and Fink, as what 'S' experiences is transcendent of man, a remainder of *The Real*, generated by her immaterial *phantasies* and captured in mediated form on the small screen.

The phrase transcendent of man serves a functional purpose in repositioning 'S's' "sexual" *jouissance*' (Barnard *in* Barnard and Fink 2002, p. 8) which is directed at the fictional, virtual-symbolic object on-screen, identified by the signifiers, 'Ezra Fitz'. 'S's' attempts to transcend the virtual-symbolic are met with failure, leaving behind an *objet petit a*, a rem(a)inder of *The Real*. The very act of being sexually attracted to a fictional character is transcendent of man. This transcendence is provided by the fantasy frame of the television screen which allows for a transcendence of *phallic jouissance* in favour of a *feminine "sexual" jouissance* that circulates in the realms of the virtual-symbolic, producing effects of *The Real*.

Finally, Barnard *in* Barnard and Fink argues that the

distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic facilitates a differentiation between the aspects of women's sexual alienation that are a function of demand and those that are a function of desire, (*ibid.*, p. 7).

'S' is sexually alienated in the sense that the object of her affection is non-existent, (she says whoever that guy is who plays Ezra, I'd really like that to be my boyfriend) and by synthesising the imaginary and the symbolic into the imaginary(virtual)- symbolic representative of the signifier of a fiction, 'S's' experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and the complexities involved can be critically understood. Thus, demand and desire, far from being two separate entities are coterminous resulting in an intermingling of desperation and fascination. 'S' ascribes both demand and desire in her longing for Ezra Fitz because '...in the absence of real objects, the subject seeks and creates for [herself] an imaginary satisfaction (Burgin *et al.* 1986, p. 24); with this imaginary satisfaction being ascribed to *jouissance* (Miller 2019).

In addition, *Feminine Jouissance* can be articulated according to Lacan, as 'a kind of "knowledge" beyond fantasy, an "unknown" knowledge that can only be discerned in and through its effects' (Barnard *in* Barnard and Fink 2002, p. 12). It is here that I argue that women as viewers obtain their *feminine jouissance* or what Lacan terms '*Other jouissance*' (*ibid.*) through their interactions with fictional characters as the Big Other, see the Introduction for the strange effects fictional characters, settings and situations have on my own subjective experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Furthermore, the emergence of *The Real* in the unconscious speech of women as feminine viewers can be attributed to *Big Other jouissance*, cathected in the fictional character of the Big Other in the imaginary(virtual)-symbolic (this imaginary, (virtual)- symbolic Other is representative of a fictional character, like Santa Claus), 'this *jouissance* does not exist because it cannot be represented: it can, however, be traced in the history of its effects' (*ibid.*).

Finally, 'S's' fascination for Ezra can be explained further by drawing on and (re)appropriating Hylén's examination of John Donne. It is useful at this point to pause and recall the maxim mentioned in the Introduction of this project that in reconfiguring Donne the ability of '...associating two things that do not appear to have any connection with each other, this unexpected circumstance, stirs the reader' (Hylén *in* Piotrowska and Tyrer 2017, p. 121). Taken in this context we thus,

...maintain the idea that ['S's'] ideal—[her] perfection of love, which in “ecstasy” is a [man]—is combined with a loss, which is not only on-going but structural. [S] desires the [man], [she] worships him, but [she] never manages to get [him]: [he] is lost forever. It is [her] own desire that drives [her], and therefore [he] can continue to exist as the unattainable (*ibid.*, p. 122).

It is useful at this point to briefly pause and consider the use of the signifiers ‘perfection’ and ‘ecstasy,’ as well as acknowledging that this unattainability corresponds to an excess enjoyment configured as the *objet petit a*, an enjoyment that ex-sists outside of the reality of our lifeworld. The signifiers ‘perfection’ and ‘ecstasy,’ indicative of idealised states, complicate matters when framed through the lens of the ineffable. When the structures of perfection and ecstasy ultimately fail, *The Real* and ‘S’s’ *feminine Jouissance* are shook and it is here that between *The Real* and *Jouissance*, anxiety emerges. These anxieties are considered in more detail in the discourses of ‘L,’ ‘E,’ and K, later in this chapter.

Through drawing on Slavoj Žižek’s use of Lacan, it is possible to reconfigure Žižek’s claim pertaining to

the elevation of woman to the sublime object of love [which] equals her debasement into the passive stuff or screen for the narcissistic projection of the male ego-ideal [...] (Žižek 1994, p. 108).

When applied to ‘S’s’ commentary where she objectifies the fictional character of Ezra Fitz ‘the elevation of man to the sublime object of love equals his debasement ...’ and consequently, his existence on the screen as an object of pleasure for ‘S’ serves to act as a catalyst ‘for the narcissistic projection of the female ego-ideal’ (*ibid.*).

As a final point ‘S’ comments on her motivations for trying to ‘grasp’ the unattainable *jouissance* allied with Ezra Fitz.

I think teen sexuality which is something that bothered me. I’m by no means prude, but again *that level of ... of ... desire just felt a little bit beyond the scope ... the scope of my ... my own experiences [...]* so I ... it was like ... a little bit strange to see *the amount of sex* that all of these kids were having with one another.

‘S’s’ comment that ‘that level of desire just felt a little bit beyond the scope of my own experiences [as it pertains to] the amount of sex’ that all of these kids were having with one another corresponds to a fantasised excess, a kernel of *The Real* emerging from the void as *objet petit a* (Žižek 1989; Žižek 2022).

This void manifests as a gap or *faille* in the televisual experiences of ‘S’. This correspondence draws on *Reading Seminar XX* in the sense that for Fink (2002)

A lot of things prop up the belief in this kind of jouissance. Hollywood certainly props it up, attempting to give it a kind of consistency few of us have probably ever known. In Hollywood’s depiction of sexual relations— [...]—there is something inevitable and reliable about the satisfaction that the actors ostensibly obtain, [...]. I am not suggesting that no one ever has sexual experiences like the ones depicted on the silver screen, but that virtually no one has them with such regularity, so *infallibly* (p. 35; emphasis in original).

In contrast to young women’s actual ‘lived’ experiences, the next section discusses the origins and development of the terms the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door as instances of fictional characters who occupy U.S. suburbia.

6.3 Conceptualising the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door/Origins of All-American

Before examining young women’s experiences of the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door it is necessary to position the concepts of the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door. Firstly, it is propitious to focus on the generalities of the history of the term All-American before focusing on the particularities of the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door. Before moving on to discuss the ‘All-American Girl’ it is useful to examine what ‘E’ might mean by the term ‘All-American’.

Although this is often contested it appears that the term was first used in 1889 as

...an honorific title given to outstanding U.S. athletes in a specific sport ...Originally the term referred to a select group of gridiron college football players’ (Britannica 2021).

The contestation comes from Merriam-Webster (2021) which lists the term as first appearing in usage in 1887. As to the term’s development and evolution, the English language term

(*ibid.*, 2021) is described as,

...having qualities that are thought to be typical of people in the U.S. or that are widely admired in the U.S.

Although difficult to pinpoint the emergence of the term 'All American Girl' at an exact point in history, the ever-changing nature of the concept has been at the forefront of the cultural imagination. One interpretation of the All-American Girl is found in the work of Frances B. Cogan who argues that the All-American Girl was representative of 'the Ideal of Real Womanhood' (Cogan 1989, p. 18). It is important to note that the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door has undergone several changes over the years in terms of representation, meaning and interpretation and Cogan's work focuses on a mid-nineteenth-century definition, which is as good as any for the purposes of this project. Yet it is important to acknowledge that,

the Ideal of Real Womanhood has *never before been clearly identified* or isolated as a coherent popular theme (*ibid.*, p. 18; my emphasis).

At this stage it is important to return to 'E's' prior comment where she chose Veronica Lodge as the 'All American Girl' over 'Betty Cooper'. 'E' mentions that 'Veronica [applies to] lots of like themes around that sort of High School Americanised drama and the All-American Girl.' The All-American girl trope is portrayed in U.S. televisual fiction by the blue-eyed blonde.

The blue-eyed blonde is often the linguistic placeholder for such signifiers. Jones (2008) explains that it is the '...stereotyped American blonde and blue-eyed female beauty ideal' (p. 144) to which the concept of the All-American girl pertains. It is evident from 'E's' articulations that she is a critically discerning viewer as she describes Veronica Lodge as the All-American girl, subverting the dominant ideologies of how the show's producers expect the concept of the All-American girl to be viewed. Subsequently, the trope of the All-American Girl extends further than just prototypical physical characteristics.

Subversions of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty can be seen in TV series and movies such as *Stranger Things*, *The Black Coat's Daughter*, and *Tank Girl*, and on *Gilligan's Island*, Mary Ann was given the moniker the 'All-American Girl'. Carpenter

comments that

Only since about 1840 have blondness and darkness come to connote distinct types of character. In the mid-nineteenth century *golden hair became an attribute of the pure and innocent maiden*; while *dark hair suggested the woman of passion and experience* (1936, p. 253; my emphasis).

In addition, the post-revolutionary America that Carpenter discusses connects to an argument Banner makes almost fifty years later.

Sir Walter Scott, along with Byron the favorite author of postrevolutionary Americans, coined the word “glamorous”, which would haunt the beauty culture of the modern age and established the convention of splitting the female character into two personalities: Rebecca and Rowena, one dark and sensuous, the other blonde and virtuous (Banner 1983, p. 11).

Characters in *Riverdale*, Betty and Veronica certainly possess the respective traits mentioned by Carpenter, yet Betty’s alter-ego ‘Dark Betty’ allows her to subvert her own pure nature, so why does ‘E’ subvert the hegemonic expectation? It could be a matter of identification, although it is not that simple, as identification is an external, conscious choice. That being said, during the analysis, it was noted that ‘E’s’ own hair colour was closer to Veronica’s than Betty’s, although ‘E’ does claim during the oral history in response to the open-ended question: can you tell me which fictional character(s) from *Riverdale* you identify with the most and what aspects do you identify with, ‘E’ chose Betty.

Betty springs to mind first [...] I liked the way that her character arc was kind of [...] different to other teen shows [...] *she wasn’t portrayed as like this sort of perfect main character* or whatever she was portrayed as having this “Dark Betty” [...] *I don’t know how to describe it*, [...] it’s interesting to see that because I think we all have a little part in us where we think, ‘uh, what’s wrong with me?’ or like a bit of a darkness or like a ... *an anxiety or a worry or whatever*. Erm, and yeah, *that was really relatable*, and I just thought that it made her character more appealing because she wasn’t just like ... *like in Pretty Little Liars they’re all a little bit perfect* [...]

There are several hints in ‘E’s’ discourse that provide unconscious clues that she sees Veronica’s character as being more ‘perfect’, yet interestingly, the scholarship of Müller (2012), Mollon (2002), Rustin (2007) and Wyatt (1990) allows us to glimpse into the unconscious of ‘E’ in determining how her choices transcend simplistic, external, identificatory patterns. Firstly, Müller (2012) argues that ‘...hegemonic discourses are sustained through the play of *lack* and *Jouissance*’ (p. 279; my emphasis).

Thus, lacking blond hair herself, 'E' naturally gravitates towards Veronica as an All-American Girl, which does nothing to diminish the fact that Betty is still her favourite character.

Secondly, by repositioning Mollon (2002) the subversion of the ideology of the All-American Girl is 'congruent with a wishful fantasy of turning to an alternative...' (Mollon 2002, p. 1). By repositioning *Jouissance* as a negativity to subvert traditional expectations of hegemonic ideologies the notions of the All-American Girl/The Girl Next Door correspond to *The Real* as an anchor for *feminine jouissance* allowing *feminine jouissance* to be re-deployed as a heuristic tool, whose function is to bring to light 'E's' creation of what I term 'new worlds' when viewed from the vantage point of repositioning Kolozova's term the "reinvention of worlds" (Kolozova 2014, p. 18). Finally, Rustin (2007) and Wyatt (1990) provide perhaps the most useful evidence for solving the paradox posed by 'E'.

'E' transcends the hegemonic ideology of the blue-eyed blonde as the *All-American Girl/Girl Next Door* through identifying with the counter ideology of the brown-eyed Brunette. Veronica Lodge and 'Betty' Cooper are archetypal depictions of idealised femininity, which in part supports Elizabeth Chin's claim that 'the blue-eyed blonde [is] most often put forward as the 'ideal' girl,' (2012, p. 231), yet 'E's' choice is arguably driven by her unconscious in the sense that her unconscious is '...disruptive of everyday and *established ways* of thinking,' (Rustin 2007, p. 1; emphasis added). For the purposes of this thesis the focus is on the lives of individuals as opposed to what Rustin terms as a disruption to the everyday lives of 'societies' (*ibid.*) as this allows a differentiation between Lacanian and Jungian approaches that deal with the collective societal unconscious.

Before concluding this section, the repositioning of Wyatt's scholarship (1990) provides evidence for a unique explanation in supporting my argument that 'E's' feminist status and experiences subvert and reconfigure the unconscious fantasy structures of the blue-eyed blond as being the idealised 'All-American Girl/Girl Next Door'. Through *feminine jouissance*, women desire differently to the hegemonic, patriarchal stances discussed by Carpenter (1936) in the sense that the Blue-Eyed Blonde is *man's idealised version* of the All-American Girl/Girl Next Door and not women's. Wyatt argues that 'patriarchy itself has constructed this ground for an

alternative epistemological framework—' (Wyatt 1990, p. 1) [...] [where 'E' is able to construct] 'an "other scene" where *different desires* play' (*ibid.*, p. 2; my emphasis).

Finally, 'E' says that she is unable to describe Dark Betty in the sense that she claims 'I don't know how to describe it'—this inability to describe in language what she means corresponds with the emergence of *The Real* and *Feminine Jouissance*. Furthermore, E's discussions around Veronica correspond with Karl Figlio's use of Freud and Arthur Schnitzler's investigations into the unconscious in the sense that they

[S]ought to demonstrate *the existence of psychic objects*, elements of psychic life which were *impersonal*, yet which *drove the unique, personal lives* of individuals (Figlio in Bainbridge et. al., 2007, p. 26; emphasis added).

Freud and Schnitzler's work can be used for analysing the relationships women have with psychic objects, which I argue has a direct correspondence with the fictional characters of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* and this point will be picked up in the conclusion. In continuing with the focus of the unconscious, the unconscious dimension of analysis lends further support for building models of viewing which eschew identificatory and conscious practices. The next section moves on to examine the concept of 'The Girl Next Door' in considering more of these examples.

6.3.1 The Girl Next Door

The All-American Girl's sister term, the 'Girl Next Door' is a trope, easily familiar to audiences within the context of movies and television. Susannah McCullough and Debra Minoff, commentators on the site *The Take* (2021) describe some of the characteristics of the Girl Next Door as '...the embodiment of idealised, wholesome femininity' in the sense that she

...encapsulates her time period's particular idea of the perfect woman, not just in her looks but also in her *deeper nature* (*ibid.*, 2021; emphasis added).

Subversive representations of the 'All-American Girl' appear to operate on two levels, the first of which, shares the same characteristics with the 'Girl Next Door', reflecting an idealised form of embodiment, but as aforementioned, does not just include physical characteristics. Secondly, the term also embodies an 'affective essence', a particular *je ne sais quoi*, French for 'I don't know what' translated into English as 'something which cannot be described' or as expressed by Žižek 'the unfathomable

‘something’ that makes an ordinary object sublime’ (Žižek 2006, p. 66). This inability of representability stirs up associations with the concept of *The Real* which is synonymous with Lacan’s concept of the *objet petit a*—both terms relate to the line of argument corresponding with the limits of representation, non-televisual complexity, and the ineffable as discussed in the introduction.

This chapter concludes with an examination pertaining to the dualistic and paradoxical structures of the ideology of American popular culture in general, expressed as Hollywood perfection/imperfection.

6.4 The Ideology of American popular culture as Hollywood (Im)Perfection

The underlying ideologies inculcated within popular culture construct women’s appearances as reflections of perfection. These idealisations can be psychically experienced by women as hyperbolic fantasy portrayals. The entanglement and tensions pertaining to these two positionalities can be seen in the discourses of ‘L’ and ‘K’.

In what follows, the multifaceted dimensions of Hollywood ideologies are analysed in terms of their correspondence with the dimensions of the depictions of mediated *fantasy* and its effects on the immaterial *phantasies*, traumas and anxieties pertaining to young women’s psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. At this stage, however, before delving deeply into this subject it is useful to position ideology as unconscious. This positioning, drawing on the work of Ira Cohen allows for a reimagining of western ideas of beauty.

This reimagining follows the line of argument that ideology is ineffable, capable of transcending the limits of fixed representation or in other words, ideologies cannot be represented due to their fleetingly fluid, ephemeral nature in the sense that the subjectivity surrounding interpretation of the ideologies are destabilized as history progresses, see upcoming section on Lois Banner. Firstly, engagement with Ira Cohen’s scholarship *Ideology and Unconsciousness* allows for the defining of terms before moving on to an examination of changing beauty ideals in America. The section concludes with the embracement of foreign counter-narratives which add credence to the ineffability of the ideological term ‘perfection’ before transitioning into an analysis of the psychic experiences of ‘L’ and ‘K’.

In constructing a definition of unconscious ideology, one must first consider

...why people become motivated by ideologies that *are in conflict* with their own social interest [...] We also must understand the way in which *human needs* are socially conditioned and *expressed unconsciously* within the *individual's psyche* (Cohen 1982, p. 2; my emphasis).

Societal acceptance and the need to belong both unconsciously equate directly with issues pertaining to beauty and attractiveness. Moreover, Cohen argues that

Psychoanalytic theory provides an insight on *human needs and motivation*. It explores how psychological processes of which the thinker is *unaware condition conscious* thought (*ibid.*, p. 4; my emphasis).

Given this, the narrators mention perfect make-up and lipstick which they say is consciously damaging (discussed later), but what are make-up and lipstick if not tools of attraction and desire? This paradoxical state of being gives rise to conscious/unconscious tensions which lead to anxiety. I reposition Cohen's theories in ascribing unconscious ideology as an unacknowledged psychic system of belief that attends to the needs and motivations of human beings, expressed in thought as emergent anxiety (Cohen 1982).

As an alternative point of view, Banner points out that over the years, 'there was a significant change in the styles of beauty' (Banner 1983, p. 8). The shifting ideologies of the time created what I call 'a metamorphosis of sensuality' that could be seen most notably in the counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s where 'the whole notion of a single or standard ideal of beauty based on Western European types' (*ibid.*, p. 5) was destabilised. Moreover, as the 'identification of women with beauty has a long tradition in Western culture' (*ibid.*, p. 10) how does something that has been inculcated into the fabric of society become so toxic?

The answers can be found in the notion of excess where such standards become wholly unattainable, expressed as *The Real* and the *objet petit a*, functions that emerge as a result of advances in technology that distort and mediate the natural bodies of women creating fantasy figures that bear no semblance to direct reality. Wolf points out that

“Beauty” is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that *keeps male dominance intact*. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is *an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated* for themselves (Wolf 2002, p. 12; my emphasis).

At the heart of this toxicity is a patriarchal malaise that requires constantly challenging.

Counterarguments to the hegemonic narratives of Western standards of beauty, perfection and idealism can be found and challenged through Eastern/Oriental theories (c.f., Cho Kyo’s *The Search for the Beautiful Woman A Cultural History of Japanese and Chinese Beauty*). Moving on to an examination of the discourses of the narrators and following the line of argument that began in chapter 5 and continues in chapter 7, this section of the chapter examines Hollywood ideologies as representative of imperfection in their perfection. Specifically, through the concepts of *Jouissance* as an aspect of *The Real* the unrepresentability or ineffable status of the concept of beauty as an aspect of U.S. culture is analysed in more detail.

As it pertains to young women’s experiences of televisual fiction, although not historically unique, the same persistent anxieties emerge within the discourses of the young women who took part in the online, virtual clinics, where psychoanalysis and oral histories were synthesised into what I term, ‘Psycho-Historical-Narratives’²⁰. Firstly, in examining the speech of ‘L’ when she comes face-to-face with the perfect, mediated on-screen bodies of the high schoolers in *Pretty Little Liars* she experiences an alienation in the sense that there exists a misrecognition between her bodily *jouissance* and the bodily *jouissance* of the fictional characters on-screen. Why fictionally mediated bodies possess the power to effect affective reactions stems from the disconnections constructed in the intersections and interstices of celebrity- non-celebrity, agency-non-agency, truth and mendacity.

²⁰ I am indebted to Loewenberg (1983) for providing the term ‘psychohistory’ which I added to narrative approaches, to come up with psycho-historical narratives. Psychohistory is not new and involves the analysis of people through posthumous psychoanalysis. This is useful for Chapter 7, on Death.

In effect, 'L's' alienation corresponds with Vanheule (2002) who 'refers to the *surplus-jouissance* inherent in our alienation in the signifier' (p. 5). It is not in this case that only 'L' as a subject possesses a *surplus-feminine-jouissance* relating to the *objet petit a*, but that through the repositioning of the concept of *surplus-feminine-jouissance*, the hyper-sexual nature of the fictional characters can be critically understood in the sense that as opposed to a lack, the fictional characters possess a positive excess of *feminine jouissance* which assists with their status as a Big Other, only capable of existing in the realm of the *virtual-symbolic*.

This absence of bodily form in the lifeworld is reflected in 'L's' words as

...everyone in that world was just extremely attractive so I guess it just gave me unrealistic expectations of like how people looked. Everyone was just very tall, you know, very beautiful, always like perfect makeup. There's something like very fake about the way that people were presented in that show compared to other programmes I've seen. Um ... and I don't think that was something that was probably helpful for me as a young woman who struggled with body image issues [...].

Aesthetic judgements oscillate between perfection/imperfection (Saito 2017), where perfection corresponds with the virtual dimension of mediated fiction and imperfection is attributed to what in philosophical circles is termed the 'lifeworld' (Buchanan 2010) which eschews the problematics associated with phrases such as real-life beauty standards which really should be articulated as actual life beauty standards. Moreover, within the speech of 'L' the on-screen reality of perfection corresponds with arguments made by both Bruce Fink and Slavoj Žižek in the sense that *The Real* is experienced on screen within the context of televisual fiction as an

anamorphic distortion of the direct image of reality—as a distorted image, a pure semblance that “subjectivizes” objective reality (Žižek 2002 in Barnard and Fink, p. 64).

Ostensibly this is the projection of someone else's *phantasy* [producer of the show]. Furthermore, what 'L' says pertains to Journalist, Naomi Wolf's assertions that

slim women and heavy ones spoke of the suffering caused by trying to meet the demands of the *thin ideal*; black, brown, and white women—*women who looked like fashion models*—admitted to knowing, from the time they could first consciously think, that *the ideal was someone tall, thin, white, and blond*, a face without pores, asymmetry, or flaws, *someone wholly “perfect,”* and someone whom they felt, in one way or another, *they were not* (Wolf 2002, p. 1; my emphasis).

The ‘thin’ ideal is further destabilised if one examines Greek culture. The signifiers ‘ideal’ and ‘perfect’ are highly problematic, particularly when synthesised with the ineffable nature of ideologies. Calogero *et. al.* argues that the ‘ideal beauty is a fugitive which is never found’ (2007, p. 260). Wolf explains that this paradox emerges in relation to tensions and anxieties associated with young women’s experiences of fiction, because,

Since middle-class women have been sequestered from the world, isolated from one another, and their heritage submerged with each generation, they are more dependent than men are on the cultural models on offer, and more likely to be imprinted by them. [...] Given few role models in the world, women seek them on the screen and the glossy page (ibid., p. 58; emphasis in original and my emphasis).

This screen-seeking behaviour and motivation links back to Cohen’s points earlier where women are interested in things which are antithetical to their own social interests. Calogero points out the devastating nature these ideologies impress upon young women saying that,

ample empirical research is available documenting associations between idealised images of female beauty and negative effects on women’s physical, psychological, and social well-being (Calogero *et. al.*, 2007, p. 260).

The concern shown by ‘L’ in relation to idealised images and negative effects pertains to a ‘gap’ that is created between the consumer [viewer] and the ideal [producer] (*ibid.*, p. 271) that reflects the emergence of *The Real*. This unattainable void which is psychically inculcated into young women’s viewing realities emerges through the ‘[r]epeated exposure to the sheer prevalence of these idealised images of women, and media’s blurred boundaries between fictitious and real women’ (*ibid.*).

In determining ‘L’s’ experiences of televisual fiction, it is useful to reposition Lacan’s notion of the specular image. The original definition of the term corresponds to a child apprehending its own reflection in the mirror.

Given this, when applying the specular image to 'L's' discussion of high school girls' in *Pretty Little Liars* this brings about two things to consider. Firstly, the mediated fiction 'L' views, through the projected, fantasised gaze of the male producer corresponds to an ideal image that is designed to appeal to a masculine audience because they were 'created for a specific (i.e., hetero male) audience' (Nicholson 2017, p. 231).

Furthermore,

[she] can never hope to measure up to [this image] in [her] life no matter what [she] may do' (*ibid.*).

Secondly, there is an issue pertaining to alienation when a child sees its reflection in the mirror. Repositioning this sense of alienation as corresponding to what 'L' views on the other side of the television screen causes an emergence of anxiety due to Lacan's argument that 'depersonalization begins with the non-recognition of the specular image' (Lacan 2014, p. 120). The fictional character on the other side of the screen is both familiar and alien to 'L' in the sense that her anxieties arise from 'the subject's inability to "live up" to the [...] ego-ideal [...]' (Astle 1979, p. 104) and as a result '...what is seen in the mirror is anguishing' (Lacan 2014, p. 120).

Moreover, drawing on Lacan (2014) 'L' experiences a special kind of *jouissance* (the *jouissance* of speech) in discussing *Riverdale*. 'I was actually really bored by it'. Given this, her *jouissance* can be translated as an *Unlust*—this German term signifies *displeasure* (Lacan 2014, p. 125; emphases added and in original). Subsequently, she says that 'the dialogue wasn't very complex or interesting...It's not really a show I've gone back to, to re-watch, ever'—the signifier 're-watching' is of particular significance here applied to *Jouissance* as it indicates repetition, yet in this case, repetition is absent, or at least that is how it appears.

'L' claims that with shows like *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* 'the expiration date for my interest for shows like this is very much erm, we've arrived!' The phrase 'expiration date' is an interesting one as this indicates that her *jouissance* towards these objects are subject to shattering. Interestingly, when 'L' was younger her interest was different, and repetition was a factor as she explains that,

I would binge episodes. I think that just makes for a very like seamless viewing process but also one that makes me kind of lose track um ... (laughs) of reality and really get sucked into the mystery.

Binging episodes shows how cultural evolution of television allows access to enhanced *Jouissance* through streaming services. 'Losing track of reality' and getting 'sucked in' are important phrases that correspond to 'L's' experiences of being seized or grasped by *The Real*. Indeed, these metaphors correspond with the destabilisation of time connected with the void of a black hole, which at the extreme end considers the darker aspects of binge watching such as addiction and psychosis.

The fantasy of enjoyment displaces the fact that we are already enjoying, that we get off, just a little bit, in and through our multiple, *repetitive*, mediated interactions (Dean 2015, p. 89; emphasis in original).

Even though 'L' shuns *Riverdale*, claiming her interest has waned in shows such as this her opinion corresponds with Fink's assertions that 'Phallic jouissance is the jouissance that fails us, that disappoints us' (Fink 2002, p. 37), yet despite this she cannot escape the grasp of *Jouissance*. Her libido is re-directed to a different object of desire, a different kind of cathexis, as later in the oral history she claims that,

I just finished watching *Watchmen*, which is also a show based on a comic book and that one was like just so much more (L smiles and laughs) – the production value, the acting, just everything about it was more moving as a show...

'L's' predilection to use the oral history interview as a platform to discuss her interest in other television shows corresponds with Ruth Golan's point that,

[...] people who draw near to psychoanalysis are principally interested (even if they are not consciously aware of it) in truth that relates to them personally. I refer to it as "living" knowledge or "erotic" knowledge, as opposed to intellectual knowledge. It reflects a craving that stems from *dissatisfaction with what already is and a desire for deeper subjective experience* (Golan 2006, XV; emphasis added).

'L' finds deeper subjective experience in television shows like *Watchmen* due to the content of the fantasy within. Her smiles and laughter indicate an enhanced *Jouissance* as 'the phenomena of *Jouissance* is linked to laughter as an outburst and discharge where laughter is seen as 'a form of relaxation or reduction of tension...' (Wolf 2019) which makes sense in

the context of the interview because earlier in the discussion 'L' displayed signs of anxiety where she apologises: 'I've kind of forgotten the other character's names, so I'm sorry.' Given this, Lacan's claims ring true (Lacan 2016, p. 131; emphasis in original) that 'anxiety is not without an object'.

As a final point of note before moving on to 'K's' experiences, it is useful to examine the phenomenon of 'L' forgetting which corresponds to a lack of intensity associated with a 'powerful memory trace', repressed by 'L' in adulthood as it pertains to *Riverdale* (Bazan and Detandt 2013, p. 5). Bazan and Detandt argue that,

the experience of satisfaction, having been in itself an experience of *jouissance*, leaves behind a powerful memory trace, which will be readily activated whenever a similar body need or drive situation is aroused, or when "the Thing" is reencountered, thereby inducing a reactivation of the memory images of this (*once*) *satisfying object* as well as of the (*once*) *satisfying action* (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

For 'L' the quasi-satisfying action of watching *Riverdale* was obtained through a *Jouissance* she shared with her younger sister: 'I think I started watching it because my younger sister was more interested in it than I was.' There is something to be said here about sibling bonds when one will endure something for the other even if their predilections do not conform. Finally, the 'gap' or 'void' in memory appears indicative of the emergence of *The Real* in 'L's' unconscious where much like trauma, repression is a factor corresponding to taste, taking taste in the sense of what the viewer prefers to watch.

The unconscious is not an expression; however, *it does manifest through the failure of expression*, of speech, *memory*, and action (Golan 2006, p. 9; emphasis added).

Moving on, 'K's' contribution continues to examine the paradox of perfection/imperfection.

Hollywood has a way in general of taking ... this ... Art and kind of distorting reality. So, even in great films like erm, *Field of Dreams* and *the Natural* and all of these, you know, great Hollywood pieces. [...] I never really feel like it's real life. You see these kinds of romantic comedies like *the Notebook*, and ... I think it hurts women to ... to watch films like *the Notebook* because we think it's supposed to be easy to date, we think it's supposed to be easy to fall in love and all you need to do is look pretty ... and dress nice ... and *kinda have this kind of personality like these actresses in Hollywood*.

'K' discusses her experiences as being an antithesis of reality as her subjective reaction to what she views translates as '...never really feel[ing] like it's real life.' Her opinion is shaped by her earlier assertion that Hollywood distorts reality. In unpacking the meaning behind her discourse, it is useful to examine theories which speak to her experiences and contrast them with 'L's' earlier comments on portrayals as being 'very fake' with the notion of distortion, as distortion is often equated with misrepresentation and falseness.

Through exposure to unconscious ideologies throughout her life 'K's' resistance to the dominant views of society relate to a rejection of a prior historical periodisation corresponding to

The proliferation of mass media in the 1920s, and throughout the 20th century, ensured the perpetuation of standardised beauty ideals, and the homogenisation of Western culture. Motion pictures, magazines, and singular Hollywood stars informed women and men about what was beautiful (Calogero *et. al.*, 2007, p. 263).

Through twenty-first century counternarratives women are arguably less inclined to assimilate media depictions into their psychic ideologies within adulthood due to being able to distinguish 'fake' representations from ones which are authentic. This critical discernment can be seen when 'K' continues to elaborate that,

Actresses in Hollywood have these professional, you know, trainers and makeup artists and they're always gonna look like that. Whereas *it hurts women in reality* because *we think* we are supposed to look like that or act like that, but *in truth we just need to be ourselves and know that this is just Art*. So, I think ... shows like *Pretty Little Liars* make it fun, because we want to have that thrill, we want to have our lives in danger.

In the above exchange 'K's' discourse reflects a paradoxical structure reflective of a contradiction between human rationality and anticipation. On the one hand, the rational aspect of 'K's' discourse explains that what is being viewed on-screen is '...just Art.' On the other hand, 'K' refers to *Pretty Little Liars* as being fun and that due to its intrinsic qualities of being fun, this predetermines our want to access a thrill and danger, absent from our lives.

The psychoanalytic vernacular used by 'K' corresponds to Freud's topological and theoretical model of the three parts of the mind – id, ego, and superego. Drawing on Lacan, although not necessarily directly mappable, ego is equated with the imaginary, superego with the symbolic, and the ID with *The Real*. 'K's' assertion that what is on-screen is Art relates to the superego, the rational aspect of the mind that reflects society's wishes, that we (as citizens) behave in a moral and responsible way. Conversely, the Ego acts as a protection from the ID with the ID relating to what 'K' calls thrill and danger which stops her from enacting such things. In essence, the on- screen events are used as a replacement. The ego's defence mechanisms prohibit her from engaging in dangerous situations in reality as this would bring her too close to the traumatic *Real*.

6.5 Conclusion

In the next chapter issues of irrepresentability in relation to death and immortality are addressed through young women's subjective experiences. The circulation of *The Real*, *Jouissance*, and the *Objet Petit a* find their indirect form and expression within depictions of *fantasy as mediated fiction*. The correspondence between irrepresentability and impossibility serves as an anchor, cementing ideologies that pertain to U.S. culture in this chapter (i.e., the tensions circulating around perfection and idealised depictions of femininity in the figure and archetype of the All-American Girl/Girl Next Door).

The tensions and anxieties caused by Hollywood ideologies in this chapter, re-manifest in the next chapter as tensions and anxieties naturally gravitate towards the end of human life and the complexities of the yearning to transcend mortality associated with the paradox of the gift of immortality and the inherent tensions of a cursed existence in never being able to die. This chapter and the one that follows precedes chapter 5 which began an analytical investigation of impossibility and irrepresentability allied to the concept of what it means to have and hold a secret. Moreover, this chapter has continued to document the enigmatic natures and expressions of *The Real* and *Jouissance* pertaining to subjective experiences and their function within televisual fiction/subsequent emergence within speech.

Chapter 7. “Death, Trauma and Televisual Fiction: Visualisations of the Impossible”

“I have no new answers to the puzzle, only the strengthening sense that, as our century advances and the casual cruelty of our world becomes ever more visible through the medium of television, we seem to take comfort in fascinations of that cruelty; fictions in which we may savo[u]r the very subjects that distress us in the real world.” —Clive Barker, *Where Nightmares Come From*, p. 24.

“...ours is a culture of death.” — Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 190.

“Narration by Cheryl Blossom: ‘Nobody ever really dies in Riverdale, do they?’” — *Riverdale*, Season 4, episode 16: The Locked Room, Chapter Seventy-Three.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the third and final part of the data collected through the 7 psychoanalytic oral histories conducted with young women in the context of an online, virtual clinic. This final part focuses on the subject of death. Overall, the analysis gives insight into how young women use romanticised depictions of death to safely experience the transgressive and the traumatic through contemporary, televisual fiction.

In particular, examples of trauma narratives and immortality provide the bedrock through which young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction are fashioned. The themes of ineffability, phantasy and reality/actuality pertaining to incongruence with lived experiences and religiosity help with structuring this final argument. These narratives are set in the context of the limitations of language *and* representation and the development of a new model of televisual experience.

This chapter examines issues of trauma, death, and immortality in two contemporary instances of American, televisual fiction, streaming on the Netflix service—*Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. In defining the chapter’s scope, it does not deal with death and trauma’s associated concepts of loss or mourning as they do not operate in the same manner, yet this would be something to analyse in further detail in subsequent investigations. The first part of the chapter continues to deal with young women’s subjective experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction focusing on trauma narratives

and how these narratives would be impossible in reality. These trauma narratives act as frames through which to examine specific episodes and scenes from *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*.

The three main sections of the chapter examine the ineffable nature of trauma, death, and immortality through their correspondence with the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance*, and the *Objet Petit a*. These ineffable terms are reconfigured, re-positioned and re-evaluated so that young women's experiences of trauma, death, and immortality in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* can be better understood through data collected from respondent narratives as explicated in chapter four's methodology. Moreover, three key arguments are analysed in response to the ineffable nature of these concepts and topics and the interrelationship between them focusing on a) a focus on the latent/unconscious aspects of women's experiences of televisual fiction as manifested within speech, b) the irrepresentability/unrepresentative nature of *Feminine Jouissance* and *The Real* and mechanisms for its representation in a televisual context, and c) this chapter considers much broader nuances of the reductively manifest manner through which theories of affect and identification have been historically theorised as the cornerstone for the analysis of televisual fiction, particularly interactions with fictional characters, (as discussed in chapter 2) and the implications this has for creating a space for a discussion around the complexities of viewing and experiencing televisual fiction, with complexity being the antithesis of identification.

The concepts/contexts selected have been chosen because they are aligned to the deadly nature of *Feminine Jouissance* and *The Real*, alongside their correspondence to and relationship with the *death drive* (discussed later). This chapter also considers much broader nuances of *Feminine Jouissance* as it is inscribed on the body through mediated experience and this facet of enquiry is explored through the emergence of *Feminine Jouissance* in response to reactions to televisual fiction. In addition, the concept of *Feminine Jouissance* is used to capture the effects of *The Real* in young women's discourse through the emergence of the unconscious because *Feminine Jouissance* manifests itself through the body in the form of speech and

'Lacan's thesis advances that the signification the subject will hear/select is dictated by [their] *jouissance*' (Declerq 2004, p. 246; emphasis added)

and when expressed through the emergence of unconscious thought the passions associated with the young women's *Feminine Jouissance* will drive the emergence of their unconscious responses. Finally, drawing on Slavoj Žižek (2006), *The Real* can be productively deployed, extended, and repositioned so that mediated representations of death (as they appear within the context of televisual fiction) can be better understood through indirect experience. The rationale for exploring *Feminine Jouissance* as it is inscribed on the body through mediated experiences is important to understand as it acts as a mechanism for capturing the emergence of the unconscious through affect. In addition, the productive deployment, extension and repositioning of *The Real's* correspondence allows one to better understand mediated representations of death through indirect experience, enabling an argument to be formed which speaks to the powers of metaphor in representing the ineffable, which draws on all four psychic concepts of *fantasy* as mediated fiction, *Feminine Jouissance*, *The Real* and the *object a/objet petit a*. In addition, it can be argued that viewers of mediated death partake in the repetitious practice of viewing metaphors of death through binge watching in the form of *fantasy* scenarios represented as *mediated fiction*.

This practice is designed to establish some form of control in exercising a degree of agency/autonomy over apprehending the concept of death, due to its incomprehensibility in life, where through *The Real*, a void emerges corresponding to a lack of meaning in the symbolic, leaving behind an excessive kernel—the *objet petit a*; a void in understanding, which metaphor attempts to fill, giving death a purpose, making it more approachable. Moreover, *Feminine Jouissance* is expressed as the repetitious consumption of death, leading to Lacan's argument that the boundaries between pleasure and pain become fed into one another (Daly 2014), which adds to the complexities pertaining to young women's experiences of televisual fiction.

As this chapter evolves and moves toward the thesis' conclusion it suggests that death plays a strong factor in capturing the complexities involved in televisual fiction due to its irrepresentable nature. Furthermore, through mechanisms of defence it becomes apparent that women prefer to keep their distance from death through the mediated functions offered by televisual fiction. Moreover, it reveals the ineffable and transcendent nature of both *The Real* and *Feminine Jouissance* and how women use metaphors to safely experience and express death in a televisual context.

As the next sections will demonstrate, within the narrative evidence provided by the young women who took part in the psychoanalytic/oral history interviews as detailed in chapter four, there is a hesitancy to engage fully with personal reflections of one's own death, preferring instead to remain detached from such issues, discussing death through a mediated lens. This vicarious behaviour through which death is approached, using the on-screen fictional characters as proxies, corresponds with Slavoj Žižek's argument that the television screen is "serving as a kind of protective screen, [where viewers are] kept at a safe distance" (1992, p. 15). I now turn to a discussion of trauma narratives in the next section which serve as an entry point in transitioning to discussions around death and its correspondence with Lacan's ineffable concepts of *The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance* and the *Objet Petit a*.

7.2 Trauma Narratives in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*

As an entry point to discussions of death and its correspondence with the concepts of *The Real*, *Feminine Jouissance*, and the *Objet Petit a* trauma is entwined with death in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. 'N' provides an interesting perspective on the theme of trauma within the context of her experiences of reading *Riverdale* and in turn, comments upon how *Riverdale* impacts upon her psychic life. She likens an instance of trauma within the show to 'Betty with her flashbacks' explaining that 'she's going back to the trauma that started [...] this new personality.'

In teasing out the nuances of the term 'trauma' it can be understood as either an internal event, as 'N' describes it here, which provides a fruitful avenue for linking the term to the concepts of *Feminine Jouissance* and/as a dimension of *The Real*. In deciding on a stable definition of trauma it is unwise to anchor the term to any kind of fixed locus, particularly as this thesis deals with the complexities of television and televisual fiction in general and young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular. Therefore, drawing on Haukedal's review of Žižek's critique of Catherine Malabou (2020) I eschew theories of trauma with a predilection to ground such fluid terms as trauma into singular categories as ultimately this makes them reductive (I will discuss the ramifications of Žižek's original critique later in this section).

Following Haukedal's lead I avoid the use of Catherine Malabou's conceptualisation of trauma, which as Haukedal points out suffers from 'unresolved tensions' (Malabou cited in Haukedal 2020, p. 1). One such tension involves Malabou's efforts to situate her concept of the material beyond the Lacanian triad of the *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and *The Real*. This endeavour received criticisms from Slavoj Žižek (2008).

Malabou's conflation of pleasure and *jouissance* as one and the same were amongst the criticisms levelled by Žižek against Malabou. Žižek argues that,

the difference between pleasure and *jouissance* should be fully asserted here: while it is clear that the dialectical reversals of pleasure fail to capture the traumatic cases evoked by Malabou, the intrusion of a numbing *jouissance* is definitely relevant here (2008, p. 129).

Žižek's modal distinction links to the notion of pain in pleasure and pleasure in pain, a conundrum/paradox that assists with helping to answer why young women engage with and find such enjoyment in traumatic depictions of death, such as those mentioned by 'E' later in this chapter. Further to this, Žižek points out an important reflexive point, considering Malabou's project is to renovate/reconfigure psychoanalysis. He asks,

does she [Catherine Malabou] not forget to include herself, her own desire, in the observed phenomenon (of autistic subjects)? (ibid., p. 132).

Failure to include the reflexivity of oneself in a project opens one up to criticism concerning issues pertaining to self-indulgence and a lack of rigour (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2005). Subsequently, in what follows, a return to 'N's' commentary focuses on the phrases 'going back' and 'new personality', which I unpack in terms of *phantasy*, *Feminine Jouissance*, the *objet petit a*, and *The Real*. The noun 'back' and the adjective, 'new' when placed in opposition to one another create a dialectical tension with one term indicative of regression, the other, emergence.

Through an examination of these words within the context of psychoanalysis it is arguable that 'N' unconsciously utilises the scenes in *Riverdale* to make sense of her own journey from childhood/girlhood (regression or the phrase 'going back') to adulthood/womanhood (emergence of a 'new personality'). The use of the psychoanalytic terminology as a heuristic device for reading between the lines, allowing access to and excavation of the unconscious/latent/sub-textual meanings buried deep below the manifest content of the

subject's reality (imaginary, symbolic) to *The Real*. Furthermore, within the show itself, 'N' goes on to explain the ways in which Betty's trauma is represented. For 'N,'

It's like when she [Betty] was with the cat and she had to hit it with a rock, this kind of triggered something in her so that is the trauma she has from that.

In providing further context to the scene, Betty Cooper regresses back to a time during her childhood, when her father, Hal 'Harold' Cooper, later revealed to be Riverdale's serial killer, the Black Hood, implores Betty to kill her pet cat, Caramel, with a rock, after it is involved in a road traffic accident. 'N' explains that this event acted as a 'trigger' to Betty's trauma, and this corresponds with Geneviève Morel's investigations into feminine conditions of *Jouissance* (Morel 1993). Expanding on this point I utilise Geneviève Morel's scholarship where she draws on Sigmund Freud in pointing out that,

a woman can experience jouissance, in this case, that of the Other, *without being aware of it*. Freud infers from this the existence of a hostile feminine current which is either expressed in a condensed way linked to jouissance via an inhibition which may take the form of frigidity, or in a way disassociated from jouissance via the mise-en-scène of phantasies of murder or of castration which preoccupy the woman, and which may even become acted out in reality (p. 1; emphasis added).

Given this, in determining what Other we are talking about, it is in this instance, **not** the fictional on-screen Other experienced by the viewer. Rather, in Riverdale's narrative, Betty Cooper has an alter-ego known as 'Dark Betty' whom some of the narrators discuss later. Betty's actions of killing her cat at the behest of her serial killer father, Hal 'Harold' Cooper become acted out in reality.

There is a transition where the mediated *phantasies* experienced by the viewer (the viewer sees what is going on in Betty's head through a series of flashbacks) then becomes *fantasy* (as mediated fiction) as although there is a displacement from the head or the mind as a form of thought to the exterior of the body (translation of a thought into a physical action), all events are contained on-screen in what Žižek would call a fantasy frame; '...the frame coordinating our desire (Žižek 1989, p. 132). Furthermore, Betty's actions are unconscious as she does not remember what she does.

In addition, it is also useful to examine a trauma narrative discussed by 'E' as she points out an ontological tension which exists between the dimensions of fiction and reality and authenticity and inauthenticity. This speaks directly to the title of the chapter that in comparison to reality, what 'E' experiences on-screen would be impossible in reality, hence attributed to mediated visualisations which are impossible. It is the intersection of fiction and reality and authenticity and inauthenticity which blurs. Thus, 'E's' response to trauma situates trauma between the dimensions of authenticity and inauthenticity.

In response to my question as to whether the processing of trauma in *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* should affect the characters more than it appears to 'E' explains that,

Yeah! Yeah, definitely. It feels like a bit of a *Gray's Anatomy* thing where everyone's dying, but they still go back to work...and it is like you think to yourself, 'If this was [*sic*] real, you would not be a functioning human being.' Yeah, and in *Riverdale*, they are all clearly not functioning...they're all a bit messed up (laughs, **NJ**: laughs).

'E's' response corresponds with research conducted by Serrone *et. al.* (2018). Serrone's research relates to how televisual portrayals of trauma might cultivate unrealistic patient and family expectations regarding recovery. Subsequently, from evidence collected by Serrone and her team (2018) the portrayal of situated (real- world) events are incongruent with what one would expect to happen in reality, resulting in the mediated portrayal of trauma as being simply and one-dimensionally- represented. Moreover, the emergence of *jouissance/feminine jouissance* is clearly present here via the 'light touch' laughter of both the narrator and I, indicative of a kind of pleasure amid the vagaries of pain.

Furthermore, 'E's' questioning of 'If this was real...' belies a limited understanding of events both on screen and on the surface of experience. Hence, 'E's' responses continue to operate at the material level. Having discussed trauma narratives in the previous section I will now use these discussions as an entry point to introduce the workings of trauma within the context of televisual fiction and their correspondence to death as well as highlighting the importance of women's engagement with death within this thesis. Women's engagement with death is important because it provides a counter- narrative to the portrayal of women as victims on television (Dillman 2014).

By way of an introduction to the importance of death and trauma as they relate to mediated representations with the context of televisual fiction, I critically interrogate ideas by Israeli scholar, Liran Razinsky, author of *Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Death* who outlines the significance and importance of studying death. Razinsky (2013) argues that there is an inattention paid to the human fundamental concern of death within the context of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, there has been a resurgence of interest with respects to death studies in recent years. Accounts of death as they relate to televisual fiction are only just beginning to re-emerge, seeping into the pores of the cultural imagination (c.f., Luper 2009; Razinsky 2013; Penfold-Mounce 2018; Cassidy 2020).

This resurgence follows earlier studies of death which provided a survey of prior studies in the field (c.f., Foltyn 2008; Weber 2018; Teodorescu and Jacobsen 2020). As the aim of this chapter feeds into the overall thesis argument regarding the development of a new model of televisual experience, prior treatments of death have resulted in philosophically immanent (virtual) interventions (c.f., Bradley, Feldman, and Johansson 2012; Luper 2009) or conversely, a focus on the physical body has been given primacy (c.f., Cassidy 2020; Penfold-Mounce 2018). Affective and critical responses to the portrayal of death have comparatively received scant attention (for one exception see Sumiala, 2021).

It is now useful to provide an exegesis as to the importance of women's engagement with death within the context of this thesis. This is important because as will be shown, prior discussions around death have been firmly fixed in the camp of men (Bielby and Richards 2010) and televisual fiction appears to ignore the historical evidence pertaining to the fact that '...women were the primary caretakers of the dying and dead...' (Weaver 2016, p. 31). Thus, in the next section I turn to the importance of women's experiences of engaging with death.

7.3 The Importance of Women's Experiences of Engaging with Death

At this stage it is useful to discuss the importance of women's engagements with death. The women who participated as narrators were interviewed using psychoanalytically inflected oral histories in chapter 4's methodology. These women gave firsthand accounts of their experiences of death and its correspondence to two contextual instances of televisual fiction, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

Indeed, this approach answers the call of Clare Bielby and Anna Richards who point out that the frequent association of women with death in western culture has received a great

deal of critical attention. But the cultural representations under scrutiny have typically been representations produced by men (Bielby and Richards 2010, p. 1).

In response to death's ascription by Lacan to a *feminine jouissance* representation is transcended, becoming ineffable and linking to wider arguments concerning the limitations of representation in chapter 3's review of literature because Bielby and Richards contend that death 'might also have a different meaning for women on account of their role as life-givers' (*ibid.*, p. 2). This approach by Bielby and Richards is, however, contentious in the sense that it points towards a positionality possessing a predilection for essentialist views. Thus, it would be better to extend their proposition and say that women's relationships with death may be different because of society's expectations of women to be life-givers, rather than there being any kind of innate, essentialist role that positions all women as life-givers. Furthermore, this is influenced by where women are geographically located (e.g., women in different societies).

Moreover, the intertwining nature of death in life and life in death as aspects of *feminine jouissance* are approached by 'M' who uses a metaphor for describing how death impresses her in *Riverdale*. As discussed below, it is arguable that her interpretation is loaded with aspects of richly layered meaning that correspond with her unconscious thoughts and it is here that metaphor plays an important role in representing the ineffable as Waldron points out (2009, p. 99) that 'Metaphors are useful because they provide a framework by which we can explore our experiences and formulate meaning.'

During the psychoanalytic oral history 'M' said:

I will say that one of the first things that really impressed me about the show was...it must have been the first ever episode when the other blossom twin dies and you know, it's set up as this whole err Twin-Peaks-esque erm, murder mysteries [sic] with the theme. I was very impressed that it was the boy-child that had died and not this typical dead girl...dead, pretty, corpse erm, trope, that usually plays out in this genre.

'M' doesn't name Jason Blossom using a congenital signifier, in other words, she doesn't address him using 'Jason' as the salutation/his first/Christian name. Rather, she refers to him as 'the other' Blossom twin. The reference to the other is significant when capitalised as Other, as taken in a posthumous context, it refers to the erasure of identity, where a speaking subject is transformed into an object; in essence, they become a body or a corpse.

This is important because '...the death (erasure) of its [Jason Blossom's] symbolic identity' (Žižek 2009, p. 127) bring us within striking distance of *The Real*. An unmediated direct encounter with a rotting and decaying corpse would be traumatic for anybody, thus the indirect tempering or mollification of *The Real* occurs through the mechanism of mediated fiction. In addition, 'M' points to a transition from life to a body or a corpse which corresponds with Jacques Allain Miller's point which can be applied to Jason Blossom that '...crossing the barrier of [...] the law, the barrier of the beautiful, to advance into the zone of horror that jouissance implies' is indicative of the transformation Jason Blossom experiences. In turn, the mechanism by which a subject becomes an object is what Miller calls a 'mortification of jouissance [...] conceived of as a loss of jouissance' (1997, pp. 30, 54) which only occurs when the body dies.

Furthermore, in establishing that the erasure of identity highlights death's correspondence to *The Real*, this is an important feature to note because just as desire serves to act as the scaffolding for the expression of secrets and U.S. culture in chapters 5 and 6, I draw on Bendle (2001) in arguing that 'Death is as much a part of the human condition as desire' (p. 223) and as Dean (2000) argues,

As human beings there is a limit to the jouissance we can access and this limit to jouissance is embodied in a range of mythic figures whose jouissance is

unlimited. [...] As their mythic status suggests, [...] none of these figures actually exists. But this fact of nonexistence does nothing to diminish the effectiveness of their functioning. [T]hese mythic figures generate powerful identificatory effects— both positively and negatively—based on *jouissance* (pp. 88-89; emphasis in original) ...It is because the real functions as an ineluctable limit that, like death, it bears political consideration (p. 93).

Thus, we see that Jason Blossom has a powerful effect on the viewer. In essence, it is here that 'M' reveals the link between death and *The Real*. Subsequently, in a pre- cursory paper to his (2013) book, Razinsky (2011) concurs with Bendle's (2001) viewpoint concerning the fact that not only is death as much a part of the human condition as desire but Bendle's notions of death, the abyss and *The Real* correspond with Razinsky's own thoughts that death is irrepresentable, just as secrets and particular interpretations of U.S. culture are in chapters 5 and 6—all three contextual instances are, as it were, examples of the ineffability of *The Real* and *The Real as Jouissance* (discussed later). Razinsky (2011) draws on Freud in arguing that '...death, as a concept, idea, or phenomenon, has no representational accessibility to the mind' (p. 332) and thus '...cannot be represented in the unconscious' (p. 333).

Secondly, the use of the term 'boy-child' has a religious connotation in that it refers to the Bible and Mary Magdalene's 'boy-child', Jesus Christ. The notion of boy-child as unconsciously corresponding to Jesus Christ, arguably relates to 'M' making sense of death through frames which inculcate views of religion, faith, and immortality. The ineffable- nature of concepts such as death, secrets (chapter 5) and aspects of culture (chapter 6) correspond with 'M's' use of the term 'boy-child', which has a religious connotation.

Conversely, the context of faith and religion are spiritual and once more the argument of psychic, irrepresentability/non-representational/ineffable theory applies. For example, the primary structuring mechanisms by which faith, religion and spirituality are articulated are tied and bonded by the ineffability of the divine (c.f., Bennett- Hunter 2015; Hick 2000 and Jonas 2016).

Subsequently, 'M's' mention of religion and faith corresponds with Julia Kristeva's (1982) point that the abject is tied to religion. Connecting the abject to 'M's' discussion of boy-child, it is arguable that boy-child is a euphemistic term, connected to faith and religion which corresponds with the abject being the foundation for her theory of religion in the sense that religion purifies the abject. Moreover, Kristeva's theory of the abject (as a contrast to the

Lacanian *Objet Petit a*) is associated with both fear and *jouissance* (Felluga 2011) hence operates on the boundaries of enjoyment, pleasure and death which is exactly what Jason Blossom signifies.

Further articulation of the complexities that structure 'M's' experience can be explained by drawing on Freud's concepts of *condensation* and *displacement* (1900). This is interesting because 'M' mentions trope. Thus, as an *imaginary(virtual)- symbolic Big Other* Jason Blossom doesn't really exist. Moreover, its [the concept or idea of Jason Blossom as a fictional character] that is tethered to an original point of origin or context. This original point of origin or context is an idea or concept in somebody's head which then gains expression through representation or is performed by the actor who plays Jason Blossom.

Subsequently, *metonymic expression* (Jakobson and Halle 1971) has occurred here also, because the traditional trope of the dead, pretty, girl corpse has been destabilised. Feminine representation has given way to masculine representation, arguably as a way to appeal to feminine desire. Thus, masculine desire has been displaced in favour of feminine desire and *the Virtual-Symbolic Big Other's* mode of expression finds material representation through a synthesis and reconfiguration of something inevitable, yet surprising when captured within the realm of fiction (c.f., Coyne 2016). In other words, the cliché of the pretty, dead, girl is absorbed into the opposite gender through the repositioning of Freud's concept of *condensation* (1900).

It is also arguable that there exists a juxtaposition between on-screen, mediated death and off-screen resurrection—in the sense that a death on-screen leads to a resurrection outside of the confines of the situated televisual fictions in which the performer acts. This continuation of existence, that which breaks down the boundaries of the fantasy/reality dichotomy reveals the dual nature of a split subject.

As Stephen Luper (2009) argues

Perhaps death is actually a transformation by which the life with which we are familiar is followed by some sort of afterlife in which our existence is continued (Luper 2009, p. 3).

The lack of familiarity of which Luper speaks corresponds with 'M's' positionality as a viewer of fiction in that what is partly familiar also has facets reflective of a 'fantasy afterlife'. This 'fantasy afterlife' is described as such because as viewers of television the mechanism which allows us to suspend our disbelief takes us to realms where the content draws us in and for a time we forget our own lives. As a third and final point, there is an oxymoronic juxtaposition of language that occurs in the sense that a dead corpse cannot possess pulchritudinous attributes, or in other words, characteristics of beauty are not associated with rot and decay.

The notions of a 'fantasy afterlife', being 'drawn in' to a narrative, and the ascription of beauty to rot and decay all correspond with processes that cannot be represented. For example, how can we know what a fantasy afterlife will be like? What does being 'drawn in' to the narrative outside the bounds of the imagination look like? How does it happen? How does rot and decay equal beauty in reality? In this sense then, through the power of 'M's' speech, through indirect apprehension one can encounter and touch the workings of *The Real* in young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction because as Žižek argues none of these examples provide any '...transparent links to the reality of human lives' (Žižek 2009, p. 124).

Moreover, 'M' subsequently discusses the excess of death at play in *Riverdale* which she states is a major cause of loss of meaning. This can be understood in the ways in which the portrayals of death are handled by the show's producers. For example, in her arguing that a loss of meaning occurs between a divorcing of the signified and the signifier 'M' says,

I do think the show really struggles with having so much death that it sort of loses all meaning like there's no sense of grief, no sense of what this character really, really meant to the other surviving characters, so it can lack a certain sense of sensitivity because of just how much is going on.

The notions of excess and loss in 'M's' account and the subsequent divorcing of the signified from the signifier reveal a tension between *fantasy* (as mediated fiction) and 'M's' experiences of death in reality. Specifically, the signified of mediated death as experienced on-screen does not relate to the signifier, creating a disjunctive relationship. As it pertains to the concepts of *Feminine Jouissance* and the *Objet Petit a*, it is the on-screen fantasy of the *Objet Petit a*, lacking in reality, that brings

forth an excessive mode of *Jouissance*, which for 'M' is expressed as a source of tension, anxiety, and discomfort. For as the Lacanian *Real* will attest

there are three distinct nominations, three "names-of-the-father,"²¹ one for each register. Inhibition is connected with the Imaginary, *anxiety with The Real*, and symptom with the Symbolic (Ragland and Milovanovic 2004, xxxiv; emphasis added).

As can be seen from 'M's' response, *The Real* is present in the gaps between the loss of connection—where fantasy and reality do not correspond, as was the case with the juxtaposition between beauty, rot and decay—and this is expressed through 'M's' discourse, present in the emergence of the symptom, expressed as *The Real* (through speech), what Dean (2000) calls a 'jouissance of speech' (p. 74) and activated via the on-screen dissonance experienced and brought about by depictions of *Virtual-Symbolic* fictions. Subsequently, the uninhibitedness is expressed through the producer's representations of the excess of death. Finally, the symptom or sinthome is important here to the overall complexities of 'M's' televisual experience.

Drawing on Jacques Allain Miller's (1997) notion of the Sinthome (or symptom) as a mixture of symptom and fantasy, the effects of viewing on the body (as a synthesis of fantasy and symptom), emerges through 'M's' speech/discourse. Moreover, le Sinthome acts as a fourth order, linking *The Real*, *Symbolic*, and *Imaginary* when the name-of-the-father fails (Boucher 2012, p. 140). Through the discordant experience 'M' undergoes, I tie this to the processes of desire inculcated in the show writer's narratives and inscribed within the televisual fiction of *Riverdale*, to account for the fact that there appears to be no restrictions as to the amount of death there can be in *Riverdale* (a fact supported by Bendle's argument) that in relation to both *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*

the past century has exhausted the capacity of the symbolic to give form to the human experience of death—death has become both ubiquitous and ineffable. With the age of mass death, it seems as if a threshold has been crossed, into a realm that humanity has never been before (Bendle 2001, p. 224).

²¹ The laws and restrictions that control both your desire and the rules of communication.

In other words, how posthumous events are framed, take on an air of unreality for viewers, with the reception of such messages destabilising the boundaries of normality. Connecting 'M's' experiences to the experiences of 'S', (another narrator), it can be argued that through reference to 'S's' discourse, death is something to be avoided, in the sense that the implied content points to issues of immortality, which is later discussed by 'E', (a further narrator). I move on now to examine 'S's' experiences of televisual fiction where in attempting to articulate and make sense of the portrayals of death that she witnessed on the small screen when viewing *Pretty Little Liars* 'S' points out that,

there's a lot of fake death too which is part of that improbability that really bothered me ... like everyone died and ... always came back, err, from the living ... from the death [*sic*] at some point.

Taken in this context, there are some deeply nuanced ways in which 'S' is unconsciously interpreting death in relation to a psychoanalytic interrogation of the latent content, expressed through her discourse. Her use of the term 'fake death' corresponds with Hauskeller's concept of 'a rebirth' (Hauskeller 2015, p. 211) as within the show, the main character Alison DiLaurentis, fakes her death to become Vivian Darkwood. Subsequently, reappropriation of Hauskeller's use of the term 'post-mortal' is useful when viewed from the positionality of what I term 'virtual post- mortality' as it provides the means whereby re-birth can be understood as a reconfiguration of one's identity [Alison's in this instance].

Continuing with the examination of 'S's' discourse the order of signification with respects to her response, privileges life over death, as she says: 'always came back, err, from the living'. This allows me to pose a question: drawing on the concept of *Feminine Jouissance*, why does 'M's' discourse concerning her experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction privilege life (defined as the act of being alive, of breathing) over death? It is this question I will now try to answer as this is important in providing further evidence corresponding to young women's interpretations and experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

The answer to this question is as complicated as the various theorisations of *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*. In essence, the answers can be found in the works of Slavoj Žižek, Derek Hook, and British psychoanalyst, Darian Leader. Firstly, however, Ellie Ragland Sullivan and Dragan Milovanovic shed some light on this conundrum.

...*jouissance(s)* [...] introduce time into meaning as the structure of desire (2004, xvii; emphasis in original).

Viewers are often drawn to repetitive iterations of specific mediated ideologies within the context of contemporary, televisual fiction. Given this, the privileging of life over death as it pertains to issues of temporality is an interesting one. Following Ragland-Sullivan and Milovanovic (2004), I argue that the order in which 'M' privileges her signifiers relates to a temporal dimension. This temporal dimension or *Jouissance of Life*, is privileged over the *Jouissance of Death*, as temporally speaking, death is temporally distant, whereas life is imminent.

Furthermore, the concepts *Jouissance of Life* and *Jouissance of Death* are better known in Lacanian parlance as *Jouissance of the Other* or *Phallic Jouissance* respectively. Returning now to Žižek, Hook, and Leader I connect and position these varying modes of *jouissance* allied to the Lacanian concept of the *death drive*. But what is the *death drive*? Žižek provides an explanation of the death drive, locating it in the realm of immortality or more specifically, ascribing it to the undead.

[The Freudian Death Drive] is the very opposite of dying—a name for the “undead” eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The paradox of the Freudian “death drive” is therefore that it is Freud’s name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny excess of life, for an “undead” urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death [...] (2006, p. 62; emphasis added).

Furthermore, the discourse is interesting as it reveals aspects of the unconscious. This aspect of privileging the signifier 'living' over 'death' arguably indicates a manifestation of the unconscious, as 'S's' use of the filler word 'err' indicates a potential mistake.

Furthermore, as human subjects, some societies precondition us to regard death as taboo, relegating or repressing it in favour of a focus on aspects of life, which allow us to flourish. Moreover, the juxtaposition of life over death shares tensions in common with eruptions of *Jouissance*. In essence, there is a tension or conflict emergent in 'S's' response resulting in a stalemate or deadlock that belies the ideological messages received from television juxtaposed with her experiential reality.

Darian Leader (2021) provides some interesting commentary, which I extend, in accounting for and linking the privileging of life over death and the term's correspondences to different modes of *jouissance* and the death drive. Leader argues that,

...jouissance, [is] taken here to imply an enjoyment of an object' (*ibid.*, p. 64, emphasis added) [and] corresponds with both [...] *enjoyment* and various other aspects of affect such as: disappointment, *horror*, *pain*, *sadness*, etc.

I take Life, expressed as *Jouissance of the Other* as corresponding with the positive signifier, enjoyment. Within the signifying chain, this is given importance over horror, pain, and sadness, associated with Death or *Phallic Jouissance*. Furthermore, Leader argues that '...life itself consists in the sharing of experience...' (*ibid.*, p. 61). When applied to the context of critically understanding young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction the death drive contains *both* types of *Jouissance* which act as counterbalances to one another, yet ultimately relate to 'S' trying to unconsciously repress death and destruction with life as a 'superabundant vitality' (Lacan 1992).

Subsequently, 'S' responded further stating that she was 'frustrated by the amount of people that died' because 'nobody seemed to dwell on the deaths too much.' Again, this indicates a conflict between what is experienced on-screen and what is experienced off-screen. Potential arguments as to why these tensions or experiential dissonances occur correspond with the scholarship of Rosemary Hennessy who speaks of 'time and space compression' (2000, p. 7).

There is nothing mystic or magical about why this time and space compression occurs as its purpose is to function in relation to the narrative. Despite this, dissonance occurs whenever human beings experience unexpected patterns from whatever they consider to be the norm of their own experiences. Finally, the dual nature of *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance* and its unsettling qualities can be utilised here as a heuristic tool to connect women's lived experiences with what they experience on-screen.

In addition, 'S' attempts to reconcile the disjunctive/discordant experiences that emerge from the tensions between *phallic jouissance* and a *jouissance of the Other* through a negotiation of the binaries of death/fear and life/immortality (Buda 2015). At this stage, and before moving on, it is important to unpack how 'S' negotiates the binaries of death and fear, life and immortality (immortality is covered in its own section later). Reading between the lines evidence suggests that death is something that bothers 'S'. In order to cope with this, she reconfigures an understanding of life after death, drawing on immortality, arguably as a blanket for comfort and/or protection.

In further reconciling the discordant experiences, which is important for positioning *The Real* as an aspect of televisual experience, alongside the reality of the *imaginary-symbolic* for theorising a new model of contemporary, televisual fiction, I mobilise that which is experienced outside of the body and connected to the signifier (Dimitriadis 2017) to explain how in this instance, *phallic jouissance* or a *jouissance of death* corresponds to the death experienced within the televisual fiction on-screen. Pertaining to 'S's' unconscious response of subjugating death in favour of life, the *jouissance of life* or *jouissance of the Other*—located in *The Real* (thus outside of language, *ibid* 2017) corresponds with the notion of immortality.

The linguistic signifiers pertaining to life and death and the ways in which they are transposed in 'S's' discourse can be better understood by drawing on the Lacanian notion of the *death drive*. Taken in this context,

[...] far from a solipsistic acceptance of death, the Lacanian death drive is immortality as such, that is, a literal life beyond death (Cho 2006, p. 28).

‘S’ does not refer to immortality, but this is implied in the phrases ‘back from the life’ and ‘back from the dead’, and it is this unconscious subtextual undercurrent that expresses the tensions of her *feminine jouissance* where she attempts to reconcile the discordance between what is seen on-screen with the reality of her life. Thus, drawing on Žižek ‘back from life’ pertains to a state of being undead, with ‘back from the dead’ corresponding with resurrection and immortality (Žižek 1992). In positioning the various modes of *Jouissance* and the associated concept of the *death drive* these theoretical tools are useful in articulating a relationship to what Derek Hook terms ‘Symbolic Mortification’ (Hook 2016) in the sense that the portrayals of death in *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars* are both symbolic, repetitive, and lose meaning when constrained to familiar patterns.

I argue that symbolic mortification creates the effect of a denaturalisation of death or a desensitisation to death as the on-screen signifiers of death in the contextual instances of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* correspond with what Hook (2016) terms ‘being *dead while alive*’ (p. 247; emphasis in original). Re-appropriation of this aspect of symbolic mortification allied to the Lacanian *death drive* is described on a YouTube broadcast by Hook as being akin to ‘Christmas’ (Hook 2020). Furthermore, this is useful to reposition with respects to death in *Pretty Little Liars* as both this show and *Riverdale* express death in a particular manner which makes it familiar— this is often done with the use of cultural signifiers for death, yet with *Pretty Little Liars* in particular, the presence of corpses as often seen in *Riverdale* is negated and is often replaced with other symbolic instances of death such as memorial photographs, see **figure 9**.



Figure 9 A memorial photograph of Allison DiLaurentis in *Pretty Little Liars*

These expressions of death relate more to the celebration of life, which is what, ‘S’ appears to be unconsciously referring to via the privileging of the life signifier over the death signifier. To close this discussion down now, I want to make a final point, and it is this, that the various modes of *jouissance* and their correspondences to the Lacanian *death drive* can be mobilised as a useful set of theoretical tools or lenses for critically analysing the tensions between life and death as they are subjectively understood as operating in reality and conversely, how they are understood, psychically or unconsciously, through viewing them in mediated form. This further adds to articulating an intervention into the complexities of televisual fiction.

Having discussed how the tensions of life and death illuminates the complexities of televisual fiction I would now like to continue this line of argument regarding televisual complexity as the antithesis of identification. In foreclosing identification as the primary means through which women’s experiences with fictional characters have been theorised, at this stage it is useful to focus on a specific facet of *jouissance*—the inscription of *jouissance* on the body through exposure to mediated experiences.

7.4 The inscription of *Jouissance* on the body through exposure to mediated experiences

The viewing body of the feminine/young woman acts as a source for capturing the effects of the unconscious, beyond that which emerges in speech. As Macêdo argues, '...what is printed on the body [is] an effect of *jouissance*, [...] producing traces of affectation' (2021, n. p.). An example of the emergence of this bodily affectation came about through an interview with 'M' and her strong reaction to the question, can you tell me about death?

[this narrator had a visceral reaction to the word via a sharp intake of breath and a 'look' on her face]. Afterwards, she stumbled over her words before regaining composure and beginning to discuss the topic.

Given this, '...the bod[il]y event [betrays] the true cause of psychic reality' (*ibid.*). In other words, the effects of the unconscious are apparent through affective reactions. This links to the work of Joseph O'Brien (2014) who argues that what 'M' experienced through her bodily reaction of an in-drawn breath through the teeth (and visible to me in my capacity as analyst/interviewer) the hunched shoulders and partial shudder in response to the subject of death) pertains to correspondence with what O' Brien calls '...a peculiar, ineffable sensation' (p. 3).

Furthermore, the capacity of the effects of television to affect the viewer— young women who view instances of contemporary, televisual fiction in the case of this thesis—where women possess no words to describe their experience—illustrates the complex nature of televisual fiction. In turn, the ineffable nature of mediated representations of death and the emergence of *The Real* act as instances of an unconscious bodily reaction, triggered through unconscious thought. 'M' refrained from verbalising this thought.

In addition, interpretation of 'M's' reaction can be approached from a different angle. Drawing on Žižek (1996, pp. 93-94) he argues that 'Voice and gaze relate to each other as life and death: voice vivifies, whereas gaze mortifies.' Based on my utterance of the word 'death' and the subsequent reaction of 'M', I argue that voice is also associated with death and that in this context, voice mortifies.

This indicates my (re)positioning of Žižek's theorisation in the sense that I (take it from one context that Žižek discusses) and shift it into the context pertaining to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, where I extend and reconfigure voice as a function that has the agency to both vivify and mortify. Subsequently, gaze and voice are both theorised as *objet petit a* in relation to partial objects, or in other words, ones that are not fully formed, they cannot be assimilated, making both gaze, and voice in particular, ineffable concepts. Finally, *Jouissance* is associated with the body and because of its dualistic-nature, *Jouissance* can be both life and death (pain in pleasure and pleasure in pain simultaneously) because even though 'M' had the reaction she did, it can be argued based on the sound she made, as well as fear, she was also fascinated by the word death and dare I say was aroused/got off on talking about death once her initial defence mechanisms had been breached.

This arousal was precipitated not by what 'M' said, but through her tone of voice and body language, where her pupils were dilated, and the tempo of her voice was fast and high. When I thought this was taking place, I thought I would be uncomfortable, but I wasn't, instead I was interested in how she was articulating her fascination. In the next section I delve deeper into the relationship between trauma, death, and *Jouissance* through continuing to analyse the thoughts of 'M'.

7.5 The Interconnected Nature of Trauma, Death and Jouissance

In an era of post-network television it is useful to draw on the scholarship of Steven Putsay (2021) in assisting with an articulation of death, trauma and *jouissance*. This is important because it follows the line of argument of this thesis more generally that by drawing on the concept of *The Real* to position the limitations of language and representation, that which is ineffable can still have a strong effect on one's experience, despite being experienced in mediated form. Firstly, Putsay points out that, 'in the digital age, we believe that we know death, despite the fact that so few of us have actually *witnessed it*' (p. 9; emphasis in original). This statement appears to be true of several of the respondents and the excessive force of a potential *objet petit a* missing from the experiences of the young women, would arguably cause such interpretations as 'M's' to emerge concerning her views on immortality.

Yeah, I think like Death, that's a really big one in ... in *Riverdale*. Erm, Betty immediately comes to mind as someone who has not only experienced a lot of traumatic things [...] for me, this kind of mostly began when they revealed that it was her dad that was the black hood and then you had all of these scenes that called back to her childhood ... killing this cat ... [...] I think she [...] engages in these kinds of avoidant behaviours which I think are, who again, are a fairly honest representation of someone who has experienced traumatic events but as with most of these kinds of things it plays out on these kind [*sic*] of bizarre stage[s] with all these other people who have also experienced really terrible things. Again, especially considering the age they're supposed to be and how quickly these things are supposed to have happened to them and it just doesn't really fit [...].

To make better sense of 'M's' commentary, it is important at this stage to give a general overview of the characters and the events being discussed as they correspond to issues of synoptic detail. In turn, this will help to expose the plot and the narrative. Firstly, as discussed in chapter 6 on U.S. culture, Elizabeth 'Betty' Cooper is the younger daughter of Hal and Alice Cooper (pictured below), **figures 10 and 11**.

Figure 10 Hal and Alice Cooper



Figure 11 The Black Hood, Hal Cooper's Alter-Ego



Within the discourse 'M' points to the revelation that Betty's father, Hal Cooper is revealed to be a serial killer, prominent in *Riverdale's* season 2 story arc where Hal Cooper dons the mantle of the Black Hood to absolve the town of all its sins. 'M' pointing out that Betty kills her cat, Caramel at the behest of her father (something that ultimately did not happen and was a false memory) is just one example of all the traumatic events that has happened to both Betty and her friends throughout the six seasons of *Riverdale/Rivervale* (the town changed from *Riverdale* to *Rivervale* in season 6 which was a storyline involving an alternate reality). Some of these events (not an exhaustive list) include the following occurrences: a) Cheryl Blossom, Elizabeth 'Betty' Cooper's cousin, attempts to commit suicide when she goes out on to a frozen lake to die before Archie saves her, b) in a later season, once again, Cheryl almost becomes the intended rape victim of wealthy socialite, Nick St. Clair, when he drugs her and c) Chick, Betty's half-brother, and her mother, Alice, kill a man in cold blood in Betty's house and bury the body.

Before moving on to further analyse the emergence of *The Real* within the discourse of the narrators through focusing on the latent/sub-textual meanings 'M' mentions, a discrepancy between all the events that have happened to the characters as it corresponds to their chronological ages (in season 2, Betty Cooper is between 17-18 years, as are her friends), 'M' points out that the speed with which these events have occurred just doesn't fit. In further developing a better understanding of the emergence of *The Real* in discourse it is important to note that the link between current traumatic events (and regressions to traumatic events during childhood) corresponds with an encounter with *The Real*, which through its inability to be represented emerges in Betty's life through dream metaphors. Furthermore, the regressive actions taken by Betty relate to the emergence of a repetition of past anxieties.

Subsequently, 'M's' use of the signifier 'bizarre' conflates Betty's trauma as something that resembles the antithesis of the commonplace. Although anxieties and trauma around death are indeed commonplace in society, televisual fiction has a way of distorting these events. Moreover, the complexities of televisual fiction in this exchange are revealed through an association with the work of Winlow (2014) who

claims that “shame is an unconscious affect of [...] childhood trauma” [...] (p.46) which accounts for Betty’s avoidance behaviours.

In addition, ‘M’ mentions the character of Cheryl Blossom stating that,

they tried to represent her trauma with this corpse of Jason [her twin brother] and like just very strange very strange like ... what the ...? What a thing to do.

Before moving on to discuss the interpretation of ‘M’s’ quotation and the emergence of *The Real* within her speech it is useful to provide a summary of the identities of Cheryl and Jason Blossom. In season 1, episode 1 of *Riverdale* titled ‘The River’s Edge’ the show begins with the death of Jason Blossom. Cheryl Blossom, pictured below with her brother, Jason, see **Figure 12** is Head Cheerleader of the Vixens at Riverdale High School, she lives in a large house on the outskirts of town called Thornhill; Jason’s corpse ends up being exhumed by Cheryl and placed in the basement of Thornhill.



Figure 12 Jason and Cheryl Blossom

Returning to ‘M’s’ discourse, the mention of the linguistic signifier ‘tried’ reveals an ultimate failure in representation. This failure of representation, that which seeks correspondence which ultimately, does not correspond, (particularly with any aspect of reality) connects with Slavoj Žižek’s account of ‘signifiers which fail’ which are expressed as ‘ontological impossibility[ies]’ Žižek (2012, pp. 959, 264). The locus of these ontological impossibilities

emerges from the deficiency of Cheryl's brother's corpse to act as the embodiment of her trauma. This ultimately results in an encounter with *The Real* as (Žižek *ibid.*) points out that,

...it is through this very failure [...] that the symbolic touches the Real
(emphasis in original).

A further example from another narrator, 'L' discusses the uncertainty felt by Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily. It is what I term, 'The Spectre of 'A'-nnihilation: Shadows of the Real'. There is a correspondence with the eponymous villain of the show, 'A' which reflects the tensions and anxieties that emerge when one cannot see their enemy.

I just remember in every episode of *Pretty Little Liars* there's always a scene where like ... see someone ... I don't know ... like a shadow in the window or something. There's always just like 'hinting' that 'A' is always around; kind of this ominous (inaudible word) that they always rely on to keep a teen ... a teen audience like freaked out. I don't think like that's the ... like works with adults as much erm but, yeah, there's always a sense of imminent danger for all those girls and I think that's why you keep watching because it's entertaining.

'L's' response to death in *Pretty Little Liars* operates on a number of levels. Notably, the multi-layered and unconscious interpretations that emerge through her anxiety-ridden discourse are telling. Firstly, her response of 'a shadow in the window' positions the shadow as a metaphor for *The Real*—in terms of Lacan's paradigm.

[The] "Fiction is [...] established through the disjunction regarding *The Real*, sustaining itself through something *that it cannot show*" (Žižek 1992, p. 82; emphasis in original). I argue that it is here that *The Real* functions as a placeholder for women in my research, and to better understand the properties associated with the mystery genre and instances of Teen Detective televisual fiction. The centrality of the shadow in 'L's' response to 'Tell me about Death' corresponds with Slavoj Žižek's notion of *The Real*. 'L's' response of formless shadows echoes Žižek's interpretation of *The Real* as a formless mist (Žižek 1992, pp. 14-15).

Furthermore, there is a juxtaposition here of 'imminent danger' and 'ominous' contrasted with 'seeing' and 'watching'. Reading below the surface of the words to arrive at an unconscious interpretation, televisual fiction as 'L' says, 'hints' at

something 'ominous' where there is the threat of 'imminent danger'. In essence, there is a tension here between *The Real* as it operates in the visual field/dimension and the unconscious sub-text of its operation in the auditory field. In other words, sound is used as a mechanism, displacing *The Real* into the auditory register/dimension.

The dual operation of audio-visuality, underpinned by the nebulous ephemerality of the properties of *The Real* both acknowledge and extend the current positions of *The Real* as it pertains to its operation and mediation within the context of televisual fiction. This insight accounts for previously untheorised enquiries into the complexity of television in general and televisual fiction in particular to be mobilised. Moving back to the metaphor of shadows and the window, due to being inaccessible directly, televisual fiction uses metaphor to represent *The Real* on the small screen.

The signifiers 'light' and 'dark' create an interesting psychoanalytic contrast, functioning as productive dualisms. In essence, 'light' has connotations to consciousness, pleasure, etc, whereas 'dark' belies repression—the unconscious, the repression of death (a defence against trauma), yet also within this context, a negativity. The next section logically leads me on to the final section before the conclusion in the sense that death is theorised as 'beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' (Kristeva 1982, p. 1) then why are we so fascinated by the concept of immortality? In the next section I draw on oral histories provided by 'E' in attempting to articulate and unravel some of the mysteries surrounding immortality. The paradoxical nature of being dead and alive at the same time, both an enigma and a conundrum is detailed below.

7.6 Immortality

Within this final section I seek to establish the notion of an eternal, immortality as that which destabilises and disturbs mortality. In positioning this argument in the overall narrative of the chapter, I connect the concept of immortality to Lacan's concepts of *The Real*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, and the *objet petit a*. Firstly, by acknowledging these positionalities I seek to reconfigure immortality as corresponding to dimensions of *jouissance* that eschew Kristeva's notion of *The Real* as something that is abject, arguing instead for what I term a 'virtual post-mortality' in the sense that immortality is considered to be a life-everlasting/affirming gift, indicative of the words spoken to *Buffy the Vampire*

Slayer by the first slayer in Season 5, episode 22: 'Death is your gift'.

Through effectuating such a shift, immortality can be realigned with discourses of religion and faith which illuminate the effulgent nature of life's association with euphemistic language and experience as opposed to something that is dysphemistic and should be feared, harnessing ideologies of miracles and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, there is a fictional permanence to *The Real* in terms of *The Real*'s relationship with immortality and its ability to be inexpressible in language. For example, out earthly bodies crumble to dust, yet the visual mediated fictions of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* continue on in a range of formats, long after our deaths.

Moreover, the correspondence of *The Real* with immortality and the *objet petit a*, positions the *objet petit a* as representative of a fictional figure that is never born, nor will ever die, in the traditional sense.

Furthermore, the complexities of televisual fiction are captured in the discourse of 'E'. By drawing on and repositioning the Lacanian concepts of *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *objet petit a* and *The Real*, the complexities of death off-screen and their influence on events on-screen, are clearly revealed. 'E' points out,

I mean with *Pretty Little Liars*; death is at the centre of the show. I mean, it is a murder mystery. Erm, Alison goes missing. Erm, her body is "recovered". It's the story of what happened to her. [...] Death is sort of treated like quite ... ooo ... it's romanticised. It's erm ... it's seen as like ... Alison, I remember her saying, like she ... she likes the idea of *dying young, because she'd be a beautiful corpse* or something like that and I remember thinking 'ooo! That's quite dark, but fun!' (laughs). And I ... quite ... I like that, cos I've grown up like reading Agatha Christie novels and the beautiful dresses and gowns and settings where there's this horrible, grisly murder. That sort of juxtaposition, it romanticises murder, which I like because I love that kind of genre (emphasis added).

The actual exchange, taken from season 1, episode 8: *Please, Do Talk About Me When I'm Gone* is detailed below. What follows is the original exchange between the girls in tabular format. This is used to give context to the whole conversation and augment 'E's' discourse.

Excerpt from Pretty Little Liars

Immortality

Aria Montgomery: *[flash-back of happy times, group basking in the sun]* I wish we could just choose the age we wanted to be, and just...stay there. **Alison DiLaurentis:** The only way to do that is to die young. Leave a beautiful corpse.

Emily Fields: Don't joke.

Alison DiLaurentis: It's not a joke. Oh, come on. Haven't you guys ever thought about how deliciously tragic it would be to die in some...incredibly mysterious way? It would be superior.

Spencer Hastings: Is that really how you wanna go, Alison?

Alison DiLaurentis: Not just yet. **Hanna**

Marin: Don't talk like that. **Aria**

Montgomery: It's gruesome.

Alison DiLaurentis: It's not gruesome. It's immortality, my darlings.

Aria Montgomery: *[back to reality, as they look down at the centerpiece of the memorial]* Where did she get that from, a movie?

Spencer Hastings: Ali was a movie.

'E's' allusions to Allison's immortality link to Allison's ability '...to defy death itself and to "remain" against the inevitability of time' (Piotrowska 2017, p. 75). When connected to *The Real* this is something which at first glance may seem impossible. That is until, once again, it finds expression in metaphor (as was discussed above in the sense that fictional characters do not die in the traditional sense, as they are technically never born). In this instance, the concept of immortality, that which has the ability to transcend death can best be understood by its correspondence with Lacan's concept of the Subject Beyond Death. For Lacan, the signifier puts the subject beyond death, because "the signifier already

considers him dead, by nature it immortalises him” (Lacan, 1993/1997, p. 180).

Taken in this context, the signifier and the text will exist beyond the life of the bodies it signifies (both the performers and the viewers). In *Pretty Little Liars* when Alison went missing and “ceased to exist” as a physical body’ (Hayles, 1993, p. 81) the other girls manifested her presence and influence through their memories. In addition, by virtue of the fact that...Alison is already a signifier/text, her allusions to immortality are riven and defined through the signifier and trapped there. It is thus an impossible mode of *jouissance* that fails to be expressed because it is ensnared by the imaginary(virtual)-symbolic signifier.

In other words, Alison’s allusions to her own death are bound by her own subjectivity and imaginary idealisations but are bound to a ‘...longing for self-annihilation which flows so darkly below the surface of contemporary culture’ (Stratton 2018 [2020], p. 8). The fantasy of her [Alison’s] own death will not reflect the intricacies of her actual death. One cannot know what their own death will be like. This corresponds with Razinsky’s quotation that,

we cannot represent our own death because in trying to do so, we are always still left as spectators (Razinsky 2013, p. 16).

Pointed to by its author (Razinsky) as a philosophical argument it is important to unpack what is meant when he says ‘we are always still left as spectators’. In providing an exegesis of this point we first need to better understand what Freud meant when he originally said this. In essence, Freud meant that the scenario that corresponds with your own death (i.e., the moment you disappear from existence) relates to your own desires.

Elaboration of this point would be to imagine your own death. Who will be crying for you? How will you be remembered? This may be obvious, but the creation of your own desire, or a mobilisation of your own *jouissance* foreshadows personal and subjective *phantasies*, which are often, in bastardised [distorted] form, projected on the small screen as televisual fiction. This scenario operates in the register of *The Real* in the sense that your own death is unable to be apprehended by yourself, being unrepresentable, and is down to the fact that *Jouissance* is unknown to the

unconscious at the moment of cessation of the body's biological systems.

7.7: Conclusion

As the thesis moves towards its conclusion it is important to acknowledge the ways in which *jouissance* and *The Real* in particular have been mobilised as heuristic tools. They speak to the previously under-theorised notion concerning the complexity of televisual fiction and have, in this chapter, pointed to new and novel ways of extending conceptualisations of death in relation to its representation on-screen. Moreover, the workings of young women's unconscious, subjective experiences have been revealed through the extension of *The Real* within the context of televisual fiction.

Furthermore, it is the discursive nature of the psychoanalytical concepts employed that have allowed new avenues to be explored. In the upcoming conclusion (chapter 8), through drawing on a thorough analysis of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it has become clear throughout this thesis that,

an increasingly clear division has to be introduced between the body and its jouissance, since in the end it is *the products of industry and culture* that the body finds its wherewithal to feed its jouissance and its lack of jouissance (Miller 2019, p. 61; emphasis added).

Taken in this context, the products of industry and culture to which Miller refers correspond with the content of the shows, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* that are offered on the streaming service, Netflix. Finally, it is important to note that *Jouissance* and the *Real* are enigmatic due to their ineffable natures. It becomes clear that death and desire become interlinked in a decadent dance, where women's personal subjectivities assisted with the configuration of a topology of death that was expressed through discourse.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The conclusion to this thesis consolidates and accounts for the key interventions that have been developed in relation to the themes of *The Real*, *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as a Product of Mediated Fiction*, and *The Object a/Objet Petit a*. Furthermore, this final section of the project will account for the terms that were in some way neglected or those that remain unaddressed in this thesis. The arguments presented in this work may now shift and reposition ‘experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction’, ‘the emergence of the unconscious within speech’, ‘the development of a new model of televisual experience’ and ‘the limitations of language *and* representation’ beyond the scope of youth and femininity in general and young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in particular.

Firstly, in choosing to focus on young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, other gendered identities, sexual predilections, and racialised/classed subject positions have been avoided. In turn, the positioning of this thesis’ key aims, objectives, questions, and lines of argument pertain to young women’s experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, but it may be suggested that directions for future research can reach out to embrace other forms of gendered, classed, sexualised, and racialised identity politics so as to see the reconfigurations involved in re-shaping desires and the unconscious. Subsequently, the key concepts of *The Real*, *Feminine/Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy as a Product of Mediated Fiction*, and the *Object a/Objet Petit a* could be productively and strategically re-worked and re-applied to the fictionally mediated bodies of the men and women portrayed in the television shows, so as to focus on a meta-analysis of ontological objects, which lack a ‘pure’ existence or materiality within the context of ontic reality; and this ties in to the aforementioned reification of psychoanalysis (Floyd 2009).

In addition, new avenues that explore the theorisation of death and the positioning of truth in the online, virtual clinic round out areas mentioned in the thesis, but not covered in detail. In what follows, the multiple areas of investigation mentioned above are organised using a thematic structure which combines new avenues of enquiry with the key aims and objectives of the thesis.

Firstly, I focus on new avenues of thought corresponding to gendered identities with specific focus given to young men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and the experiences of people who identify as transgender. Secondly, one of the narrator's identified as bisexual, this was only paid lip service to and I would like to provide a further exegesis to this in the space of this conclusion, alongside a focus on both gay and lesbian identities, which are further avenues of interest, as amongst other things, responses to the questions asked of the young women (see appendices) would arguably yield very different and interesting results. Thirdly, within my sample of young women there were three women who identified as different ethnicities, but a look through the lens of non-caucasian identities would arguably warrant identifications with different fictional characters as well as produce different readings of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* (Hall 1973).

Following on from this, the fourth dimension of enquiry focuses on class and how this shapes the types of fiction consumed by narrators who are other than middle-class. Furthermore, the fifth and final section of this conclusion circulates around the application of Lacanian concepts to the reification of fictionally mediated bodies, ending with the perspectives of new theorisations of death and the impact the 'truth' has within the context of an online, virtual clinic.

8.2 Gendered Identities: Young Men's Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction

Having focused on young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction it would be useful to assess what young men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction might be. This dimension of enquiry is an important one to consider, as few studies have focused on the empirical analysis of young men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis. For example, Derrick, Gabriel and Hugenberg (2009) focus on four studies related to positivistic/quantitative approaches, studying parasocial relationships, loneliness, etc, with their sample comprising *both* men and women.

Furthermore, Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) investigated the concept of identification and its correspondence to television characters. The sample was again focused on the quantitative/positivistic approach and the sample mirrored Derrick, Gabriel and Hugenberg's later sample with the focus resting on both men and women.

Subsequent investigations draw the focus towards every medium aside from television (e.g., film, literature, opera, song, cartoons, new media and social media) with Smith (2022) conducting a critical character analysis devoid of human participant intervention.

In turn, Lesley Henderson's (2007) scholarship is based on empirical work, but its focus resides in a mixed-sex sampling method. A final piece of evidence is used in support of the need to focus on young men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and this is a call to action from Amanda D. Lotz (2014) who argues that,

It is revealing that so little has been written about men on television. [...] In some ways a parallel exists with the situation of men in history that Michael Kimmel notes in his cultural history, *Manhood in America*. Kimmel [notes] that "American men have no history" because although the dominant and widely known version of American history is full of men, it never considers the key figures *as men*. Similarly, to Kimmel's assertion, [...] we can claim that we have no history of men, masculinity, and manhood on television—or at best, a very limited one—despite the fact that male characters have been central in [...] television history. It is the peculiar situation that *nearly all assessments of gender and television have examined the place and nature of women, femininity, and feminism* on television while *we have no typologies or archetypes or thematic analyses of stories about men or masculinities* (p. 7; emphasis in original and my emphasis added).

Before moving on to the next section where I outline the need for and importance of studying trans-gender dimensions of identity, it is useful to conclude this section by asking what Kimmel means when he says that American history never considers the key figures *as men*. Thus, by drawing on Kimmel's original research, in essence, what is revealed is that studies fail to '...explore [...] the *experience* of being a man, [...] (Kimmel 1996, p. 2; emphasis added); hence, a focus on young men's experiences of televisual fiction would help to close this gap and add a critical dimension to the body of literature and the field by extending the ideas and propositions put forwards by Lotz (2014). The next section moves on to consider the notion of Transgender Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction through the prism of gendered identities.

8.3 Gendered Identities: Transgendered Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction

Due to issues of accessibility pertaining to conducting psychoanalytic research with transgender individuals, critical studies and thought experiments are useful for determining what may be possible regarding directions for future research. Firstly, a recent study by McLaren, Bryant and Brown (2021) focused on the representation of transgender characters in fictional television. From the perspective of extending this area of research, the application of psychoanalysis can be employed to position a positive form of critical outreach that considers the reconfiguration of Lacanian ideas—most notably, those areas of analysis which pertain to *phantasy/fantasy* as a product of *mediated fiction*, and *Jouissance/Feminine Jouissance* and their correspondence to unconscious desires.

One area of analysis that is highly interesting and could prove fruitful would be the examination of how psychic experiences may be reconfigured through the reconfiguration of one's biological sex and gender identity. Some questions for consideration would be: what are the differences between men and women's psychic experiences? How does the transition from man to woman or woman to man change the psychic experiences of her who was once him or him who was once her? Furthermore, having had experiences of both sexes in their lifetimes, what concepts would prove the most effective for capturing the unconscious, psychic experiences of young men who are now young women or young women who or now young men?

More specifically, it would be interesting to see if any 'traces' of the narrators' former lives would emerge within their unconscious thought. If so, then an investigation into how these tensions are negotiated would be another fertile direction for further research. Having considered the notion of gender identities in relation to transgender experiences I move on in the next section to interrogate potential avenues for future research in terms of sexualities: bisexual, lesbian, and gay as when these dimensions of identity take centre-stage an interesting comparison could be made with the experiences of men and women who identity as heterosexual.

8.4 Positioning Sexualities: Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction

8.4.1 Bisexuality

Firstly, I use the space of this conclusion to excavate the intricacies of bisexual experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, having not focused on this area as much as I would have liked due to only a single narrator of seven identifying as such. During the interview with 'L' in the online, virtual clinic she explained that she preferred more complex shows like *Watchmen* as opposed to *Pretty Little Liars* or *Riverdale*. With this in mind, it would be interesting to see whether or not the complexities of her bisexuality link in any manner to the level of complexity of the shows that bisexuals' view. In turn, do bisexuals see their sexual preferences as predilections in flux, or in other words, are there objects of affection constructed as egalitarian and harmonious or are they in tension, competing and oscillating from one pole to the next, constantly subjected to destabilisation?

Subsequently, the area of bisexuality is an interesting area to apply Lacan's concept of *Jouissance* to as it has been seen throughout this thesis that *Jouissance* possesses a dual, paradoxical function. Thus, it is useful to theorise what might happen when *Jouissance* and *Feminine Jouissance* are both applied to the televisual experiences of bisexuals. Would it not be, due to having sexual preferences for both men and women that the duality of one form of *Jouissance* would merge with another form of *Jouissance* in the spirit of producing a new configurational model of *Jouissance* that builds on prior tripartite structures?

Furthermore, in developing the line of argument analogous to the development of a new model of televisual experience, the possibility for the synergistic synthesis of identification, affect, and unconscious desires becomes a very real possibility. Ostensibly, this would arguably lead to multiple identifications with different television shows, characters, and riven desires. As well as women, drawing on the line of argument presented by Kimmel (1996) and Lotz (2014) the experiences of bi-sexual men would be another area of enquiry where little research has studied the viewing preferences of men with the overall research examining viewers preferences towards fictional characters who present themselves as bisexual on the sexuality spectrum (van Meer and Pollmann 2021).

In addition, an earlier study by Fillipo (2013) argued that,

bisexuality is [...] a crucial component in the strategies and processes involved in selling and experiencing screen media. *Yet this key presence goes almost entirely unacknowledged and undiscussed.* Media scholars and critics occasionally appear to notice it, but they call it by other names: gay, lesbian, homoerotic, homosocial, queer . . . *To a surprising extent, bisexuality remains the orientation that dares not speak its name.* Into this discursive gap falls a good deal of knowledge that it is essential we retrieve in order to grasp with precision how sexuality works—*not just within film and television, but with regard to everyday desires, behaviors, and subjectivities* (p. 4; emphasis added).

There isn't a limit in terms of language that would make bisexuality relegated to silence or invisibility, thus a future focus on this research area would help enable a number of further productive prognostications. These prognostications can be attached through the psychoanalytic notion of cathexes. In essence, the desires, behaviours, and subjectivities of which Fillipo speaks form central points of enquiry which would be of interest in advancing and extending how those who identify as bisexual men and bisexual women negotiate and appropriate aspects of what they view in terms of their experiences of bisexual, fictional television characters. Having considered bisexuality, I move on to discuss opportunities for the examination of gay men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

8.4.2 Gay

Having discussed bisexuality in the previous section, this section focuses on potential avenues of enquiry relating to gay men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Similarly, to the prior section on bisexuality, a study by Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald (2006) focused on heterosexual attitudes towards gay men and lesbians (lesbians are covered in the next section). The specific focus of enquiry corresponded with the effects of visual media, where a control group was used to mediate between a pro-gay video and an anti-gay video.

Other studies in the field by Avila-Saavedra (2009) and Tim Dean (2009) focus respectively on the televised construction of gay masculinities and the phenomena of barebacking and its correspondence to the context of films, particularly, in the case of Dean, pornographic films. Dean and Avila-Saavedra's studies do not, however, focus

on the lived experiences of gay men, nor is their focus on gay men's connections to gay, fictional, televisual characters or indeed, (in the case of Dean) their (gay men's) experiences of the pornography they consume. Furthermore, although both authors adopt critically reflective stances, examining their own roles in the production of research, there is no discussion around other people.

Finally, Kathleen Farrell (2006) comes the closest to examining gay men's experiences of fictional characters through her study of *HIV on TV: Conversations with Young Gay Men*. She examines,

how some gay undergraduate males make sense of a fictional story about an HIV serodiscordant gay couple struggling to negotiate their romantic relationship in light of sharp opposition from friends and family (Farrell 2006, p. 193).

Farrell's research, with its use of focus group interviews, acts as a good starting point for further investigation into gay male experiences of both gay fictional characters and also characters such as Betty Cooper and Veronica Lodge from *Riverdale* who within the fiction have a GBF (Gay Best Friend), Kevin Keller, the Sheriff's, Son. In turn, Farrell's focus is on the TV show, *Queer as Folk* and through an extension of her activities, my methodology of the online, virtual clinic could provide an alternative to Farrell's traditional method of focus groups for examining young gay men's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. Furthermore, Lacanian interventions into gay men's experiences are what is lacking. The next section focuses on the application of Lacan to lesbian experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.

8.4.3 Lacan and Lesbian Experiences of Contemporary, Televisual Fiction

As before, women's experiences of lesbians on television are not historically unique. For example, Scanlon and Lewis (2016) examine the 'diverse representations of lesbians on our television and cinema screens' arguing that 'scholarly attention to audience responses to the representations has not kept pace with these developments' (p. 1005). Furthermore, Scanlon and Lewis consider,

existing research on these themes and contribute[.] analysis of qualitative data from focus groups with audiences of the film season, "Lesbians on Screen: How Far Have We Come?" (*ibid.*).

This is an important step, yet Scanlon and Lewis' focus rests with film as opposed to television. In their conclusion the authors state that their paper provided,

...empirical qualitative analysis that aims to contribute to the small body of scholarship that has listened to women's voices about their experience of gendered cinema spaces and depictions of lesbians (pp. 1016-1017).

This proposition could be theoretically extended in future work to embrace a Lacanian approach that focuses on young lesbian women's experiences of contemporary, fictional television characters across various shows that span UK, US, and European geographies. In turn, earlier studies by Clare Whatling (1997) study not television, but once again, the medium of film. It appears that film is placed in higher regard than television as an object of academic enquiry, yet as my arguments in the Introduction have shown, this is no longer the case. Furthermore, lesbian women's experiences of fictional lesbian characters would be another interesting avenue to pursue.

Finally, as a brief snapshot of the area, Kate McNicholas Smith (2020) provides a historical overview of lesbians and queer women on screen prior to the year 2000. An extension of and synthesis with Scanlon and Lewis' empirical work would be fruitful from an oral history/audience reception sensibility (with the focus being on television shows) post-2000. The next two sections examine young women's experiences of class in relation to contemporary, televisual fiction, followed by race.

8.4.4. Class

The seminal work associated with young women's experiences of class, particularly as it corresponds with American television is Press (1991) mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. In turn, more recent scholarship has focused on *Working-Class Women and Television Fiction Uses* (Rosini *et. al.*, 2019). Rosini *et. al.*'s epistemology was 'Critical Reception Studies' (p. 89) with the methodological focus utilising 'Lahire's individual sociological portraits (2006) which capture subjective aspects of experience ...' (*ibid.*). In short, both *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* utilise a mixture of fictional characters that fall into different classes of affluence (Veronica Lodge, see Chapter 6) or Jughead Jones (working class).

A synthesis and extension of Rosini's empirical approach (with a focus on Lacan) could be combined with Press' seminal output. This would allow for young women's experiences of differently classed individuals in to be examined further. In other words, 'S' mentions in chapter 6 that she implicitly lacks the financial means to dress as stylishly as Aria and 'E' (in the same chapter) points towards both Veronica Lodge from *Riverdale* and Serena Van Der Woodsen from *Gossip Girl* as both possessing the kind of lifestyles she would like to have, particularly as it relates to studying at an American University. Finally, not mentioned in any detail, 'I' pointed out that when she was younger, she didn't have the time and money to do things that these fictional characters appear to be able to do during the week, explaining that this was only possible to do on weekends due to financial constraints.

Finally, as this is just a snapshot of further research that could be undertaken in response to areas not covered within this thesis, I refer the reader to one last piece of literature in this section. This literature by Press and Strathman (1993) is important due to its seminal nature. The content of the article investigates the notion that American television programmes in the 1980s do not portray the lives of women realistically.

This is particularly true of middle-class and upper-middle-class women where the focus rests on an anti-essentialist notion of gender. Women's roles revolve around nurturing which is associated with motherhood or family life in general, with little scope for exploration beyond these boundaries. During the interviews in the online, virtual clinic 'S' made the claims that some of the situations the girls from *Pretty Little Liars* found themselves in was ridiculous. These sorts of comments provide the impetus for exploring how young women use class in identifying themselves and whether or not this has an effect on what type(s) of fictional media they consume. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore whether or not young women's stated classes were either congruent or incongruent with what is viewed on- screen as this would provide important information potentially related to fantasy and its uses (if incongruent) or whether they feel the fictional portrayals are authentic representations of their lived realities (if congruent).

The next section, section 8.4.5 examines young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction and its correspondence with race.

8.4.5 Race

Prior commentary on *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* has come under critical scrutiny regarding the correspondence of race to the issue of marginalisation. These issues, particularly with *Riverdale*, go back years before the introduction of *Riverdale* as a TV series. For example, Beaty (2017) argues that,

The myth is that *Riverdale* was a typical American community. The fact is that the almost total absence of nonwhite characters makes *Riverdale* one of the least typical locales in the United States. Until the introduction of Chuck Clayton in *Pep 251* (September 1971), it is likely that not a single African American appeared in an Archie story set within the *Riverdale* city limits. Through the height of the civil rights movement, Archie comics willfully ignored the social transformation taking place around them, clinging to a vision of a "preracial" America... (p. 52).

Beaty's discussion of the 'almost total absence of non-white characters' corresponds with popular commentary provided by Kadeen Griffiths (2017) who explains that,

Riverdale has a representation problem that's even bigger than not having any POC at all: the show marginalizes and ignores the POC in the cast to the point where they may as well not be there.

Furthermore, Griffiths call for, "We've *seen* the people of color in *Riverdale* (my emphasis). Now, can we *please* get to know them? (emphasis in the original) provides a catalyst for further research on the topic of race, particularly as it corresponds to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction, if they too, are also a different race. Before transitioning to the section on psychoanalytic reification it is important to note that this move away from ideological representations of the content of race in contemporary, televisual fiction to a focus on the lived (empirical) experiences of young women themselves is a type of investigation that lends itself well to the concept of reification where ideological representation is given physical form in physical (ontic) reality. This will be explored, alongside other issues, in the next section—8.4.6.

8.4.6 Psychoanalytic Reification

As this section attests, reification is a useful heuristic and psychoanalytic tool for shifting the emphasis of television studies from critical examinations and interpretations of ideological representation to a focus on the empirical, where young women's lived experiences are accounted for. The intervention of this thesis aids in scratching the surface of this endeavour. There is, however, a great deal more work to be done, beyond the pages of this dissertation argument.

The concept of reification, as utilised by Kevin Floyd (2009) provides the catalyst for a productive synthesis that accounts for the connection between televisual representation, young women as consumers, and the discoveries that can be made through a critical, empirical examination of the topics that have been mentioned above. Race, class, sexuality, genders beyond women, and as cited in the introduction the reification of fictionally mediated bodies. It is here that the reader is provided insight into what is meant by a reification of fictionally mediated bodies.

As fictionally mediated bodies are floating signifiers, they are expressed as ideas and find their form through the embodiment of a performer. With this in mind, it is useful to theorise how the melding of the performer and the fictional character are riven, while at the same time, representing a metaphor for schizophrenia and mental illness. Moving on now, the penultimate section of this conclusion focuses on theorising theoretical approaches to death.

8.4.7 Theorising theoretical approaches to death

The theme of death was first approached in the preceding chapter (chapter 7). Working through scholarly interpretations of death and its application within academic discourse, revealed a gap, requiring further study. It is here I would like to provide an exegesis of this point, with the aim of extending and applying the concept of death as a means of embracing directions for future research.

The gap I identified was present within the work of Johanna Sumiala (Sumiala 2021). Sumiala's analysis of death in her work, *Mediated Death*, focuses on a dichotomy between the deaths of ordinary people, whom would be termed, members of the general public and those who possess a heightened status in society, described as

celebrities. In other words, Sumiala focuses on and fosters an interest in the death of iconic, public figures.

Through questioning the unexamined 'middle'—viewer responses to the deaths of fictional characters opens up a liminal space that can be fruitfully applied to all manner of fictional deaths. These deaths both include and exceed the boundaries of the fictional universes of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. For example, an interesting avenue of enquiry would be to examine responses to the deaths of various fictional characters spanning the breadth and depth of television, movies, and novels such as the recent death of James Bond in the movie, *No Time to Die* (2021). A psychoanalytic investigation into emotions applied to such cases would be helpful in shedding a light on people's attachments to fictional characters and their abilities to often be unable to distinguish between the character and the performer.

Furthermore, fictional death is a fascinating proposition, as fictional characters are never truly 'born' in the first place. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the deaths of some fictionalised television characters result directly from the deaths of the performers who play them, as was the case with Luke Perry who played Archie Andrews' father, Fred Andrews, in *Riverdale*. In turn, Sumiala also focuses on digital immortalisation, and it would be interesting to note how fans of television shows immortalise their favourite characters from television, after they have been killed off— in other words, how are their memories preserved? One solution may be that just like in reality, one would watch old episodes of the show where they were still alive, akin to how some people cope and mourn in the real world by watching home movies of the deceased from earlier stages of their life.

8.4.8 How much closer are we to the truth?

No matter which lens is used to analyse the dimensions of research enquiry corresponding to naturalistic, qualitative, constructivist/interpretivist accounts, the pragmatic nature of a study examining young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction is always beholden to, enshrouded in and encapsulated by the notion of truth. It can be argued that a psychoanalytic approach gets us no closer to truth, trust, or objective reality, because, as aforementioned there is a) no truth in any of the paradigms employed, b) psychoanalysis is not a trustworthy discourse and is

built on productive distrust, and most importantly, c) we live in a post-belief era where there is no truth, with these points all converging to reflect Murphy's (2023) citing of Nicholas Cusanus (2007, pp. 11-12) who points out that, 'all we know of the truth is that the absolute truth, such as it is, is beyond our reach'.

This does not mean that the research is invaluable, rather, as has been seen throughout the lines of argument structuring this thesis/research enquiry the negativity and tensions inherent in a study corresponding to young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be deployed productively. This productive deployment is succinctly expressed by returning to Schwandt *in* Denzin and Lincoln (1998) who points out that,

such epistemological terms as *truth* and *meaning* are not expressions of relationships of correspondence to reality [making them useful for the study of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction], but refer to the consequences of a purposeful action (p. 234; emphasis in the original).

Schwandt (*ibid.*, p. 236) goes on to argue that,

truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. They emphasize the pluralistic and plastic character of reality—[...] reality is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of intentional human agents.

Finally, drawing on Goodman and Elgin (1988, p. 58) Schwandt points out that Goodman and Elgin argue that,

[Truth] and certainty 'are excessively restrictive concepts beset with trouble [therefore, Goodman] proposes that we adopt the more pragmatic notion of "rightness," a term with "greater reach" than truth. *Rightness* is defined as an act of fitting and working but "not a fitting *onto*—[...] but a fitting *into* a context or discourse or standing complex of other symbols (Schwandt *in* Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p. 239).

Finally, what is important to remember, drawing on Arteaga and Bandinelli (2022, p. 108) is that,

What psychoanalytic enquiries can do is to help us ask better questions, and these arise precisely when the rift between knowledge and truth is opened up, engaged with, and treated as the condition of possibility for any desire to know more and know better.

The penultimate section of this conclusion ascertains the extent to which the findings of this thesis correspond with the application of real-life impact, linking its theoretical findings with practical, societal solutions.

8.5 Introduction: Societal Impact

The findings of this thesis are flexible in scope regarding their usefulness to make a societal impact. In what follows, I outline several contexts that could benefit from the impact of an application of these findings. Firstly, I begin with applying the findings from young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction to the media and entertainment industry.

8.5.1 Media and entertainment industry

This section can be separated into content producers and networks and distributors. People responsible for the creation of contemporary, televisual fiction such as writers, directors, producers and performers could be interested in how their content is received and experienced by young women. For instance, Day and Pennell (2020) investigate fans' reactions to queer representation in *Pretty Little Liars*.

The correspondence of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can also inform content creation. This includes understanding young women's viewing habits, preferences and responses. This can also include concerns. For example, Greenwood (2009) studied Idealised TV Friends and young women's body concerns. Dara Greenwood investigates which interpersonal forms of involvement with both female and male TV characters led to and were linked with young women's body concerns.

Furthermore, networks and distributors, inclusive of streaming platforms are stakeholders interested in audience engagement. Programming decisions can be influenced by women's viewing habits, preferences and responses. For example, in the paper, *Understanding the lack of science on TV: Network Decision-Makers' Opinions towards Televisual Science*.

Within the study, Soto-Sanfiel, Villegas Simón and Angulo-Brunet (2021) conducted people's responses to network decision-makers' opinions and their correspondence towards televisual science and its lack of representation on television in Spain. In addition, advertisers and marketers are key with regards to the appropriation of the results of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction within a societal context.

8.5.2 Advertisers and Marketers

The impact of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction on marketing and advertising as a valuable piece of research. As advertisers may align their campaigns with popular shows or television characters as if seeking to target young women as a demographic, advertisers would be interested in how televisual fiction influences perceptions, preferences, and consumer behaviour. For instance, Nancy Mramor charts the history of the impact of television on human behaviour (2024).

In addition, Macheka, Quayne and Ligaraba (2023) explored celebrity endorsement on young female consumers' purchase intentions. Finally, Jennifer Hessler (2021) discusses *Pretty Little Liars*' use of an interactive social media campaign using para-textual material designed by the production team, to entice viewers to tune in. Hessler argues that

The series [*Pretty Little Liars*] was Nielsen's [TV ratings] champion for demonstrating how social metrics can enhance a series' staying power and ability to attract advertisers (p. 278).

In turn, the success of the show's strategy enabled several brands to be able to use *Pretty Little Liars* to sell their products, including 'a fashion line with Aeropostale; and successful iTunes releases of music featured on the series' (ibid., p. 281). Furthermore, young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can influence the work of feminist, advocacy and social activist groups.

8.5.3 Advocacy, Feminist and Social Activist Groups

The impact of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can inform advocacy strategies and initiatives. These strategies and initiatives often focus on women's rights and social justice. Stakeholders would be interested in how media representations contribute to or challenge societal norms. Subsequently, when advocating for gender representation positive or negative portrayals of women can influence advocacy efforts.

For example, organisations such as Girl Up, Feminist Frequency and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media are all involved in positive research. The Geena Davis Institute pushes for more balanced and diverse portrayals of women in media. A recent report from the company website focuses on the topic of *Rewriting Motherhood: How TV Represents Moms and What We Want to See Next*. Girl Up is a UN Foundation initiative engaging young women in advocacy and leadership programs. Issues include working to eliminate gender-based violence. In addition, the study of how TV impacts young women's gender roles is often used to inform their campaign initiatives.

Finally, Feminist Frequency analyses and critiques the portrayal of women in popular media, including television. Discussions have included *Glee*, *Veronica Mars*, Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and *Terminator: Sarah Connor Chronicles*. In addition to these positive organisations, the final two categories include employers and workplace diversity initiatives and mental health professionals.

8.5.4 Employers and Workplace Diversity Initiatives

Young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can influence how professional roles and opportunities are perceived, with positive portrayals contributing to the breaking of gender stereotypes. Companies who have collaborated with television and film companies include Unilever, Proctor & Gamble, and Netflix. Unilever's Unstereotype campaign sought to address the issue of gender stereotypes in advertising. Furthermore, Proctor & Gamble's Like a Girl campaign focused on Always and women's sanitary products with the hashtag, #LikeAGirl. The campaign challenges gender stereotyping, advocating for equality. Finally, Netflix has been the forerunner in creating diverse content, which impacts upon its hiring processes for women in leadership, for example.

8.5.5 Mental Health Professionals

Young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be used by mental health professionals who are interested from a psychological perspective as to how televisual fiction affects young women's well-being and mental health. Content that addresses mental health in a particularly relatable way is useful. For example, McMahon-Coleman and Weaver (2020). In turn, more recent scholarship by Moore, Comerford and Vettoretto (2024) focuses on binge watching and mental illness.

Penultimately, as this thesis focuses on *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale* two studies of interest include Goal Auzeen Saedi's (2018) commentary on Watching "Pretty Little Liars" ... as a Psychologist where she argues that a dire image of mental health is painted in the show. In addition, Beachside Teen Treatment Center focuses on using *Riverdale* as just one example of many when it comes to exploring how personality disorders are portrayed on television. Finally, social, economic and cultural intersections make insights gained from these experiences relevant to a wide range of stakeholders.

8.6 Concluding Remarks

Through the development of a model of contemporary, televisual fiction, one that accounts for the unconscious in particular, steps towards the development of a critical model of television which considers the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction can be developed in synthesis with prior models of television that focus on identificatory and affective dimensions of enquiry. Furthermore, the implications of the research, whereby insights into young women's psychic experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction are captured are useful for developing models of experiencing fiction through the consideration of counter-hegemonic modes of thought. In other words, the traditional ways of thinking about ideology are destabilised through women's experiences of *feminine jouissance* as this mode of experience does not centre the man or deal with patriarchal structures which are responsible for seeing the world in a particular way (e.g., man's ideal of the All-American Girl as the blue-eyed blonde, is not woman's ideal).

Finally, questions that circulate around the ineffable natures of secrets, death, and ideologies, alongside mechanisms for their potential capture in television opens avenues of enquiry for adding to the literature on the unrepresentable, and more so, discussing the notion of the unrepresentable within the field of post-network television. This approach has all kinds of political implications pertaining to the analysis of critical approaches to television through the lenses of differing genders, sexualities, cultures, ages, and class positions which provides future researchers with a multiplicity of avenues to consider pertaining to the enactment of future research.

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Appendix A

APPENDIX INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

ETHICS REVIEW FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Conversations Inside the Online, Virtual Clinic: a Psychoanalytic Exploration of Young Women's Experiences of the Contemporary, Televisual Fictions of *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*.

Primary Investigator: Mr. Nick Jensen

You are to participate in a research project being completed by a Doctoral candidate at the University of Newcastle. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether you would like to participate. If you have any questions at any point during this study, please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to determine how women react and respond to televisual fictions in general and more specifically to fictional characters, with an emphasis on the Netflix shows, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Riverdale*. The information obtained in this study will be used to complete a PhD dissertation. Participation in this study will take place in a single stage and you may choose to participate in any/all or none of the activities after making your choice.

Stage 1: Oral History Interview/Witness Testimony based on open-ended interview questions.

This study involves the recruitment of students from England in the United Kingdom (to include American and European students studying at British Universities in England, UK). The sessions will be recorded via a recording device in a face-to-face situation. The culmination of this project will involve interviewing between 5-8 women of differing nationalities. The oral history interviews will be conducted via Zoom, Teams or a similar videoconferencing system. The interviews will last up to and be under 50-minutes to reflect Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic sessions while taking account of the length of the variable session. There is minimal risk or discomfort associated with this research, aside from the nature of the content of certain question themes (e.g., death).

Your answers to the research questions and all aspects of each stage of the study are anonymous and your identity will NOT be revealed. ALL narrators' identities will be kept strictly confidential. The use of specific names in the report will be avoided via the adoption of pseudonyms (false identities) chosen by the interviewer. As an added precaution ALL materials associated with the study (paper-based or electronic) will be kept under lock and key or encrypted, requiring a password to be accessed. Materials will be destroyed when they are no longer needed.

There is no compensation for participating in this research; however, if you desire a copy of the results from this investigation, a reproduction will be made available to you by contacting the primary investigator (Nick Jensen n.jensen2@newcastle.ac.uk). Although there is very little risk associated with this research, answering certain sensitive topics within the themes used may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any question you feel uncomfortable with throughout this process.

The summarised findings of this investigation with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal, presented at a scholarly conference or form the basis for a monograph (single-authored book on a specific topic). You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or the University of Newcastle. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research.

Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate in the study having read the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. You may ask any questions of the primary investigator concerning the research before agreeing to participate or while completing any of the scheduled activities.

If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Nick Jensen via e-mail – n.jensen2@newcastle.ac.uk or the project investigator's Departmental supervisor, Doctor Gareth E. Longstaff at the Department of Media, Culture, Heritage, University of Newcastle – Gareth.Longstaff@newcastle.ac.uk. You can also contact res.policy@newcastle.ac.uk for answers to questions about the rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

Participant Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating as a narrator in the study concerning your views of your personal experiences of watching the U.S., contemporary, televisual fictions of *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*. The present study's aims, objectives, and methods are outlined below:

Aims of the study

1. To reposition the Lacanian concepts of *The Real*, *Feminine/Jouissance*, *Phantasy/Fantasy*, the *Object a/Objet Petit a*, as products of *Mediated Fiction* to foster a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.
2. To move towards the development of a model of television which acknowledges the unconscious and moves beyond identificatory and affective models of televisual fiction.
3. To move towards the development of a practical and empirical form of psychoanalysis which extends and builds on prior theorizations of this work (c.f., Tillman, Clemence, Stevens 2011; Bainbridge, Ward and Yates 2013, Whitehouse-Hart 2014, Mimica 2007).

Objectives of the study

1. Argue for the complexity of television, by conceptually reconfiguring *The Real*, *Phantasy/Fantasy* as a product of *Mediated Fiction*, *Feminine/Jouissance*, and the *Object a/Objet petit a*, and utilising the resulting complexity as a heuristic tool (defined later in section 1.6.4) to help with fostering a critical understanding of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction.
2. Capture the opinions and complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction through undertaking a series of oral history interviews/witness testimonies.
3. Move towards the development of a practical/empirical form of psychoanalysis that acknowledges the roles played by fiction and psychic experience within the context of an online, virtual clinic.
4. Concatenate the concept of identification with televisual studies of affect and the unconscious. The combined signifying chain of "identification: affect: unconscious" progressively provides the dimensions for a holistic understanding of the complexities of young women's experiences of contemporary, televisual fiction. In turn, it acknowledges the importance of identification in the process but condenses this dimension with other aspects of enquiry in order to shift the focus away from surface-level, identificatory models of television which were popular at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Again, we thank you for your participation in this study.

Procedures for debriefing after study is completed.

Once the study is completed, should you require further information about the project's methodology, intended aims, and objectives, you will be contacted via e-mail, telephone, or social media (whichever is more convenient).

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to ask the researcher or consult with Dr. Gareth E. Longstaff (email: Gareth.longstaff@newcastle.ac.uk; telephone: 0191-208-6068).

Thanks again for your participation.

N. Jensen (Digital Signature). Nick
Jensen, Principal Investigator.

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Heritage.

Dr. Gareth E. Longstaff – Gareth.longstaff@newcastle.ac.uk

Dr. Chris Haywood – Chris.Haywood@newcastle.ac.uk

Research Questions and Themes: Interview Protocol

1. Can you please tell me about yourself and your relationship to the television show *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*?
2. Can you tell me about the methods that you use to view the show and in relation to the method that you use to view it do you feel that this has an impact on your experience of it?
3. Can you tell me about which fictional character(s) from *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale* you identify with the most and what aspects do you identify with?
4. Can you tell me about how you think *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale* constructs fantasies and desires?
5. Can you tell me whether or not any of the fantasy constructions you have mentioned plays a role in your everyday life in relation to your own desires, your own memories, your own choices, or your own expectations?
6. Can you tell me about the events or incidents in the series that moved you the most or affected you the most?

Themes

Tell me about death in *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*.

Tell me about betrayal in *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*.

Tell me about secrets in *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*.

Tell me about trauma in *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*.

Tell me about Dreams in *Pretty Little Liars* and/or *Riverdale*.



Are you a fan of Pretty Little Liars?



Are you a fan of Riverdale?

Would you like to take part in my research?

I'm a Ph.D. researcher at Newcastle University and I'm looking for young woman who would be willing to talk to me about their experiences of **televisual fiction** including **fictional characters**, **fictional events**, and **fictional settings**.

Are all of these true for you?

- ✓ I am between 18-40 years old;
- ✓ I am a fan of Riverdale and/or Pretty Little Liars
- ✓ I was born in the UK, Europe or the USA
- ✓ I have access to Zoom Videoconferencing Software



If you meet these criteria, please do get in touch and I'll send you more details about this project.

Nick Jensen – n.jensen2@newcastle.ac.uk

This research has received Ethical Approval from Newcastle University.