FROM LIARS TO SLAYERS: SEEKING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEEN DRAMA

by

Corine Elizabeth Mathis

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy in English

Middle Tennessee State University
August 2017

Doctoral Committee:

Dr. Alicia Mischa Renfroe, Chair

Dr. Allen Hibbard

Dr. Jane Marcellus

I dedicate this research to my mentor, Dr. David Lavery, who always believed in my ideas and ability to see them to fruition, and to my uncle, Dr. Donald Andrews, without whom I would never have done any of this in the first place. I miss you both greatly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for their love and support throughout this seemingly unending process—from Tennessee to Alabama, full-time work to fellowship, you have been very understanding of the idiosyncrasies necessary to bring this project to completion. And to the friends who have become family, thank you for all the times you have been my sounding boards and helped me work out my ideas; I appreciate our conversations more than you know.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mischa Renfroe, Dr. Allen Hibbard, and Dr. Jane Marcellus for being so patient with me during a very difficult year and working hard to give helpful feedback to a long-distance student.

ABSTRACT

In television genre studies, scholars tend to neglect the teen drama or situate all series that concern teens under the same umbrella, often dismissing the genre for connections to the soap or for its appeal to a teenage, often primarily female, audience. This dissertation asserts that the term "teen drama" itself is misleading and suggests that the name is actually of more use industrially than theoretically or practically, as the label considers the target audience instead of how these series are aesthetically constructed or how the genre has evolved. In its analysis of the genre, this study also shows that the teen drama is not a monolith; to fill a gap in current television scholarship, this project identifies three important subgenres: the teen family drama, the teen soap, and the young adult fantasy drama. Each of these subgenres has distinct thematic concerns, iconographic elements, and cultural work. Though these subgenres certainly share some characteristics, it is important to understand their unique contributions to teen drama to advance scholarship in the field.

After providing an overview of teen drama scholarship and a description of the thematic and generic elements of three of the more popular subgenres, this project considers how one series in each communicates cultural messages to their audience. An example of the family drama, *Gilmore Girls* is widely known as a series with a pro-feminist message—its central teen character even identifies as such early on—but the narrative's clear preference of white liberal feminism makes Lorelai and Rory hard to identify with for many third- and fourth-wave viewers; when one adds the events of *A Year in the Life* into the diegesis, Lorelai and Rory's viewpoints and choices become

even harder to reconcile with feminist concerns. As a teen soap, *Pretty Little Liars* is often dismissed as escapist fare—and many critics' negative reviews of the series are heavily gendered—but the series' use of slasher tropes allows the narrative to deconstruct and subvert its subgenre's traditional gender roles. In particular, it puts female friendships at the center of the Liars' lives, rather than romantic attachments or social concerns—a significant change to the teen soap subgenre. A young adult fantasy drama, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* uses its feminist heroine's constant fight against patriarchal villains to endorse communal action rather than top-down order; in Sunnydale, only those who work together and utilize everyone's strengths will win in the end. By identifying and describing three subgenres and examining the cultural work in three popular series in each, this study shows that the teen drama is much more multifaceted than scholars currently recognize—and it is ripe for further academic work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In our current television climate, where antiheroes abound and gritty realism is becoming the watchword, it can be difficult to convince many popular culture scholars of the value of teen television, a genre that seems to thrive on stereotypes and the unrealistic. An extension of this feeling has led to a critical inclination to lump every drama that features teenage characters as leads—or, sometimes, those that are featured on networks with a strong teen viewership—into the "teen drama" category, which is reductive and damaging to scholarship on these series. For example, Rachel Moseley defines the genre industrially in a larger entry for "The Teen Series" in Glen Creeber's 2008 edition of *The Television Genre Book*. She uses series as varied as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003, the WB/UPN) and *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003, the WB)—one a young adult fantasy drama, the other a coming-of-age drama—and includes *Charmed*—a series I cannot include in my own teen drama library, namely because none of its protagonists are in their teens, nor do they have teen concerns—as well as *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*, a teen sitcom.[1]

Another common approach among television scholars is to focus on a single series, and in doing so, spend most of their time discussing specific tropes or themes rather than dissecting its place in the genre. For example, an entire subfield has arisen around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, enough to spawn international conferences and a

[1] Some more examples include Maura Kelly's "Virginity Loss Narratives +in 'Teen Drama' Television Programs" (2010), which conflates family dramas, multigenerational soaps, and young adult fantasy dramas; Rebecca Williams's "Unlocking *The Vampire Diaries*: Genre, Authorship, and Quality in Teen TV Horror" (2013) names the series as both teen drama and TV horror, but somehow does not consider that there is a space between the two. It is clear that scholars have yet to truly come together to help define this genre.

journal, but little critical attention has been paid to the series' place in the teen drama genre, a gap this project will address. As I will argue later in this project, as a young adult fantasy drama, *Buffy* is concerned with power relationships in a way that the *Gilmore Girls*, a family drama, is not. When *Buffy*'s associations with the genre are discussed, it is generally "transcending one's origins" rhetoric—in other words, *Buffy* is so much better than most teen drama that it is easy to forget that is its home. Though these readings are useful in understanding specific issues, they overlook the importance of providing theoretical definitions of the genre and identifying clear markers for inquiry and comparison as the genre continues to evolve. However convenient these approaches may be, both strands of scholarship tend to minimize the cultural work of teen drama and lead to some misunderstandings about the thematic concerns and generic building blocks of the series in question.

This dissertation fills a gap in the literature that examines teen television, more specifically teen dramas. Drawing on genre studies of film and television, it asserts that the term "teen drama" itself is misleading, and that instead of considering the teen drama to be one monolithic drama that works in a similar fashion, there are actually several different subgenres within it, each with their own distinct iconographies, themes, and cultural work. In doing so, it examines three particularly strong examples of these subgenres: *Gilmore Girls*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

I am primarily interested in what most teen television scholars understand to be the teen drama period, 1990 to the present.[2] This study will focus on American series, but lovers of the teen drama know that the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and South Korea have a long tradition in the genre, complete with both academic and fan appreciation. This project does not include these countries' offerings as there is simply not enough time or space for analysis, but the framework developed here could easily be extended to influential and important series such as *Misfits*, *Degrassi*, *Ready for This*, and *Playful Kiss*.[3]

I aim to redefine how we think of genre as a whole when it comes to the teen drama—not as a mere category, but as a concept that helps us create and establish our own meanings in order to come to a better understanding of what these series aim to accomplish, both in terms of connecting with their audiences and their larger cultural work. As John Cawelti notes *in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, genre is "the degree to which particular works share common characteristics that may be indicative of important cultural tendencies" (7). A genre is not static; it changes over time with shifts in worldviews and especially as innovative contributions lead to new audience expectations. Genre has become intersectional and intertextual. In *Genre and Television*, Jason Mittell offers a new, more productive way to look at genre. As he explains,

---

[2] It should be noted that while we do acknowledge other series that helped shape this timeframe, much like literary periods, this is merely for convenience's sake. Also, *Beverly Hills, 90210*, which arguably began the boom, premiered in 1990.

[3] From the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and South Korea, respectively.

> genres work as discursive clusters, with certain definitions, interpretations, and evaluations coming together at any given time to suggest a coherent and clear genre. However, these clusters are contingent and transitory, shifting over time and taking on new definitions, meanings, and values within differing contexts. At any given time, a generic cluster functions as a stable cultural convenience, a shorthand label for a set of linked assumptions and categorized texts, yet these discourses (and associated texts) are bound to shift meanings and definitions as a genre's history transpires. (17)

These discursive clusters are particularly helpful in thinking about the teen drama. Average viewers may not be able to define a teen drama off-hand, but they could identify one on their television screen. My goal is to make explicit the narrative structure, tropes, and iconography that characterize each subgenre because it is these things that come together to help support the interpretations and assumptions the audience takes from the series. While an audience analysis is outside the scope of this project, it will offer a general discussion of how the teen drama appeals to a primarily female audience and may be neglected as a result.

In "A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory," Mittell has also noted something that, while it seems obvious, few genre scholars take the time to stop and make clear: "there is a crucial difference between conceiving of a genre as a textual *category* and treating it as a *component* of a text" (5). A genre is not defined by the texts that are or are not in it; in fact, the word define itself is problematic, as genre practices shift over time. As a whole, genres can be identified by the types of elements they choose

to include or exclude, otherwise known as iconography, but using only the idea of these elements—setting, characters, costumes—simply becomes too rigid when taken to its natural conclusion. Must a hospital setting force a hospital drama, or can characters simply work in a hospital—and be there often—but be part of a sci-fi series? In our current television writing and producing environment, the answer is yes and no. Genre is a much more complicated process that requires one to step back, away from individual series, and look at them as a whole, to see how they interact with each other and with their audiences and how they have done so over the course of time. In the case of the teen drama, this fluid approach is particularly important because since its real beginnings roughly twenty-five years ago, the genre has slowly evolved into something much different. Only by looking at how these series compare to each other as well as how they build off each other can we see patterns and begin to come to an understanding of the genre as a whole. We must remember that genre is not located within the text alone, but rather is a complicated process of relationships among series that have come before and occur simultaneously, as well as industrial and reception practices (an area ripe for its own study).

The History of Teen Dramas—and Teenagers

As a genre, the teen drama can be broadly defined as a series in which the central characters are going through a period of prolonged adolescence and liminality in their attempt to transition to adulthood. In addition, they spend a great deal of time working through emotional angst, often as a result of parental expectations or romantic and platonic relationships. These elements appear in all of the series considered in this

project. It may seem as if this genre has always had a place on our televisions since teenagers seem to loom so large in our society, but this is not the case. It has, however, had an interesting history when it comes to its development on American network television. Thus, it is important to understand the networks' role in the development of the genre: from its distant ancestors in the 1950s and 1960s, to its coalescence with *Beverly Hills, 90210* in the 1990s, and to the emergence of its own networks with the WB and, more recently, Freeform. The evolution of network to cable to internet television access has facilitated the development of the teen drama in many directions.

Historically, teenagers on television have been placed within the context of a much larger narrative; their perspectives were not consistently privileged or centered within the text. However, with the rise of televisions in the home, domestic sitcoms such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966, ABC)—based on the radio sitcom of the same name—became popular with American families, and teen characters like Ricky Nelson drew in teen viewers.[4] *The Patty Duke Show* (1963-1966, ABC), with its "identical cousins," fun-loving, outspoken Patty and brainy, refined Cathy, offered more of a clear teenage consciousness as the series was produced with the idea of putting Patty Duke forward as the star rather than an established adult personality. Because of their great popularity and importance in teen culture, as well as producers' direct courting of the adolescent market, these series, and others like them, can be classified as teen television (Ross and Stein 12). However, because these early teen shows are couched within a domestic framework and do not privilege the teenagers' experiences—for

[4] By 1960, eight out of ten American homes had television sets on for five or more hours daily (Doherty 19).

example, a first love might be a source of comedy or a fight with a friend a reason to show good parenting—they do not represent the beginnings of teen drama as a genre.

Those programs that were created to directly try to access the power of the teen market with series that focused directly on teenagers began with "non-fiction series that emerged from local market successes" (Ross and Stein 13). Primarily, these were musical performance series in the vein of *American Bandstand* (1952-1989, WFIL-TV/ABC/Syndicated/USA Network) and *Soul Train* (1971-2006, Syndicated), which proved popular in syndication. Later, ABC also found great success with shows such as *The Partridge Family* (1970-1974) and *Happy Days* (1974-1984) by placing teens at the center of the narrative. The Big Three networks began to see the value in this strategy and, in the 1980s, started to develop sitcoms centered around teenagers, like ABC's *Growing Pains* (1985-1992) and NBC's *Saved by the Bell* (1989-1992)—and most importantly, teens of color, such as NBC's *A Different World* (1987-93) and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990-1996). These program choices suggest that networks understood that teens could be a strong market pull, but they were yet to make the jump to hour-long productions for the teen demographic. Enter FOX, the fledgling new network that was starting to build a reputation for itself with daring, edgy new programming like *The Simpsons* (1989-present).

On October 4, 1990, FOX launched a primetime drama that critics either dismissed for its formulaic plots or praised for its sensitive treatment of real teen issues: *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000). The Aaron Spelling-produced series primarily followed Brandon and Brenda Walsh, twins and Midwestern transplants to Beverly Hills.

Beverly Hills, 90210 was the first of its kind in that it not only starred teenagers—adults were kept in the background for the most part—but was directly aimed at them, as well.[5] While the average adult may not have been aware that the series existed, "in the 12-17 teen demographic it was pulling a 40 share, meaning that an estimated 40 percent of all American teenagers watching television Thursdays at 9 were tuned to Fox" (Kimmel 109). *Beverly Hills, 90210* was extremely successful; it lasted ten years, making household names of its stars—particularly among American teenagers, who saw its male leads in teen idol magazines and collected the stars' trading cards—and spawning four spinoffs, two of which came ten years after the series went off the air.[6] Though it was not the first teen series, or even the first teen drama—we can look at series like *James at 15* (1977-1978, NBC) for that discussion—*Beverly Hills, 90210* certainly created a distinct place for the genre, establishing conventions and expectations for the audience that still exist today.

Still, no brief history of the genre would be complete without the WB—now the CW after the 2006 merger of the WB and UPN—and Freeform, which also underwent a rebranding in 2016, having previously been known as ABC Family in its teen drama heyday from 2006-2016. It is no exaggeration to state that the WB is responsible for the majority of the foundational series in teen drama studies, as well as the idea that teen

---

[5] That is, it starred actors who were presented as teenagers. At this point, the casting practices of *BH, 90210* are legendary and foundational—for example, Gabrielle Carteris was twenty-eight and Luke Perry twenty-four when they began portraying sixteen-year-old characters Andrea Zuckerman and Dylan McKay, respectively.

[6] *Melrose Place* (1992-1999, FOX), *Models, Inc.* (1994-1995, FOX), *90210* (reboot, 2008-2013, the CW), and *Melrose Place* (reboot, 2009-2010, the CW).

drama series do not just have to be for teenagers. As Valerie Wee explains, the network, established in 1995, embraced new ideas about what teenage meant:

> . . . by the 1990s, the notion of "teenage" and the teenage identity had evolved; the term "teen" had less to do with biological age and increasingly more to do with lifestyle and shared cultural tastes and interests. "Teenage" in the late 20th century has achieved a much broader appeal . . . In the youth-obsessed culture of American society in the 20th and 21st century, it is no longer how young you are, but how young you think you are, or choose to be, that matters. Consequently, in skewing towards a teen demographic, the WB network was not restricting itself to a demographic defined by actual age. Rather, it was aligning with a broader market that could relate to and embrace a teen lifestyle and, more importantly for advertiser interests, its products. (47-48)

The WB quickly put together a formula that worked for them. First, pull together attractive actors who could reasonably portray teenagers and young adults—and, depending on the series, add in others from the thirty-five to fifty-year-old range that would appeal to older viewers, either due to attractiveness or intertextual reasons. Then, put them in situations that required them to use their brains to navigate the varied obstacles that the series' writers would put before them—whether that be something with an impact on multiple worlds, like in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s universe, or how to deal with the loss of a parent, as in the teens of *Dawson's Creek*, many of whom have either dead or deliberately absent parents by the end of the series—and explore issues to which teenagers could relate in realistic ways. For the most part, the teens of the WB are not

perfect; they fail spectacularly and make very big mistakes as they grow up. It was not uncommon to see these series tackle important issues like drug addiction, abuse, rape, or self-harm and suicide; while teens may have seen characters deal with them before on network television[7], the difference was, as a rule, that the WB did not make them "very special episodes[8]," instead letting the narrative give its own lesson.

In 2006, CBS—UPN's parent company—announced that the WB and UPN, a small network primarily known for urban programming, would merge, creating the CW. While the WB's series were generally about middle-class white kids trying to make sense of the world, UPN was the home of some truly great African-American sitcoms like *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Moesha*, and *The Parkers*. Instead of incorporating them in, the CW was fairly whitewashed, cancelling some of the sitcoms and sending the rest to a single night. Their focus was on sexy teens being bad—this is the age of *Gossip Girl*. The network renewed *Veronica Mars*, whose protagonist may not have cared about being sexy, but the stories were certainly juicy. The CW aesthetic is clearly identifiable: beautiful actors in their early twenties to mid-thirties, a great deal of angst, amazing clothes—some of which are clearly designer pieces—and film-quality lighting and shots. In recent years, the network has made a name for itself with superhero series, but its beginnings are soapier—ratings juggernaut *The Vampire Diaries* is one example.

---

[7] One exception would be *My So-Called Life*, but then again, as one born too early, it is the exception to many things.

[8] Joss Whedon might be the one to thank for this; he famously said, "There will never be a 'very special episode' of *Buffy*."

The WB is certainly not the only network to target a teen audience successfully. The N network was launched in 2001 as a programming block on Nickelodeon, then later moved to its own channel in 2002. An interesting experiment in cable programming, The N was only on from 5 PM EST until 6 AM the next morning, at which time it turned back into Noggin, a children's channel. According to the N's former website, its "mission [was] to be the authentic voice for teens and help them figure out their lives with relevant, topical programming on-air and online" (Ross, "Defining" 61). In 2009, it was relaunched as TeenNick, while Noggin became another network, Nick Jr. The N was (and as Teen Nick, continues to be) known for more controversial programming—not along the lines of pushing Standards and Practices boundaries of nudity or language, but in terms of the narrative. One series, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, remains popular in streaming services as it is part of the larger culturally and critically significant Canadian *Degrassi* storyworld. It began on the N network and continued on Teen Nick until 2015, when it was cancelled and picked up by Netflix. It its time on the N/Teen Nick, it served as an example of the network's approach to teen programming, wherein

> [e]xpectations of topicality are in operation, and the writers feel that any tendency towards sensationalism is kept in check by producers' emphasis on exploring reasons and repercussions for the story moments they develop for characters … More significantly, the majority of these issues are framed narratively as *social* rather than wholly *individual* concerns, either by emphasizing how one person's problems impact those around them or by emphasizing connections among different people's problems. (Ross 65)

Degrassi emphasizes community in the coming-of-age process, and while it shows the full range of what teens can struggle with in the twenty-first century, it avoids the temptation to exploit them. This ethos pervaded the N/Teen Nick's original series; at this point, the network mainly burns off Nickelodeon's cancelled shows and series they are contractually obligated to air.

While the N may have started to go by the wayside, Freeform is thriving. Freeform has gone by many names in its time as a network; in its infancy in the late 1970s, it was actually part of the Christian Broadcasting Network and showed mainly religious programming. After leaving CBN because of endangering their non-profit status, it was called The Family Channel in 1990 and was in the average cable-subscribing American family home. At this point, its programming attempted to court the entire family but still drew a mostly older and religious audience. The Fox/Saban Consortium bought the channel in 1998 and named it Fox Family, turning its focus to children, mainly tweens. The company did not see the ratings they hoped for with adults and sold the channel to The Walt Disney Company, who renamed it ABC Family and populated the network with successful teen dramas. In January 2016, ABC Family rebranded itself Freeform (Andreeva, Steinberg, "Disney's,"). The network is known for darker, more adult themes—no surprise, since the median viewer age is 29 for all content and 25 for original programming—and serials with deep mysteries, often with soap roots. Its strongest player is *Pretty Little Liars*, a series about teen girls, now in their early twenties, whose secrets come with a body count. ABC Family/Freeform's teen dramas reflect the network's new perspective, as explained by president Tom Ascheim:

> "We are renewing our focus on an especially vibrant and important part of the consuming public, whom we have named Becomers, and are committing to this life stage, rather than to a generation . . . Becomers are exploring and establishing who they are becoming—personally, professionally and romantically—they live in that magical and messy place between their first kiss and their first kid." (qtd. in Goldberg para. 4)

As a result, one commonality of these series is that the main characters may age, but they rarely learn. This does reflect societal trends and sociological studies, referred to later in this project—about the Millennial generation, namely that they often take longer to reach adulthood and make many mistakes along the way. It provides a great deal of narrative fodder either way.

Unpacking "Teen Drama"

It made perfect sense when *Beverly Hills, 90210* premiered in 1990 to label it a "teen drama" because the number of series like it could be counted on two hands, and it dealt with teenagers and their everyday problems. Teen drama was simply an umbrella term used by critics to communicate attitudes and expectations to their readers. However, today, the series brought under this label do and offer so much more. Throughout the past twenty-five years, the idea of the teen drama has expanded in such a way that necessitates a reexamination of the genre, and in the process, it becomes clear that the term "teen drama" itself is limiting. Consider reality television; in its inception near the end of the twentieth century, it was narrowly defined, as well. But today's shows require an expanded lexicon: reality competition, documentary-style, social experiment, and home

improvement shows are only a few examples. It is time for a similar change in the way we discuss the teen drama—specifically, we need to abandon the standard term "teen drama" in favor of more specific subgenres. When we do that, we can finally come to an understanding of these series as true artistic creations. In addition, as scholars, we can begin to put together a corpus of works to add to television studies' genre project, detailing the ins and outs of teen drama in this moment for future critics and students.

First, it is important that we consider the very term we use; "teen drama" is misleading. Series like *The O.C.*, *Friday Night Lights*, and *The Vampire Diaries* no longer focus on only teenagers or even limit themselves to chronicling the characters' teenage years; many follow them into college while others persist into the more stable scenes of early adulthood, where the characters get married, begin careers, and have children. This is not only an issue in television; Catherine Driscoll notes that the term "teen film" is problematic for its genre as well, because "the concept 'teenager' is too narrow to define a genre that is preoccupied with the difficulty as well as the importance of borders" (2). However, in film the term remains useful; even though it is increasingly difficult to set a limit on where these boundaries begin and end, these movies—such as the 1980s' *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Heathers*, the 1990s' *Clueless* and *Dazed and Confused*, and more contemporary fare like *Mean Girls* and *Paper Towns*—are entirely focused on the adolescent experience and generally shown from that perspective. Teen dramas cannot be defined in the same way. In television, teenagers are often understood and contextualized through the lens of the larger family structure or their immediate

authoritarian surroundings—including parents—and their portrayal is influenced by our growing understanding of the teenager as a concept.

Further complicating the issue is the word "teen" itself. We need to reconsider even the very term we use. "Teen" and "teenager" have different evolutionary paths in the English language, with "teen" appearing earlier; the Oxford English Dictionary has it coming into use as a descriptor of "a young person in the teens [referring to age]" ("Teen") as early as 1818 in Isaac Taylor's *Advice to the Teens; or, Practical Helps to the Formation of Character*; in 1941, "teen-ager" showed up in the September 1941 issue of the American publication *Popular Science Monthly* ("Teenager"), with today's common spelling generally in use by 1945 (Hine 225). After 1960, the popularity of the words is clear, and it is difficult to ignore the rise alongside the growing force of teen culture in America.

Our society no longer views the years between thirteen and nineteen in the same way we once did—not culturally and not scientifically. Once we believed that the brain was essentially finished developing by the onset of puberty, simply because it was full-sized; after that, we assumed, people were adults basically formed into whomever they were intended to be (Johnson, Blum, and Giedd 216-17). This understanding was reinforced by cultural "initiation rites" and the entrance into trades in the early twentieth century, as well; as a result, "[s]ome theorists concluded from this that the idea of adolescence was an artificial construct, a phenomenon invented in the post-Industrial Revolution years" (Wallis n.pag.). Further research changed that viewpoint, and our culture started seeing the teenage years as a time to grow and mature, which led to

attitudes of understanding toward the more reckless behavior sometimes exhibited, though punishment also went hand-in-hand with acting out. This shift was reflected in representations of teenagers on television; it was the parents' responsibility to teach their children how to be mature adults and functional members of society. Neuroscientists have now found that the teenage brain is continuously undergoing change, even into its twenties, which explains "the teenager's propensity to take risks, seek out new experiences and fail to restrain inappropriate responses" (Powell 865). These impulses translate perfectly into dramatic material, and the fact that teenagers actually retain them long past the age of eighteen offers a natural opportunity to allow their series to transition into college and beyond.

Another discovery that helps in the expansion of the genre is that offered by developmental psychologist Jeffrey Arnett almost ten years ago. In his book, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, Arnett explains that today's young people are in a much different space than those in the 1970s. Today, twenty-one-year-olds may be aimless, not hold down a steady job, be dependent on their parents for money and shelter, and not be in a committed romantic relationship, and few people look askance at them. Forty years ago, it was a much different story. People were often married in their early twenties, beginning careers and having families. The idea of that terrifies many young people in the same place in life today; now, Americans do not usually get married and have children until their late twenties or early thirties, and it often takes that long for them to settle into a career. As Arnett explains, it is

> a time of anxiety and uncertainty, because the lives of young people are so unsettled, and many of them have no idea where their explorations will lead . . . The rise in the ages of entering marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of higher education, and prolonged job instability during the twenties, reflect the development of a new period of life for young people . . . [it is] much freer from parental control, much more a period of independent exploration. (3-4)

Arnett calls this period "emerging adulthood," more of a transitional stage than late adolescence or young adulthood, both of which come with connotations he is uncomfortable with, particularly because "young adulthood" suggests one has already entered adulthood when many members of this group clearly have not, and "late adolescence" evokes markers of the adolescent stage, such as going to high school and going through certain biological changes (Arnett 2).

Emerging adulthood has arisen as a result of how we view adulthood as a concept. No longer something to be hoped for, it is something we avoid at all costs (Arnett 6). Being an adult is scary and frustrating; it means the beginning of responsibilities and the end of fun—no more leaving for the weekend on a whim to go see a concert or a friend in another state. Thursday nights become resting up for the next day of work instead of staying out until the wee hours of the morning; instead of going to clubs on the weekends, an adult has to stay in with the spouse and kids. It is a never-ending list of clichés from any number of internet memes from the "before college/after college" category. This attitude is reflected in an entire subgenre of films and television series that

are devoted to Generation X[9] and Y[10] and their refusal to fully immerse themselves in adult life after college, whether that means committing to one romantic partner or establishing themselves in a field in which they never intended to work.

This confusion and anxiety is perfectly matched to the concerns of the teen drama, where characters spend multiple seasons searching for what really makes them happy and romantic arcs can last years. It also allows for a wider range of scripts; audiences are wise to the *Saved by the Bell* style of writing, in which characters seemingly age but stay in the same grade for two years, but it has become another generally established rule that college stories do not work well in the genre.[11] With the exception of series based around educational institutions or storylines, education is generally left in the background at this point, leaving viewers to wonder if the characters could possibly be making the grades to allow them to graduate—the series will rarely show them going to class, if ever. Short of simply skipping these years altogether with a flash-forward, using an emerging adulthood perspective rather than the traditional structure of life opens the narrative up to a much wider range of thematic options and lets the main characters bring in new friends and foes that would not have made sense otherwise.

---

[9] Coined by Douglas Copeland in his book *Generation X*, the generation born after the baby boomers is roughly defined as those born from 1965-1980 and tends to come with a slacker mythos, something reinforced by popular culture—see films such as *Reality Bites*—but the more pervasive message was working for passion, rather than money and in general rejecting Boomer ideals (Stephey).

[10] The generation born immediately after Generation X, Generation Y/the Millennial Generation (Generation Y is often used internationally and has less derogatory overtones) has conflicting definitions in terms of the timespan in which they were born. However, the term "Millennial Generation" itself was first proposed by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book *Millennials Rising*, where they identify them as the generation born between 1982-2004, so that is the definition I choose to use. Strauss and Howe see the group as more positive and upbeat than Generation X, as well as generally subjected to more pressure from adults. The combination will theoretically lead to greatness from the group.

[11] For a considered examination of this phenomenon, see Sarah D. Bunting's October 28, 2015 article in *Vulture*, "Why Do High-School Shows Have So Much Trouble Graduating to College?"

Those who study the brain are not the only scholars to reexamine how we view this age group. This trend is mirrored in the genre's parallel in fiction—young adult literature. Here, the age of the audience and content material have shifted greatly since its beginning, which, in America, essentially came alongside the solidification of the concept of adolescence as a whole. America's teenagers saw themselves represented in novels like Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen* (1916), which inspired the long-running comic strip *Harold Teen* three years later. Perhaps of greatest interest to this study is the arrival of the *Archie* comics; central character Archie Andrews first appeared in *Pep Comics No. 22* on December 22, 1941, and he and the gang have been reflecting teen culture ever since (Cart 3-6). Currently, they have yet another television series premiering as a midseason replacement for the 2016-2017 season; however, this is not the happy *Archie* animation of yore. The CW series, *Riverdale*, is a dark teen soap that begins with finding the submerged body of Jason Blossom, part of Archie's larger social circle.

Depending on the context in which one is discussing it, young adult fiction has a wide audience. Sales from the last five years demonstrate that adults find it very enjoyable—as many do its televisual counterpart—but strict literary definition can limit the audience somewhat. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) defines the audience as twelve- to eighteen-year-olds; their concept of audience is those readers an author has in mind as consuming their books as the author writes them. However, young adult literature scholar Michael Cart feels that including those adolescents in middle school is problematic since the books written for them are different in theme and scope. He argues that these books should really be termed "middle school"

and not "YA" (120). Cart's determination of young adult fiction is that which centers on characters ages sixteen to twenty-five.

This is a distinction television has already made with the teen series as a whole; the middle school age group dominates family-friendly comedy on tween-centered networks like the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon. It is so broadly appealing that network executives have even revived older series that proved successful to reach those audiences' children, such as Disney's *Girl Meets World*, a series that follows Riley, the eldest child of *Boy Meets World*'s Cory and Topanga Matthews. However, these series are concerned with hijinks and innocent issues like first crushes, not heavier themes such as drug addiction, sexual assault, and domestic violence, all of which are seen in the teen drama and young adult fiction.

In attempting to redefine and refocus the conversation around the teen drama, it is helpful to make this comparison to young adult fiction, not only because it is increasingly becoming the basis of series material, but also because, on a basic level, one needs to understand where a genre's attention lies before attempting to analyze it. A literal definition of the teen drama genre would require that these shows focus on characters between the ages of thirteen and nineteen—and only those characters. Perhaps it would be understandable to let a series go a season or two longer to let the storylines wrap up neatly and satisfy fans (or, more cynically, to fulfill contracts), but there would not be anything like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where the heroine's first love interest's mental age is over two hundred years old even though his physical body has not aged past his mid-twenties. Either way, his presence serves to disqualify the show. These series also do

not typically have young teenage characters; if these young men and women are at the lower end of the teen range—that is, thirteen and fourteen—they are often younger brothers and sisters and not taken very seriously, nor do they have real storylines of their own at these ages. These characters generally serve as irritants for our protagonists; for the writers, they are a guarantee for later seasons since they will continue on in the high school after their siblings graduate. In these series' most basic forms, they are written about characters roughly ages fifteen to twenty-one, with the protagonist usually on the younger side when the series opens. If the series begins with the characters at fifteen, it is often to allow the telling of stories around them turning sixteen, an important milestone in American life. The upper end of that range allows for older siblings and love interests, as well as an expansion of audience.

Despite these complications with labeling, television scholars and critics tend to classify several types of series as teen drama and often with little regard for their distinct qualities. To address this issue, this project will focus on three subgenres of teen drama—the family drama, the teen soap, and the young adult fantasy drama—though additional subgenres could be identified and discussed in a longer project. Each has a degree of connection to the others, but they differ so wildly in focus and execution that it is irresponsible to lump them in together. All three subgenres all concern themselves with teenagers and their lives, but because their writers and producers approach the task in such varied ways, the ultimate product can end up looking quite different. For example, it could be argued that coming of age is something that all of these series deal with—why have a subgenre devoted to it? Quite simply, here is one place where these subtle

differences are highlighted: in a coming-of-age series, teen subjectivities are privileged. Their concerns are the focus of the narrative; these matters are the building blocks of the character and season arcs. When one looks back at the series, mentally arranging storylines is done through "when characters X and Y broke up for the first time" and "when character Z's childhood friend died of an overdose." There is no overarching metaphor; the issues of adolescence are laid bare on the screen for the characters to work through and the audience to experience vicariously. Contrast this style with the young adult fantasy drama, which also works with this same subject matter, but much less straightforwardly.

At one point, two popular characters—*Dawson's Creek*'s Jack McPhee and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Willow Rosenberg—dealt with coming out in a small town around the turn of the twenty-first century. While LGBTQ characters are common in teen dramas now, they were not at the time—interestingly, the 1999-2000 season for both series. Additionally, the *Dawson's Creek* storyline is significant historically because it featured the first gay kiss on network television, in May 2001. Jack's story revolves around coming out of the closet because of an English assignment and the fallout he faces as the school's only out student; it is a moving and sincere storyline, particularly for an early coming-of-age drama, but not a complicated one. Jack deals with a great deal of public pushback because he wants to enjoy playing football and go to prom in high school and join a fraternity in college, among other things, so the majority of his narrative has to do with local and interpersonal activism.

On the other hand, Willow's story remains anything but simple.[12] After beginning to dabble in magic during her senior year in high school, she joins the college Wiccans and meets Tara Maclay, a witch with real powers, unlike the rest of the group. As they work together to deepen their knowledge of magic, Willow realizes she is attracted to Tara, beginning the series' intertwining of magic and lesbian interaction. This is both implicit—casting certain spells is orgasmic—and explicit, such as when Tara's father arrives for her twentieth birthday and, looking around her room, which is filled with magical artifacts and leftovers of spells cast with Willow, accuses her, "You don't even try to hide it anymore" ("Family," 5.6). Throughout the series, even past Tara's death, Willow learns this lesson from Tara, and the former shy bookworm emerges as a powerful witch and an unapologetic lesbian.

Detractors of the Teen Drama

Despite these differences, television critics[13] and scholars[14] typically lump every teen drama into one large category, and one must wonder why when it has become increasingly clear as more and more offerings flood the market that the series in this genre can have very little in common. A major issue lies in our view of teen television; as Louisa Ellen Stein has pointed out in "Pushing at the Margins: Teenage Angst in Teen TV and Audience Response," it "is itself a contested and heavily weighted liminal

---

[12] The *Buffy* series continues in comic format and Willow is still a vital character.
[13] See any number of recent articles in *Vulture* or *TVLine* or descriptors in *TV Guide*. One example would be Margaret Lyons's July 15, 2015 advice column in *Vulture*, "What Teen Shows Should I Watch? Here Are 101 Suggestions." It is a very thorough list that would be at home in any scholar's files in which she goes so far as to break series down into special descriptors to help readers decide if they would enjoy them—the UK's *Misfits* "fits in with the magical-puberty model" (Lyons n.p)—but overall, hour-long series without great comedic flair are simply teen dramas in her rhetoric.
[14] Refer to footnote number 1.

category, mired in industrial and popular perceptions of consumerist, poor-quality TV" (225). Teen drama is remarkably devalued, understood to be simply a type of series that focuses on the social and romantic problems of high schoolers—problems that can seem contrived for maximum dramatic potential. This is the basis of one type of teen drama, but it can hardly be applied to every subgenre, and—it must be noted—those issues are not unimportant and should not be dismissed as irrelevant televisual material. The rhetoric thrown against it is eerily similar to that written about soap opera, a genre scholars have written adeptly and remarkably about, yet still seems to need recovery in the public eye.

However, there are a few common threads in the genre as a whole. The hallmark of teen drama is intense feeling, and emotions will consistently run high for both the characters and the audience. Unlike soap operas, for example, which have the idea of distraction built in with their constant shifts in narrative focus and commercial breaks, teen dramas assume constant audience attention.[15] A great deal is covered in forty-three minutes. In terms of character types, "teen television drama makes a point of celebrating difference and championing otherness in its narrative, asking audiences to sympathise with the respectful and morally upstanding high school nerds and social misfits rather than the more ostensibly popular teen stereotypes" (Feasey 48). Even when those traditionally popular stereotypes are featured as main characters, layers are pulled back to reveal anxieties and issues that make one wonder how they maintain the position.

---

[15] See Dorothy Hobson's 1982 study on the British soap opera *Crossroads*, where she notes that soap operas are constructed specifically for the rhythms of women at home, allowing them to view the series in short bursts while taking breaks for things like child care and housework, yet still letting them feel as if they are keeping up with the narrative.

Additionally, for teen characters, seemingly small problems can be life and death, and larger questions related to growing up can become existential crises. As Rachel Moseley notes, "[t]eenageness is a significant 'in-between' period, and teen drama deals with the stuff of adolescent anxiety: friendship, love, sex and impending adulthood" (42). Still, the ways in which these anxieties are dealt with differ among teen drama's subgenres, and watching even just the first seasons of these series—often only the pilot—bears this out.

The Marketing of Teen Dramas

A connected concern some detractors have with the genre lies in its marketing, both on a micro and macro level, and marketing itself would be a fascinating area for Marxist-inspired television and cultural critics. One clear distinction between a teen drama and a drama watched by teens is that the teen drama series is directly aimed at teenagers; its network is often one known for this type of programming, its cast is chosen for their teen appeal, and its promotions are directed entirely at this market. It is a profitable model, and as a result, critics find the teen drama to simply be an outgrowth of one of *30 Rock*'s Jack Donaghy's favorite concepts: synergy. Because teenagers have a great deal of spending power in American culture, a more cynical view of the genre is that it exists to sell things to those easily persuaded to buy them. Teen girls, particularly, are in what Susan Murray describes as a "process of intense self-creation and experimentation" (36), which can lead them to identify strongly with fictional characters as role models to help them decide the kind of persona they would like to show the world. Many critics have found that networks take advantage of this: "creation of youth programming and its subsequent spin-off products suggests to children that just as brand

name products could serve as a representation of a film or television show, they could also serve as symbols of identity" (Bindig 110). If viewers are searching for something to help signify that they are a disaffected outsider, what better way than to dress like their favorite televisual disaffected outsider?

This concern is not easily dismissed; one must concede points such as American Eagle and J. Crew's sponsorship of an entire season of *Dawson's Creek* or record companies paying to launch their new artists by having their songs included in the episodes of CW series. It is simply good business sense to plant your products in front of those most likely to consume them. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson note this as well in their introduction to *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*: "[t]hese instances often facilitate a linkage between different products manufactured by the same large multinational corporation and thus establish and strengthen the predominance of certain horizontally integrated media conglomerates" (9). With the growth of these large multinational corporations, networks have all become corporatized. It does make good business sense to help each other along when possible. Still, the clothes, candy, makeup, and music are only step one. As Dallas W. Smythe has established, "the principal product of the commercial mass media in monopoly capitalism . . . [is] audience power" (233). In "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work," Smythe explains that what is really at stake in media production are viewers as commodities, not the items advertised, because without the audience getting up to go buy them, advertisements are useless. Synergetic attempts may be carefully crafted by networks, but if teens do not like the products being pushed, most of them will not buy them.

Networks also think about how they will market these shows overall. Series tend to be planned in terms of their dollar value—will it do well domestically? Do we think it can get to syndication? Will this translate overseas? When considering this, particularly on a critical level, issues of globalization arise; teen dramas are "message" shows to a great extent, and they push a specific idea of America and its values. However, as Herbert I. Schiller demonstrated at the beginning of the teen drama era, "[t]oday, television is but one element, however influential, in an all-encompassing cultural package" (297) and America is but one voice in a larger international market. Schiller was writing in 1991, before the ability to watch television on the internet—today's global teens have a great deal competing for their attention, and while America's cultural messages are strongly transmitted, so are Australia's, South Korea's, and the United Kingdom's.

However, teen dramas take ideas of marketing a bit further, attempting to ensure from day one that audiences will become obsessed, not only with the series, but with the actors themselves. There are a number of ways networks work to achieve this. Casting can be almost incestuous, with leads hopping from series to series after they end, and at times resembling the old star system with the level of control networks have over the actors. For example, actress Phoebe Tonkin began working for the CW on *The Secret Circle* as Faye Chamberlain; when it was cancelled after one season in 2012, she moved to *The Vampire Diaries* to play Hayley Marshall, then took her character to its spinoff, *The Originals*, in 2013, where she has been playing the role ever since.

In terms of everyday marketing, networks have discovered a major way to create buzz for their series: paratexts. In the twenty-first century, paratexts are often begun

through social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter. It has become common for series leads to have clauses concerning the use of social media in their contracts detailing what kinds of things they may post and how often they must do it; though some take it further and engage with the fans a great deal, a careful study of some of these accounts—particularly those of the stars on Freeform, formerly ABC Family—reveal a decidedly public relations tone.[16] Generally, their posts are tame revelations of everyday life and inside looks at what goes on backstage[17], but occasionally, they "leak" information about their series, creating a giant paratext around the show as their posts are forwarded, reposted, and commented on by fans. As Jonathan Gray has pointed out, while paratexts create a richer original text, they are often motivated by the desire to increase profit (5). This practice also garners loyal followers and practically guarantees that viewers will follow these actors in whatever they choose to promote, whether that be a guest appearance by a musician whose album is about to drop or a new candy they are obsessed with. In many critics' view, these series promote conspicuous consumption, and its stars simply help things along. However, when one looks at the many series in this genre, it is clear that this marketing strategy has evolved over the years. Social media campaigns seem to be the norm now, and post-recession, series with extremely wealthy characters have also declined; while the clothes are still far from affordable for the average teenager,

---

[16] A number of celebrity social media accounts are handled by public relations professionals. The Freeform actors may have help in this way—for example, keeping things PG-13 and on-brand—but a great deal of work goes into making it look like they do not. A recent Instagram campaign showed *Shadowhunters* star Katherine McNamara enjoying Disney World with *Beyond* star Burkely Duffield. McNamara's Twitter account is primarily show-focused, but she has tweeted support of the Women's March. However, that is in line with Freeform's brand.

[17] For a perfect example of this, see *Pretty Little Liars* star Lucy Hale's Twitter account, which primarily focuses on her work promoting the series and fans' reactions to her character's romantic arc, or *Shadowhunters*' Instagram feed, which is periodically "taken over" by the stars for behind-the-scenes sneak peeks.

these actors are rarely wearing Chanel on-screen. Though teen dramas are far from perfect, few series are—it is hard to find a network series these days that does not engage in similar marketing strategies.

Generic Considerations

Perhaps the biggest obstacle toward acceptance lies in the teen drama's heritage; the genre is often snubbed for purely sexist reasons. As I will explore more fully later in the project, the teen drama borrows heavily from soap opera; the teen drama's association with seriality and rejection of more traditional narrative structure is a clear reference to this soapy lineage.[18] However, the genres share far more than this simple connection. Both have predominantly female audiences who are highly engaged with the series they enjoy, demonstrating their bonds through interactions with other fans and the cast and crew who make themselves available. That level of connection is often diminished and ridiculed in our culture and a picture painted of fans who cannot separate fantasy and reality. Most importantly, both genres suffer from what, in her book *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, Ien Ang terms "the ideology of mass culture," wherein "'female' forms of mass culture such as soap operas and popular romances are the lowest of the low, while 'male' genres such as detective and science fiction are considered able to rise above the low level of 'mass culture'" (119). The soap opera—and, by extension, the teen drama—arouse definitively negative connotations because it focuses on creating connections between its characters, whether they be

[18] It must be noted that most so-called "quality television drama" does the same, but because they tend to follow adult male protagonists, their soap roots are often ignored.

romantic, friendly, familial, or adversarial, and the narrative through which these connections are formed can often be unrealistic and idealized.

However, this emphasis on connections is a convention of the genre, as Ang also demonstrates in *Watching Dallas*, and its viewers are fully aware that what they are watching is implausible in reality. What matters to them is an emotional connection to the characters and a particular way of ordering the fictional world:

> what is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a 'structure of feeling.' It is emotions which count … This structure of feeling can be called the tragic structure of feeling; tragic because of the idea that happiness can never last for ever [*sic*] but, quite the contrary, is precarious. In the tragic structure of feeling emotional ups and downs occupy a central place . . . Life presents a problem according to the tragic structure of feeling, but that does not mean that life consists solely of problems. On the contrary, problems are only regarded as problems if there is a prospect of their solution, if, in other words, there is hope for better times. (45-6)

The audience knows the rules of the genre; these characters will go through a great deal, but there is always the idea that things will work out in the end if they persevere—"they" meaning the characters and the audience, because in both, gratification is constantly delayed.[19] The soap audience is an intelligent one—as is the teen drama audience—

[19] It should be noted that while an initial overview of soap's idea of tragedy does not mix with a literary one, the concept of tragedy in soap is open-ended, as is the narrative structure. Aristotle's concept of the fall of a great man is still at work; however, that great man will often remain on the series and cannot, in this genre, suffer constantly. His (or her) narrative is filled with ups and downs. This contributes to the

though it is often as stereotyped as the shows they love. It is true that soaps thrive on unrealistic events and heightened drama. What critics of the genre seem to willfully forget is that, *because* soap is a genre, it is supposed to do something along these lines.

Generic realism is a basic tenet of genre studies, as Jason Mittell has shown in his study, *Television and American Culture*:

> a set of form and content norms that viewers can expect to be followed within a particular program, and thus feels 'real' to a viewer. A cartoon character can get back up from a fatal fall even when the same accident would cause death in other genres; our expectations for the rules of the storyworld depend on our expectations of generic realism. (238)

Think of *Family Guy*'s Peter Griffin, who routinely gets into life-threatening fights with an adult-sized chicken and nearly dies each time—yet somehow is perfectly fine in the next scene. Much like Peter, soap characters constantly come back from the dead or near-dead and their lives often seem to consist of nothing but conflict, but viewers are not really surprised. Savvy fans simply wonder if an absence was due to contract negotiations, a stint on another series, or personal issues and assume that the conflict-riddled character is a fan (and likely writer) favorite—and therefore unlikely to leave the series anytime soon. Because audiences have the necessary cultural capital to understand the subtext, they realize when things in their storyworld are light enough to engage with

---

pleasure of the audience—which, in turn, ties into Northrup Frye's ideas of tragedy, the catharsis of pity and fear.

other fans on social media—perhaps get a snack—and when things are so dire that their show demands their complete attention.

The Shape of This Project

In this study, my purpose is to show how the American teen drama has evolved since its early years—primarily, since it began to dominate teen culture approximately twenty years ago with the beginnings of the WB network—so that these series can no longer all be properly painted with the same brush; the term "teen drama" is now becoming as general as "comedy." I assert that because of the evolution of this genre, there are now multiple subgenres under the teen drama umbrella. To help develop this claim, in Chapter Two, I analyze several foundational series under three of the subgenres—the family drama, the teen soap, and the young adult fantasy drama—to show how different these shows really are in terms of iconography and themes. The teen soap is often used interchangeably with the teen drama in everyday language, particularly by mainstream television critics, but as Chapter Two will show, soaps are much different in tone and style than the average drama—and in a teen series, the characters are distinctively drawn depending on the subgenre they inhabit. A teen soap villain, for example, would be greatly out of place in the family drama; their machinations would be far too intense for that world. In a similar fashion, the teens of the young adult fantasy drama already act like adults, so in many ways, they would enjoy some time in the family drama, where parents have high expectations of their teens; however, they would be frustrated once they realized that having parents around a great deal of the time equals

more rules and supervision, something missing in their world of large scale power struggles.

In Chapters Three through Five of this study, I examine specific series from three popular subgenres; the discussions in these chapters shift away from the larger concerns about genre explored in Chapters One and Two to focus specifically on the cultural work in three highly rated, if not always highly regarded, series. Chapter Three focuses on *Gilmore Girls*—widely held to be a feminist series with its powerful mother-daughter love above all, pro-education, strong female friendship, and pro-matriarchal household ideas; after a discussion of the feminist messages of the original series, I consider whether the show's recent revival series, *A Year in the Life*, has changed the show and main characters' overall ethos. This chapter argues that while the series makes gestures toward a feminist foundation for their narrative (and even implies their two main female characters, Rory and Lorelai, are feminists) the ways in which Rory and Lorelai ignore their class privilege suggests an acceptance of white liberal feminist thought—a real issue for a series whose creator insists her show has no message. Also, the addition of *A Year in the Life* to the diegesis enhances Rory's storyline and character, particularly, highlighting white liberal feminism's problematic ideas of merit- and class-based achievement. Chapter Four turns to the outrageously successful teen soap *Pretty Little Liars*. This series does not get a great deal of scholarly attention[20], though television critics give it plenty of virtual ink; critics (quite naturally) prefer to ruminate over the identity of A and various other secrets that actually have been revealed. In this chapter, I

[20] However, there is a forthcoming book on the Freeform network that will have at least one chapter on the series.

look at the series' debt to slasher films to argue that *Pretty Little Liars* subverts the generic expectations of the soap to push the teen soap in new directions. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will turn to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to investigate how the young adult fantasy drama has dealt with patriarchal dominance; here, the heroine must deal with it on every level—her power is the product of great gendered violence, her town is run by misogynists, she has been born into the body of a small, easily physically dominated woman, and at the beginning of the series, she is underage. This chapter argues that the series uses Buffy's position as the Slayer in Sunnydale—a center of demonic activity—to show that communal action is preferable and more effective as a model of management than traditional, patriarchal, top-down hierarchies. By contrasting Buffy, who works with her friends—each with their own talents and powers—to defeat the town's monsters (and sometimes regular humans) with the series' Big Bads, *Buffy* offers a clear, workable model of feminist participatory government.

By juxtaposing three important subgenres, this project fills a gap in existing scholarship and gestures to other areas for consideration. These three subgenres only partially account for the multifaceted aspects of teen drama. The conclusion points to directions for future scholarship, particularly through genre-bending series like *Reign* (a historical multigenerational soap) and *East Los High* (a teen soap with an overtly didactic message). Thus, through describing thematic elements and iconographies of three subgenres and analyzing the cultural work of three important series, this project represents an important step toward taking the teen drama scholarship beyond the soap.

CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since teen drama as a genre has been neglected by most scholars, this project draws on scholarship from several related fields, primarily film studies and television studies, to provide a foundation for discussions of genre theory. While a great deal has been written about literary and film genre, the corpus is comparatively small regarding television genre in terms of how to define it theoretically. Scholars have shown great interest in individual genres—the soap opera being of the most use to this project—but ideas of what makes television genres what they are continue to emerge. Additionally, teen television suffers from a dearth of scholarly attention to the genre as a whole; critical writing remains, for the most part, about the issues explored within individual shows. Some scholars will draw attention to patterns within the genre but few take the time to unpack the subgeneric similarities therein. In order to undertake this project, it was necessary to survey the major voices that would have an impact on my claims. Before turning to an analysis of specific subgenres in Chapter Two, it is important to understand relevant work in film and television studies.

Film Studies

Since much early television scholarship has its roots in film studies, we will consider film genre first. Beginning in the 1940s in the United States and Europe—particularly in France—books and articles on individual Hollywood genres, perhaps most notably by critics like Andre Bazin and Robert Warshow; however, it was in the late 1960s that Film Studies began to establish itself as an academic discipline to be taken seriously. As a result, this period saw significant critical argument about the concept of

film genre, and a small corpus of theory emerged. In the beginning—and sometimes, even today—work on genre suffered from prescriptivism (Gledhill 58; Grant, *Film Genre Reader* xv-xviii).

One of the greatest issues that seemed to develop was over the very term *genre* and what it represented: our roots in literary studies, a place most of us were no longer working. John Cawelti was using Northrup Frye to make his case; Edward Buscombe could not seem to focus on a field, switching from using Aristotle's terms of "tragedy, epic, lyric, and so forth" (11) and then later discussing the western by comparing it to writing a sonnet. The impression one gets is that too many scholars were attempting to give a sense of quality to their work. Others went another direction, examining just what effect our growth from literary studies had on the field itself.

Andrew Tudor's "Genre" (1973) considers the complex discourse behind even using the term "genre." The piece begins by noting that while scholars do not own the term—everyday filmgoers recognize and use it—"genre" carries a bit more weight for us. He spends some time on the Western, a common analysis in film studies, in order to make his point that he has problems with what he terms "the empiricist dilemma" (5) of establishing a body of films for a genre, examining them, then pulling generic qualities from them afterward. Tudor argues that

> the crucial factors that distinguish a genre are not only characteristics inherent in the films themselves; they also depend on the particular culture in which we are operating . . . Genre notions—except the special case of arbitrary definition—are

> not critics; classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be. (6-7)

Tudor's work anticipates that of later scholars, like Jason Mittell and Louisa Ellen Stein, who argue that genre is a fluid category.

Another important early scholar John G. Cawelti who made a space for himself in film studies with three books: *The Six-Gun Mystique*, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, and *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Cawelti's work tends to focus on sociocultural significance as well as key elements of popular film genres. In terms of genre theory's main strands, looking at aesthetics and describing sociocultural significance, Cawelti follows the latter. Specifically, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1970) takes a ritual approach, wherein what Cawelti here terms "formula"—and later acknowledges to be an imprecise expression—"is a conventional system for structuring cultural products" (29). He goes further in the book by breaking down the characters, setting, and patterns found in the Western. The main issue with Cawelti's analysis is his reliance on Northrup Frye's work and his refusal to engage in any meaningful way with other ideas of genre. Cawelti ignores the word in favor of "formula," conflating its use with genre throughout the study when the two actually mean two different things—there is a formula at work in genre films, but, as Tudor's work implies, the execution may vary at different times and in different places. Cawelti's analysis bears this out, so his deliberate eliding of the nuances of genre is puzzling.

In *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999), Cawelti attempts to correct this error in his introduction, wherein he goes into a deeper analysis of genre, formula, and myth—

another term he admits he was using formula in place of "to bypass the more complex artistic meanings of genre and the kind of cultural and archetypal meanings associated with myth" (8). Cawelti admits to an evolution of feeling on the topic, now leaning more toward the "family resemblance" school of thought on genre, but still feels it is important to "try to sort out the dominant patterns which seem present in the great majority of Westerns" (9). He also moves to more specific language, writing of the "Western genre" along with the "Western formula." *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* is a greatly expanded version of his original study—the first book is essentially chapter two—and includes an overview of the development of the Western genre. Cawelti stresses that "the first step in the analysis of any artistic construction, canonic or popular, must be the definition of its elements and their relations" (12). In my study, I will take a similar approach, breaking down three of the teen drama's more popular subgenres in this fashion so that their code can be more fully understood.

Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (1976) is less of a strict film study, but it is equally applicable here. Cawelti remains interested in formula, though he has moved to distinguishing it from genre at this time, possibly because this book focuses primarily on literature rather than film. He suggests that "[f]ormula and genre might be best understood not as denoting two different things, but as reflecting two phases or aspects of a complex process of literary analysis" (7). Mixing analysis of genre literature and film, he attempts to outline those issues that scholars must deal with when we examine "formulaic literature" and give some examples of how one might approach them. Cawelti asserts that

> [f]ormulas are cultural products and in turn presumably have some sort of influence on culture because they become conventional ways of representing and relating certain images, symbols, themes, and myths. The process through which formulas develop, change, and give way to other formulas is a kind of cultural evolution with survival through audience selection. (20)

Cawelti also notes that previously ignored or oppressed cultural groups become new targets for genre literature and film as they come to a "new . . . self-consciousness" (35), offering a potentially fruitful space for interrogation that he does not pursue. However, this is not surprising—though these moments of "genre play" were and are interesting for scholars, they are natural phases of genre evolution wherein more diverse faces and voices come into the corpus.

In the 1980s and 1990s, informed by an infusion of critical theory, there was a revival of interest in genre in American film; several of these projects remain at the top of the field today. Arguing from different perspectives, Rick Altman, Steve Neale, and Graeme Turner point to broader implications of genre that inform my work here. Altman's "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" (1984), later greatly expanded into *Film/Genre* (1999), moves away from the idea that genre can be encapsulated by a checklist accompanied by examples. In dealing with these issues, Altman proposes a new model: the semantic/syntactic approach to genre study. By semantic, he means the characters, locations, shots, traits—iconographical elements—and "the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged" (30). He stresses that the semantic and syntactic go together; "choose the semantic view and you give up *explanatory power*;

choose the syntactic approach and you do without *broad applicability*" (31). While it can be helpful to do each on their own, particularly in shorter examinations—perhaps of individual texts or cycles—a full and complete study of a genre is only accomplished with both. Genre study is dual by nature because not all genre films are created the same; if they were, they would fail. Altman proposes this model because it allows scholars to get into the real problems of genre study as well as adeptly examine those films that innovatively play with genre.

In *Genre and Hollywood* (2000), Steve Neale proposes that previous genre scholarship, largely that of the 1960s and 1970s, has "been driven by critical and theoretical agendas rather than by a commitment to detailed empirical analysis and thorough industrial and historical research . . . these accounts are usually underpinned by received definitions of genre [which are] open to question on theoretical grounds" (1). According to Neale, genre needs to be thought of multidimensionally—it is not only made up of films. Genres

> consist also of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process. These systems provide spectators with means of recognition and understanding. They help render individual films, and the elements within them, intelligible, and therefore, explicable. They offer a way of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen . . . (Neale 31)

Genres offer audience satisfaction from an industrial perspective, but they also allow them to feel cognitively comfortable while watching the film. Neale is also interested in

"inter-textual relay"—a borrowed term—which is essentially generic expectations due to generic intertextuality and paratexts going on at the time.

Graeme Turner points out that genre has another side: it acknowledges that the audience is a fan of it. These films play with what has come before. In *Film as Social Practice* (1999), he writes that "intertextuality . . . polices the boundaries of an audience's expectations. It can tell them what to expect or it can deliberately mislead them by offering expectations that are not going to be met" (97) He notes that this is a delicate balance; some films fail because they are simply boring—they have not put enough spin on the generic building blocks—and others are too experimental. Audiences need to have enough experience with the genre to be able to read the film correctly, but the filmmaker should also set up a satisfying resolution. In the teen drama, this is especially relevant; teen films and television, particularly beginning in the 1990s with the WB generation, are hyperliterate in their own genres and expect their audience to follow along. As a result, the grammar of teen drama has become fairly established, even among the subgenres as they have evolved, allowing for a clear analysis.

Television Studies

For the majority of the beginning of television studies—the mid-1970s[1] until the turn of the century—it was treated as an outgrowth of film studies. As a result, the majority of early work relied heavily on film genre scholarship, particularly in its terminology and theoretical roots. Scholars often ignored the issues brought up by the

[1] The field is generally held to have begun in earnest with the publication of Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art* in 1974.

dissonance of the difference in structure between film and television, mainly in terms of narrative, and those who did recognize that the theory in place at the time was simply insufficient generally relied on the disclaimer "more work is needed." Still, there were voices out there calling for stronger critical attention to the difference between film and television, though television studies work in genre did not truly develop as we know it until the mid-to-late 1990s.

Feminist scholars led the way with their analyses of soap opera in the 1980s, principally in Britain, but in America, Jane Feuer was a pioneer in the field, discussing television genre in general. In her article, "Genre Study and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, Feuer calls for a distinction in the way we use the term "genre" in literature, film, and television. It is her assertion that television genres work differently than film genres, and especially literary genres, which are longer lasting and not temporally or culturally bound. She also gives a good overview of genre study up to the point of writing (1987, revised in 1992), noting that there are three main approaches—aesthetic, ritual, and ideological—and offers an industrial perspective, as well: "the classical Hollywood narrative style and genres help to regulate the production of difference by producing their own differences within very circumscribed differences of similarity" (142). She ends by analyzing the situation comedy as a model of how one might take a generic approach to television analysis, noting that in "generic evolution, a genre begins with a naïve version of its particular cultural mythology, then develops toward an increasingly self-conscious awareness of its own myths and conventions" (156).

Jason Mittell's "A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory" (2001), one of his early building blocks of later monographs on the topic, argues that rather than being static containers into which we drop series based on long-ago decided-upon qualifications, genres are fluid cultural categories. Using our contemporary understanding of race—that it is a construct—as a basis of comparison, Mittell argues that "the category itself emerges from the relationships between the elements it groups together and the cultural context in which it operates . . . Genres emerge only from the intertextual relations between multiple texts, resulting in a common category" (6) This raises the obvious question: how do genres do that? Texts do not talk to each other on their own—they need an intermediary. This is where audiences and members of the industry come in. They create intertextuality and genre reproduction: "[w]e need to look outside the texts to locate the range of sites in which genres operate, change, proliferate, and die out" (7). Mittell also stresses that "genres work as *discursive clusters*, and certain definitions and meanings come together at any given time to suggest a coherent and clear genre. But these clusters are contingent and transitory, shifting over time and taking on new meanings and definitions in different contexts" (11). He ends by taking up five principles of cultural genre analysis, one of which is not generally taken up by many other scholars: essentially, we must remember that genre is always centered in some sort of power relations, something that is certainly applicable in the teen drama.

Feminist Television Studies

Particularly relevant for this project is feminist scholarship on the soap opera. Beginning in the 1970s, a good portion of the scholarship produced on television was

done by feminist scholars attempting to pull the soap into a place of real critical attention by showing how multifaceted the genre was and analyzing the cultural work it carried out. The teen drama incorporates many aspects of the soap opera and the melodrama, genres traditionally aimed at and stereotypically favored by women.

One early work on the soap that continues to resonate, though some of its claims are now dated, is Tania Modleski's "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas: Notes on a Feminine Narrative Form" (1979). Modleski is in the beginning of considering soap opera as a feminist text because of the distinct feminine pleasures it offers; she sees the problems the genre presents for feminists, but she makes a call for other feminist scholars to address the (nearly all male) critics who denigrate female-directed popular culture as "low" art, something she continues in her monograph, *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), which encompasses much more than television. The article also explores what is privileged in the genre. In contrast to the male-centered classic film narrative, "[i]n soaps, the important thing is that there always be time for a person to consider a remark's ramifications, time for people to speak and listen lavishly. Actions and climaxes are only of secondary importance" (19). Additionally, Modleski asserts that the spectator's pleasure in soap operas comes primarily from the delayed ending and fractured identification; soaps present the viewer with multiple points of view with which to identify and ask them to root for each of them—even the villain, to a certain extent. Essentially, the viewer is placed in the position of ideal mother, a soap character type, who forgives all sins in hopes that her children will right their lives and find happiness in order to bring harmony to the family.

In a seminal text in the field, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985), Ien Ang moves to a consideration of the primetime soap opera in her audience analysis of Dutch viewers of *Dallas*. She found the popularity of *Dallas* among Dutch viewers very interesting but focused her attention on attempting to explain the pleasure the audience gained from watching the series. She placed an advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine for viewers to participate in her study and primarily received answers from female participants.

In her analysis, Ang establishes a number of principles in relation to audience knowledge of genre conventions, particularly the ones that come under attack from those who denigrate soaps. For example, she notes that *Dallas*—and, one can extrapolate, other series like it—is often accused of being "unrealistic." She counters that what viewers see as true-to-life are "the concrete situations and complications [that] are rather regarded as symbolic representations of more general living experiences; rows, intrigues, problems, happiness and misery . . . In this sense the realism of *Dallas* can be called an 'emotional realism'" (44-5). In addition, Ang argues, the series functions in a "tragic structure of feeling" (72) wherein the characters are set up to fail in their pursuit of happiness because the overarching narrative structure is built upon conflict. Ultimately, the "good" characters may find peace for a time, but the villain(s) will remain in the background, waiting to pounce. This works especially well when viewers have a "melodramatic imagination" (79), defined by Peter Brooks as a way of making "the world we inhabit one charged with meaning, one in which interpersonal relations are not merely contacts of the flesh, but encounters that must be carefully nurtured, judged, handled as if they mattered"

(qtd. in 79). Ang makes it clear that the melodramatic imagination is not the only way to derive pleasure from *Dallas*, but it is certainly a common one. She also takes on claims that the series is low mass culture and a blow to feminism—claims she finds in her respondents' letters—and comes to the understanding that for many letter writers, there seems to be a need to justify why they watch the series because of the ideology of mass culture.

Laura Stempel Mumford offers a useful explanation of the aspects of soap opera in 1995's *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women, and Television Genre*, making her distinctions not from function, as previous scholars have, but from "the specific characteristics of the genre itself" (18), which, as she notes, is important, because it allows us to imagine what the genre could be, rather than what it is at the moment. In addition, Mumford examines the issues of closure in the soap opera, arguing that closure does exist in the genre—that the problems other scholars have found are actually reopening of previously resolved storylines. In the episode itself, irresolution is typical, but viewers enjoy the pastime of attempting to figure out how things will resolve themselves.

In *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970* (1996), Bonnie Dow explains that we must remember that television series are texts produced in and as a result of cultural moments, and as such, must be read for the cultural messages they promote. Using *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *One Day at a Time*, *Designing Women*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, she points out that each series has a different version of feminism on screen; *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s

Mary is a "lifestyle feminist"; the women of *One Day at a Time* utilize "therapeutic feminism"; *Designing Women* works with, and occasionally goes beyond, "women's issue" feminism; *Murphy Brown* represents the postfeminist era; and *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* offers a response to questions about postfeminism, specifically what a woman is—she is a mother. Dow also shows that until this point, while *what* a feminist was has been handled differently, *who* a feminist was has been made quite clear: they are "white, middle-class, heterosexual women: the women who have benefited the most from the movement's gains and who are in the best position to practice individualist feminism" (207). Still, she notes, there is no danger in enjoying these shows as long as viewers do not forget that they are incomplete representations.

In reading Dow's work today, one is reminded of Susan Douglas's seminal study, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (1995). Though these works were published nearly contemporarily, their historical foci vary slightly; while Dow looks at television, Douglas reflects on popular culture artifacts as varied as film, television, music, and advertising. However, Douglas also goes a step further and indicts American society for producing multiple generations of women—though she admittedly spends much time on her own—who are confused about their place in it: "American women today are a bundle of contradictions because much of the media imagery we grew up with was itself filled with mixed messages about what women should and should not do, what women could and could not be. This was true in the 1960s, and it is true today" (9). As Douglas notes, during her youth—and, like today—it was impossible to escape images of women in the media, because preteen and teen girls were its target. However,

as television reinforced ideas of women staying in their places and being longsuffering with series like *I Dream of Jeannie*, girls heard the music of The Shirelles, who had an entirely different message. With songs like "I Met Him on a Sunday," the girl group preached agency and owning one's feelings. The song does not end happily for "him"—he ignores the lead singer after a kiss on Thursday, so she says goodbye when he shows back up on Saturday. Douglas's thesis still rings true in the 21st century, where we have supposedly eliminated outwardly sexist messages in teen culture; however, we can still see these contradictions in upcoming generations.

In 1997, Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel put together an edited collection, *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, which remains an excellent resource in feminist television studies. Two articles that are useful in the context of this study are Annette Kuhn's "Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera, and Theory" and Ien Ang's "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy." In Kuhn's piece, she concerns herself with the soap opera audience: "first, the problem of gendered spectatorship, secondly, questions concerning the universalism as against the historical specificity of conceptualizations of gendered spectatorship; and thirdly, the relationship between film and television texts and their social, historical, and institutional contexts" (146). She comes to the conclusion that previous examinations of the soap audience has forgotten one important aspect of their construction in scholars' interest in viewers as spectators —they are a social audience, which involves the ideas of their economic contribution to the industry as well as their ability to be counted and categorized.

In her analysis, Kuhn also asserts that "soaps and melodrama inscribe femininity in their address, [so] women—as well as being already formed *for* such representations—are in a sense also formed *by* them" (150), though she is careful to note that she does not equate femaleness and femininity, as a female spectator can be addressed in the masculine, and the reverse is true as well. Ultimately, Kuhn decides that her questions may not fully be addressed at this time, but she does feel that Charlotte Brunsdon's work may come closest; for Brunsdon, "the spectator addressed by soap opera is constructed within culture rather than by representation" (152). In other words, the audience is already divided by gender because of the cultural capital required to parse the text—not just familiarity with the serial form, but knowledge of what is and is not appropriate behavior in interpersonal relationships and family dynamics.

Ien Ang's contribution to the collection, "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy" offers an extension of her thoughts on soap opera and the melodramatic imagination, as well as some specific qualities that help distinguish a soap opera. She again uses *Dallas* as part of her formal study; however, she notes that moving a soap opera to primetime necessitates some expansion of "themes, scenes, and plots" (158) in order to reach a wider audience—namely, things traditionally appreciated by a male audience, like business dealings, and in the case of *Dallas*, a Western setting. Ang notes that in soap, like in melodrama, "personal life is the core problematic of the narrative" (158); it should be understood that this is dealt with through personal relationships. Secondly, soaps can be recognized for their excessively complicated plot structure. These characters are constantly under attack from their

universe. However, it is important to note that while from the outside these problems seem excessive and contrived, within the diegesis, this is simply how the world works, so the characters take everything that comes their way quite seriously. Finally, soaps are known for their "lack of narrative progress . . . [wherein] a basic melodramatic idea is conveyed: the sense that life is marked by eternal contradiction, by unsolvable emotional and moral conflicts, by the ultimate impossibility, as it were, of reconciling desire and reality" (160). Ang ends by looking at the idea of the subject position, as is common in writing from this period, but unlike many other scholars, she is frustrated with the idea that viewers are ever in any one subject position; she argues that women often try on a number of types of femininities or feminine subject positions.

Teen Television Studies

The first major collection on the teen drama series was put forth by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson in 2004. *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, and Identity* tackles just what its title implies, and its contributors offer varied and helpful approaches to the genre. Jenny Bavidge's "Chosen Ones: Reading the Contemporary Heroine" is an important early work in a growing bibliography of analysis of teen heroines in young adult popular culture. Here, she concerns herself with Buffy Summers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and how the series "enables, and has offered up, an interrogation of the social and cultural construction of female adolescence. That is, over its seasons, *Buffy* has explored how one comes to be—and, indeed, what it means to be—a girl" (41). Specifically, Bavidge means the "Anglo-American girl," a Western construct that she asserts begins in nineteenth-century novels and has continued to the present, albeit with some

modernization. Today's Girl has recurring themes that show up in the series: "the importance of education; the difficulty of splitting duties between home and work; and, perhaps primarily, the search for what it means to be a girl—that is, whether it's something she's 'born with' or an identity she can paint on along with her mascara" (46). The idea of performing girlhood and/or femininity is of particular interest to this project as it will come into play in my exploration of the young adult fantasy drama's semiotic code.

In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom* (2008), Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein make a valuable effort to help define the genre; Stein is known for her commitment to more fluid ideas concerning genre, terming generic mixing "transgenericism" elsewhere[2], so the book includes more articles dealing with industrial practices and audience discourses. Valerie Wee's essay, "Teen Television and the WB Television Network," does an excellent job outlining the beginnings of the WB and how it built an identity aimed at teens and those who imagined themselves to have a more youth-oriented lifestyle. The network also specifically assembled a stable of teen series that reflected the style of quality television but were adapted to the interests of their teen demographic. In "Riding the Third Wave: The Multiple Feminisms of *Gilmore Girls*," Francesca Gamber argues that the series can be categorized as feminist not just because it is primarily populated by women but because it shows a multiplicity of feminisms and does not make Rory—and, by extension, its viewers—choose between them. *Gilmore Girls* also stresses the performativity of gender through Rory's journey to adulthood; she

[2] Louisa Ellen Stein. "'They Cavort, You Decide.' Transgenericism, Queerness, and Fan Interpretation in Teen TV." *Spectator* 25.1 (Spring 2005): 11-22.

tries on feminine models in her teen years by imitating the women in her life. As she moves into her college years, Gamber maintains, Rory comes into her own expression of femininity and feminism.

Another line of interest in the teen drama comes in the representation of the everyday teenager. One series that drew attention in this regard was *Dawson's Creek*. Matt Hills' piece on the series from *Teen TV*, "*Dawson's Creek*: 'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'?" addresses the issue that still follows the series today: do teens really speak this way? Hills argues that the series makes an attempt to show teenagers as people worthy of attention and respect, rather than the adult-sized children television so often portrayed them as at the point of the series' debut. In treating these teen characters as people with hopes, dreams, and real problems, the series positions itself as quality television as well. As Hills contends,

> *Dawson's Creek*'s 'hyper-articulacy' occurs in part, I want to suggest, due to the programme's bid for cultural value. Its teens become 'hyper-articulate' because by making this move, the programme can align itself with cultural ideals of self-transparency, reflexivity and agency. Quality teen TV is, perhaps, not only about textual self-reflexivity or self-referentiality, it is also about the reflexivity that teen characters display. (59)

Hills points out that all of this talking about themselves does not just make it clear that these teens are smart, but they are actively trying to grow emotionally and make progress in their interpersonal relationships. Using this as a marker of quality teen television is

threatening to those who automatically use "adult" as part of the checklist of quality television—no longer can they say that teen automatically equals immature.

Turning more specifically to audience, Louisa Ellen Stein's latest offering, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age* (2015), contends that the millennial and fan are both constructs, noting significant research and discourse concerning each that comes to name them and deconstruct their habits and concerns.[3] Stein's main contribution to current scholarship is that millennials operate in an interesting dichotomy, hope/noir, which is evident in their television. She defines millennial television more broadly than teen television, including series that begin when the main characters are in their mid-twenties—essentially, series that have proven popular with the demographic and are a bit darker in tone. Stein asserts that the hopeful millennial series negotiate the generation's concerns with issues of gender, sexuality, race, and disability, particularly through *Glee* and its message of inclusiveness. Millennial noir, however, is more ambivalent. Series like *Pretty Little Liars* portray millennials as powerful and dangerous, impossible to contain—and therefore a threat to the adult world. Stein also investigates the ways in which these series deal with gender issues in the millennium—what does it mean to be female in this generation?

---

[3] For the fandom studies basics, see Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992. Print); Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002. Print); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York UP, 2006. Print); and Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York UP, 2013. Print). The definitive work establishing what millennials are and will be remains Neil Howe and William Strauss's *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000. Print), though it has become popular for freelancers to market themselves as "millennial specialists" to businesses.

Perhaps the most industrious scholars in this area are those in the cottage industry of Whedon Studies, formerly known as Buffy Studies. Arising from the initial publication of Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery's *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer (2002)—and their later founding of *Slayage*, the Whedon Studies journal—the *Buffy* bibliography grows rapidly each year. In their introduction to the book, the editors explain how the series qualifies as "quality television," using Robert J. Thompson's characteristics, helping to establish it as such. *Fighting the Forces* includes a number of thought-provoking approaches to *Buffy*, including Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto's analysis of the uses of speech acts as weapons in the series—something particularly interesting in light of how female characters employ them against male aggression. Rhonda V. Wilcox's essay, "'Who Died and Made Her the Boss?' Patterns of Mortality in *Buffy*," examines the connections the series makes between death and patriarchy and how *Buffy*'s feminism intersects in that narrative to comment on larger issues of gender and violence. Wilcox also authored one of the earliest monographs in the discipline, *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of* Buffy the Vampire Slayer (2005), which takes as its task showing her audience the aesthetic pleasures of the series—essentially, she proves why so many scholars with literary backgrounds have such deep appreciation for the series, exposing *Buffy*'s deep roots in mythology, poetry, psychology, and music.

The scholarship is multidisciplined, but gender relations in the series is a major concern. An early work in the field, Lorna Jowett's *Sex and the Slayer* (2005) examines how the series represents not only what it means to be feminine or masculine, but how men and women relate to one another in light of *Buffy*'s position as a postmodern,

postfeminist text—one's gender identity is constantly being "constructed, reconstructed, and negotiated" (4). The book is significant in that it deals with characters not given a great deal of comparative critical attention—such as African-American characters Mr. Trick and Kendra and Buffy's minor love interests like Parker—in meaningful ways.

In 2016's *I'm Buffy and You're History:* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and Contemporary Feminism*, Patricia Pender greatly expands upon ideas first put forth in earlier articles.[4] She contends that not only is *Buffy* a third-wave feminist text, as is generally accepted in scholarly circles at this point, but is actually actively involved in critiquing and negotiating second-wave feminism for the third-wavers who watched it. Pender also positions the series as a queer feminist text, opening up interpretive possibilities for readings of characters who are fan favorites but often go overlooked, like Andrew. The author carefully handles some of the more problematic aspects of the series, such as racial representation, and spends significant space interrogating the place of gender politics and sexual dynamics in the series. The text is proof that this field is still vibrant even nearly fourteen years after *Buffy*'s televisual end.

However, despite *Buffy*'s emergence as a cottage industry, other series remain neglected. Though it ran for seven seasons and recently returned on Netflix for a four-episode revival, *Gilmore Girls* receives limited attention, with only two scholarly books and only eight articles listed in the MLA database. Despite a seven season run and a spin-

---

[4] "'I'm Buffy and you're…history': The Postmodern Politics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 35-44. Print; "'Kicking ass is comfort food': Buffy as Third Wave Feminist Icon." *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*. Eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 164-74. Print.

off, *Pretty Little Liars* is overlooked by scholars; a recent multi-database search located three articles and a book chapter. Generally speaking, scholarship on teen drama tends to focus on the concerns of a few individual series with little attention to the genre as a whole. To address this issue, Chapter Two will examine several important subgenres of the teen drama.

CHAPTER TWO: ICONOGRAPHY AS THE KEY TO SUBGENRE IDENTIFICATION AND UNDERSTANDING

Foreword

For something that ignites such spirited debate, *genre* is really a fairly insignificant word when translated from the French—it simply means "type" or "class" (Kuhn and Westwell). However, which of those words a scholar chooses when thinking about genre says a great deal about their approach: "type" or "class"? "Type" is a much more narrow word; it means that something fits into a preconceived notion, generally with a checklist. Think of the increasingly common training exercises used in American businesses: workers are sorted into types of people based on their personalities and working habits. Are you an eagle or an owl? A D or an I? There is very little room for bleeding into another category. This narrow view would be analogous to the descriptive approach to genre, which focuses on classification and definition according to a rigid set of rules—and a very small number of categories—as exemplified by the work of theorists like John Cawelti, Will Wright, and Thomas Schatz.[1] However, "class" allows for more possibilities. In other disciplines, such as biology, the word "class" is used as a taxonomic rank. In a biological class, members have things in common, but they are not the same. For example, the class *Mammalia* includes animals as varied as bats, whales, and apes. Biologists have found that these animals have a reason to be counted in this larger group for purposes of study. In the same way, the functional approach looks

[1] See John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique.* 2nd ed. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green U Popular Press, 1984. Print.; Will Wright, *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1975. Print.; Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*. Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1981. Print.

toward a text's sociohistorical context and considers how it evolves from a nation's values and anxieties. This approach, as used by film theorists such as Rick Altman, Steve Neale, and Robert Stam,[2] permits more flexibility in assigning genre; so, too, some scholars, particularly influential media theorist Jason Mittell, are more open-minded about what genre is. In this study, I also follow the functional approach; the teen drama has proven that it is much more adaptable than it may appear from a cursory viewing.

Through critical analysis of several teen dramas, I argue that there are several subgenres of the teen drama, all of which are distinctive, though they share some common concerns. Because the constraints of this project limit me from adequately addressing all of these, I have chosen to discuss three that consistently receive high critical and audience attention: the family drama, the teen soap, and the young adult fantasy drama. This chapter will briefly examine a sampling of series to establish a basic understanding of the iconography of each subgenre; an understanding of character, setting, and clothing, in particular, can illuminate distinctions among subgenres. With this basic understanding in place, later chapters will provide a thorough analysis of each subgenre by focusing on a single example and its cultural work via a series' use of feminism: *Gilmore Girls* as a family drama, *Pretty Little Liars* as a teen soap, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a young adult fantasy drama. This chapter is structured as a semiotic analysis of three subgenres in order to expose their televisual codes and show

---

[2] See Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." *Film Genre Reader II*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. 26-40. Print. Rpt. from *Cinema Journal* 23.3 (Spring 1984); Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre." Screen 31.1 (Spring 1990): 45-66; and Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. Print.

the types of cultural capital their audiences are gathering over time. By drawing on a sampling of series, this chapter will also suggest how these codes can evolve.

Semiotics, or the study of signs, how we use them, and how they impact our lives, has proved to be an incredibly useful tool in genre analysis, particularly when it comes to the early stages of building scholarship in a field. Because teen dramas have not been adequately analyzed for their generic building blocks, this approach will assist me in breaking down the subgenres in order to expose their *langue*—their formal language, also known as their grammar or code—and then, in turn, to examine their *parole*—their speech, or the message given by the code. Roland Barthes, arguably the leading voice in semiotic study in popular culture, takes Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas of the signifier and the signified to a higher level. While Saussure acknowledged that *parole* did not exist individually but needed to happen among a social group, he did not take the larger leap to the promise his ideas held outside linguistics.

In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes makes a number of claims that are valuable in genre analysis. First, contemporary genre theory asserts that genres do not arise without a certain amount of conversation with similar texts (Mittell, "A Cultural Approach," 8); there is a moment in televisual history where creative energy, industrial practice, and audience reception come together for a genre to emerge and flourish. Semiotic theory supports this observation:

> it is because signs are repeated in successive discourses and within one and the same discourse (although they are combined in accordance with the infinite diversity of various people's speech) that each sign becomes an element of the

> language; and it is because speech is essentially a combinative activity that it corresponds to an individual act and not to a pure creation. (Barthes 15)[3]

When a television series premieres and seems to be a new type of creation, we are intrigued, but it is not until others come along and work in a similar fashion, dealing in a parallel language, that a genre begins to emerge. Additionally, genres are not static; they grow and change with each supplement to the corpus, which matches Barthes' idea that "it is speech which makes language evolve" (16). We may have ideas about what the genre is or does, but every new season brings fresh possibilities. It is an issue of a checklist in a book versus practice in the real world.

As a structuralist technique, semiotic analysis offers a unique ability in television studies to help scholars step away from the philosophical—and often, as happens with television, personal or emotional—entanglements that these narratives offer and provide a potentially cleaner engagement with the text. Tzvetan Todorov notes something similar in his "Structural Analysis of Narrative," and though he writes of literary texts, the impact is the same:

> [h]ere we can be satisfied neither by a pure description of the work nor by its interpretation in terms that are psychological or sociological or, indeed,

---

[3] In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes does not give a satisfactory description of "discourse" that would allow one to distinguish how he uses it from other critics—especially those like Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough, who tie discourse to power relations. However, in "The Discourse of History," Barthes makes it clear that for him, "discourse" is simply a linguistic term that, "for convenience's sake," allows him to describe length, primarily—it is "[t]he formal description of words superior to the sentence" (127). He goes on to explain that "a linguistics of discourse may henceforth be possible; by reason of its effects on literary analysis…it even constitutes one of the first tasks of semiology" (127). A fuller explanation may be found in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," but it, too, does not give discourse an ideological basis.

> philosophical. . . . Such analysis seeks no longer to articulate a paraphrase, a rational resumé of the concrete work, but to propose a theory of the structure and operation of the literary discourse, to present a spectrum of literary possibilities, in such a manner that the existing works of literature appear as particular instances that have been realized. (2024)

Objective and distant, we look at the assemblage of texts before us, identifying the key signifiers and signifieds, the signs that give the texts meaning. As Roland Barthes advises, we pinpoint the first and second orders of signification—denotation and connotation, respectively—so that we might isolate the third order—more explicitly discussed in John Fiske and John Hartley's *Reading Television*—which produces mythology, or ideology.[4] From there, we can fit future creative works into our discussions of genre more fruitfully because we have the grammar completely laid out for examination.

The signs of television come with their own terminology. Specifically, we use the word "iconography" when referring to those calling cards of a genre. Genre critics have borrowed the term iconography from art historians—namely Erwin Panofsky and his work on Renaissance art—who use it to propose that artists may express themes through symbolically-charged objects. In film and television, icons have a symbolic meaning not because of something necessarily established within a particular text, but because the icon has been employed in a similar fashion across so many other texts that it has become

[4] See Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies* (1957; American translation 1972); also John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (1978).

symbolic on its own. In genre films and television, this concept refers to certain objects and characters that recur, costuming, lighting—even actors that find themselves working only or primarily within that genre (Grant, *Film Genre* 11-12). However, because icons are still just signs, their meanings are culturally determined and arbitrary; eventually, they may lose their impact because television, especially, is dynamic (Fiske and Hartley 43). In this chapter, I will begin each section by explaining the distinct iconography of each subgenre I examine before turning to the third order of signification, the ideology—or themes—that may be extrapolated from the works.

The Family Drama

The family drama, represented by such critically acclaimed series as *Gilmore Girls*[5] (2000-07, the WB/the CW; 2016 revival, Netflix) and *Life Unexpected* (2010-11, the CW), remains a subgenre with a strong interest in examining the concerns of the contemporary family. From its infancy primarily at the WB to its more recent ability to find a home nearly anywhere, the family drama has proven its audience is strong and devoted, likely because of its increasing commitment to representing the American family as it is, not how we would prefer it to be. Using a sampling of important series, this section will discuss the iconography of the family drama, focusing primarily on characters, setting, and clothing, I will show how the common iconography of these series appears and works within various popular shows within the subgenre.

[5] See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this series.

In *Reading Television*, John Fiske and John Hartley contend that "[t]he more closely the signifier reproduces our common experience, our culturally determined intersubjectivity . . . the more realistic it appears to be" (38). The family drama's iconography works to imitate the world of American families in the time they are produced; in this way, it shows its difference from the family sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *The Patty Duke Show*, which showed the ideal American family. In the beginning of the family drama, these attempts at verisimilitude are sometimes more successful than others. However, as we enter 2017, series like *The Fosters* (2013-present, ABC Family/Freeform)—with its multiethnic blended family—make it clear that content producers are truly working to reproduce common experiences. In the following paragraphs, I will show how the common iconography of the family drama appears and works within various popular shows within the subgenre, as well as the foundational text for the teen drama, *My So-Called Life*.

Character: *My So-Called Life*

My So-Called Life (1994-95, ABC) had a short run, but it is hailed as a quality teen drama; it also shows the seeds of the family drama in its use of the juxtaposition of the teenagers' coming-of-age plot with the adults' rediscovery of their youths and other conflict in their lives that has them reconsidering their choices. This seminal show suggests the complexities of teen drama and hints at directions to be explored more fully in later series, and in any examination of this genre, it must be included—it represents a major shift in the trajectory of the teen drama. As Jason Mittell argues in *Genre and Television*, genre analyses should account for more than basic textual examples of each

genre one is taking on—if there are historical shifts involved, scholars must address those as well (19-20). While *My So-Called Life* is not truly a family drama in the way we would characterize it today—interference from the network muddled its generic presentation a bit—the fact that it aired contemporaneously with *Beverly Hills, 90210*, which was already laying its own foundation for the genre through soap conventions, and gained such a strong fan base not only with teens but with emerging writers in the genre, highlights its importance in establishing standards for the emerging teen drama genre.

Angela Chase, a fifteen-year-old girl who is just trying to make sense of the world, opens *My So-Called Life* in the same way that so many teenage girls mark an important change in their lives—she gets a makeover. Angela's previous style had been what her mother, Patty, deemed appropriate for a girl her age: wearing Laura Ashley dresses and keeping her light brown hair long, both of which symbolize her acquiescence to all her mother's wishes. Even in this early series, clothing serves as an important marker of identity and reinforces viewers' understanding of Angela's character. Angela soon realizes that the life her mother has prescribed for her is limiting. She stops hanging out with fellow good girl Sharon Cherski, her best friend since childhood and the daughter of Patty's closest friend, and starts spending time with Rayanne Graff and Rickie Vasquez, the school's resident party girl and her bisexual[6] best friend. Here, though the series remains focused on Angela, it does gesture to other identities for teens to model. Most importantly, the series explores overarching teen concerns. Angela feels like no one in her life understands her—or is even trying to—and Rayanne, especially,

[6] Initially, Angela explains that Rickie is "bi," but later he identifies as gay.

seems like a kindred spirit. Angela's attempts to navigate the pitfalls of adolescence are compelling whether the viewer is fifteen or fifty; struggles with parents, boys, and friends are universal. Essentially, the series is about yearning—Angela's for Jordan Catalano, Brian Krakow's for Angela, Rickie's to find a place to belong, Rayanne's to gain some stability in her life, and, at times, even the yearning of Graham and Patty Chase to understand their daughter.

The series' signature voiceover style verbalizes Angela's inner struggles—and these are not lines scripted by a writer looking to impress the audience with the many big words they know. Angela sounds like a teenager, not an adult, constantly stumbling through sentences, trying to make herself understood: "So I started hanging out with Rayanne Graff. Just for fun. Just 'cause it seemed like if I didn't, I would die or something. Things were getting to me. Just how people are. How they always expect you to be a certain way, even your best friend" ("Pilot," 1.1). There is nothing eloquent about Angela; if she is poetic, it is generally by accident. The team behind *My So-Called Life* worked to give the teen characters authenticity, and Angela's heartfelt if sometimes scattered thoughts make her feel real. As Caren Murphy has rightfully noted, "The pilot . . . explore[s] adolescence from an insider's perspective, and Angela's voiceover sets her character apart from previous televisual teens as dark, multi-faceted, and painfully emotional" (167). From the opening scenes of the pilot, it is obvious that these teenagers will not be stereotypical representations—their lives will be shown as they really live them, not how their parents hope things go, and what is revealed may make adults uncomfortable.

One thing that may make these adults uneasy is the friends their teens choose. *My So-Called Life* exemplifies another crucial characteristic of this subgenre: a variety of teens are shown in a way that does not reduce them to stereotypes. In other subgenres, such as the teen soap, this type of representation is typically an issue; teens are often less multifaceted in their characterization. However, the adolescents of the family drama show themselves to be more complicated with each new piece of information revealed. This aspect of the subgenre is connected to its goals of reflecting the contemporary American family; real-life teenagers are not two-dimensional, and a great deal has gone into making them who they are—far beyond petty high school concerns. Additionally, from a marketing perspective, producers are looking to court a wider market share with these series; teens are not generally seen to covet nuanced characterizations—an unfortunate generalization—but their parents are, so more carefully drawn characters are a way to draw in more members of the family to the series.

As a foundational text, *My So-Called Life* clearly establishes these ideas of compelling characters early on. Rayanne is promiscuous and has a drinking problem, so she provides a nice foil to Angela, who is at heart a fairly conventional person. Angela struggles with the idea of enacting the sexual life that she has been dreaming about. Rickie is the only character who retains the romantic viewpoint that Angela is trying to get rid of, which is surprising considering his tumultuous home life. In these best friends, *My So-Called Life* helps form the basis of friendship among female friends for the genre as a whole for the next twenty years (and counting).[7] Angela, Rayanne, and Rickie love

[7] Rickie largely rejects male homosocial relationships and prefers the structures and markers of female friendship.

each other fiercely but fight just as passionately; some of the issues that come between them may seem silly to adults—who is allowed to be with Jordan Catalano is a major plot point, for example—but a close examination reveals that the characters are still learning to effectively express their emotions. The teen drama as a whole draws from *My So-Called Life*'s example here; this series features no soapy fights where female characters throw each other into pools. Instead, these friends fight in a way viewers might recognize: drawing on their deep knowledge of each other to hurt and humiliate. Cold wars come afterward; no one speaks to or acknowledges each other until a détente can be reached, likely because of an even bigger problem that looms ahead. Even then, hurt feelings may last for some time, which means the problem never really dies, but lies in wait for a later blowup. In constructing fighting between female friend groups this way, the series not only sets the tone for the genre, but models behavior for viewers. If series creator and showrunner Winnie Holzman was doing as she was tasked by her *thirtysomething* bosses, Ed Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz, and presenting "an 'uncensored' depiction of teenage life" (Jensen para. 6), female friendships are a field of landmines in which one is ever careful to follow a preset walking path. In Holzman's presentation of Angela's circle of friends, she sets the tone for the genre for years to come.

While *My So-Called Life* does tend to focus on its female characters, its male teen characters also exemplify important foundational aspects of the teen drama as well. The coming-of-age plot does not shy away from the reality that most teens' lives are not bright and shiny, and many of them even have heart-wrenching stories that make one

wonder how and if they will ever become well-adjusted. Jordan comes from an abusive home and is illiterate, and Rickie is constantly bullied for his sexual orientation, something that eventually leads to him being kicked out by his guardians and living on the streets. These teenagers' varied home lives provide the germ of the family drama: the protagonist comes from a fairly stable (and, in its own ways, conventional) home—though they chafe against its limitations and embarrassing aspects—while their friends often find themselves taking refuge there from parents and guardians who are deficient in any number of ways, some more serious than others. Even if these parental figures do not mean any harm, it is clear that the protagonist's parents are to be preferred, even as the narrative shows them to be flawed. Angela's home life is a perfect example. An intact nuclear family is privileged while the characters are minors; being a single parent is shown to have a negative effect on children. It is hinted that Rayanne's behavior is tied to her existence as a latchkey child; her mother works a great deal to support her since her father is not in the picture. Rayanne, Jordan, and Rickie's dysfunctional home lives function as a way to both allow Angela to mature as she steps in to help them, particularly Jordan, and to highlight how lucky she is to have her parents. Though Graham and Patty may be a little clueless—and Graham is tempted to cheat and Patty is very demanding—they truly love their children and put them first. Whenever Angela is confronted with her friends' frenetic upbringings, she is reminded to appreciate what she has. Series like *My So-Called Life* offer a comforting perspective to parents who may often feel like their children do not get these reminders, but it comes with the realization that those reminders are served with a cold dose of the real world.

Setting: *Gilmore Girls*

Thus, family dramas strive for authenticity of representation**.** As a result, the settings here are solidly middle-class for the most part: houses that are just big enough for the family and look fairly lived-in, though clean; pets or animals within reach; and a village to help the single parent. The settings show the parents' workplaces and the children's schools as well as the town at large—these are generally small towns where it is safe for children to walk alone and explore. On one level (from a marketing standpoint) the message is that these series are clean. You can enjoy them with your family, because these families are just like yours. You have a dog, too. Your house might even have that couch—it comes from Ikea. However, just because these series are shot in a bright way, that does not mean they are all equally squeaky. Still, the veneer brings in viewers, and the compelling storylines keep most of them. After all, *Gilmore Girls* was a hit in WB terms; it regularly pulled in four to five million viewers. While this may seem like meager numbers at a time when *Friends* drew upwards of twenty-five million, one must keep in mind that the WB did not have the same advantages as the Big Three Networks: *Gilmore Girls* "was broadcast across the country on a network of smaller TV stations without the reach—or marketing resources—of more established broadcasters such as ABC or even Fox" (Adalian para. 2). However, in the homes the series did reach, viewers quickly learned the code behind the pieces of *Gilmore Girls*' setting; the family drama's setting is not terribly complicated, though it is fruitful to explore in its connection to character.

These pieces of setting can appear in other subgenres, like the teen soap—for example, smaller houses can signify something else there, like reduced circumstances or general poverty. Depending on the character, audiences may even be led to believe the house signifies criminal activity or other suspicious behavior. What, then, is the difference? It is important to remember Barthes' reminder in *Elements of Semiology* that

> *signification* can be conceived as a process; it is the act which binds the signifier and the signified, an act whose product is the sign. This distinction has, of course, only a classifying (and not phenomenological) value: firstly, because the union of signifier and signified, as we shall see, does not exhaust the semantic act, for the sign derives its value also from its surroundings . . . And indeed the signification . . . does not unite unilateral entities, it does not conjoin two terms, for the very good reason that signifier and signified are both at once term and relation. (48)

What matters here is how setting is used and explored within the narrative; in the family drama, characters are deliberately put into homes that reflect not only their circumstances, but their ethos. It would be jarring to see, for example, Eric and Tami Taylor of *Friday Night Lights* in a grand home—they are both no-nonsense, salt-of-the-earth people. Explaining an upper middle-class living situation away with some sort of windfall would be disingenuous and untrue to the Taylors' way of life. So, then, to extrapolate from Barthes' point, we must not bind together the signifier and the signified permanently within the teen drama, because as we go further into subgenres, signs fall apart and are reassembled with new significations because of each subgenres' purpose and outlook.

If the world of the upper class is explored in the family drama, it is fairly limited and only because one of the main characters has an entry point. Explorations of the rich and their world tend to belong to the soap, both multigenerational and teen, because the level of excess involved is out of place in drama, which requires a certain level of earnestness. However, in some family dramas, those upper-class settings are often used for deliberate juxtaposition, sometimes as a gesture toward class distinctions, and other times—when these settings are given more extended time and emphasis in the series, particularly when they are actively discussed—as a way to help deepen thematic concerns about class. In a series about teens, these concerns are often related to family relations and how dysfunctional families affect children. Allowing certain characters, particularly those who are deeply earnest or who work as the series' moral compass, access to the world of the rich highlights the profound troubles of the upper class, which is contrasted with the character's cash-poor but love- and morality-rich world. *Veronica Mars*' titular protagonist runs into this a great deal both in her work as a teen private investigator in the *noir*ish town of Neptune and as she dates two very wealthy classmates; she and her father run a PI firm and live paycheck to paycheck, so the narrative positions her—and her other lower-class friends—as able to see what many of their "09er" classmates cannot: money cannot buy happiness, nor parents who actually care about you. A life with a great deal of money often means you grow up without a guiding hand; it is no coincidence that many of the unrepentant offenders Veronica goes after are affluent.

There are also more daytime scenes than nighttime scenes in the family drama unless the scene would make no sense during the day; daytime gives an idea of openness

and bringing things to light, concepts that healthy families work toward—and the audience's subject position comes from one of these healthy families.[8] A perfect example of this iconography is *Gilmore Girls*, whose Stars Hollow—even the set used for it—has become iconic in its own right. Though *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007, the WB/the CW) will be analyzed in greater detail later in the following chapter, it is worth brief discussion here for its distinctive use of setting; in fact, the town Amy Sherman-Palladino created for her Gilmore girls to live in might be as famous as its central characters. The series follows Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, a fast-talking mother and daughter who live in Stars Hollow, a quirky small town in Connecticut. Lorelai got pregnant with Rory as a teenager and ran away from a life of privilege so that she could raise her child without interference. Because Lorelai left her old-money family with only essentially whatever she could carry along with her baby, she has been working her way up from nothing since she was sixteen years old. For ten years, she and Rory lived in the groundskeeper's cottage at the inn where she worked until Lorelai could afford a modest, comfortable Victorian.

Eccentric townspeople populate places in Stars Hollow like Miss Patty's School of Dance; Taylor's Market; Kim's Antiques; the Dragonfly Inn; and, possibly most importantly in the narrative, Luke's Diner.[9] The series borrows from Aaron Sorkin's "walk and talk" tradition, so these characters are often going from one of these businesses

---

[8] One exception would be *Veronica Mars*, which, as a *neo-noir* series, sets a number of scenes in the dark. However, this fits with the show's concern with the many unhealthy families in Neptune.

[9] Stars Hollow is based on a real town, Washington Depot, Connecticut; creator Amy Sherman-Palladino was inspired by it during a stay at their Mayflower Grace. Like Stars Hollow, they use a town hall system of government, though it does not boast a diner or gazebo (Kurutz).

to another, and it is common for significant experiences to happen in them. For example, when Rory accidentally spends the night with her first boyfriend, Dean, and Lorelai cannot find her, she is in Miss Patty's, where they have fallen asleep. Escapades like this are possible because in Stars Hollow, there is also a town square, and nearly everything is within walking distance. Rory and Lorelai seem to live on the outskirts of town, but even their neighbors do a lot of walking around to see each other. Those who live in the center of town never seem to use cars unless they are leaving Stars Hollow entirely, giving the town an otherworldly, even utopian feel—viewers are aware that in America, outside of well-planned cities, people tend to drive because municipal funds are not always able to be used for sidewalks. However, Stars Hollow seems to have plenty of money, another comforting aspect for audiences who may be frustrated with their own towns' issues. Viewers might also be encouraged by how homey even the smaller residences are. Much like the other houses in town, Lorelai and Rory's home is a two-story Victorian, though a smaller one at only two bedrooms, but it is quickly established as a place everyone wants to be. Luke Danes, the diner owner and Lorelai's primary love interest, lives in a small apartment above his diner on the town square. Though Luke's space is a bachelor pad and the butt of many jokes, he spends little time there—he is always with the townspeople in the diner. The implication given is that Stars Hollow is small and familial; everyone has access to each other at a moment's notice. In this subgenre, the idea of familial care and comfort are constantly reinforced through setting.

The locations of *Gilmore Girls*' Stars Hollow interactions signify a great deal about the characters' relationships and social class, and viewers quickly learn to associate

characters and potential conflicts with settings. When Lorelai and Rory are in their home, decorated with comfortable, mismatched furniture that encourages sitting for long periods, we can see that Lorelai has spent the money to create a safe and comfortable environment for her child, but she feels no need to impress anyone but herself. She buys what she likes, not what might be an "investment piece." This is a place where people feel emotionally safe. Here, children—and people in general—can slouch down on the couch and watch movies with their parents. Feet can go on the coffee table. Food is eaten anywhere one chooses. Lorelai is clearly reacting to her mother's home, where none of these elements were at work.

It is no coincidence that Lorelai's home is a refuge for Rory's friends, whose homes are far from this kind of comforting space. Rory's friend Lane, for example, lives in a Victorian home on the town square that is beautifully maintained on the outside but on the inside houses a terribly crowded antique store on the first floor, which mirrors the generally harried nature of the Kim family—they are highly scheduled people when Mrs. Kim is not working, generally with church or church-related activities. Lane spends her time either working with her overbearing and overprotective mother or attending church, but she is often seen hiding from Mrs. Kim. Here, the space reflects their mother-daughter relationship, as Mrs. Kim forces Lane to hide who she really is. It is a dysfunctional relationship that only works because of their home, which allows Lane to literally hide pieces of herself in it—she keeps her choices in music under the floorboards of her room and "real" clothes behind the closet walls. As Barthes explains in in a roundtable discussion collected in his book *The Language of Fashion*, "[f]ashion is a

phenomenon both of innovation and conformity" (86). For Lane, her fashion choices must work this way, but at different times: when she is free to be herself, she innovates as teenage girls do, trying various types of makeup and clothing until she settles on a style that feels authentic, but when she is at home or around her mother, she must conform to Mrs. Kim's vision of teen girl appropriateness. In the Kim family home, the series uses setting to highlight important aspects of Lane's personality in order to make her future rebellion seem not only obvious, but necessary. In doing so, *Gilmore Girls* plays into a generic tradition: the good girl must eventually rebel.

Similarly, Luke's home signifies aspects of his personality; he is reclusive and private, and his upstairs apartment indicates the same. A converted office, it holds little more than a small bed, couch, and table. Lorelai comments more than once on his Spartan surroundings; interestingly, at this time, Luke is unable to make any real emotional connections. The family drama, though rife with setting signification, does not make the audience do a great deal of mental work initially: Luke is closed-off and so is his apartment. When his nephew Jess moves in, theoretically temporarily, things are bursting at the seams. Luke takes the space next door and expands the apartment; the moment he knocks the wall down, showing Jess where his room will be, is the beginning of the lowering of his emotional walls. Jess's introduction also brings in another aspect of the family drama: adding characters with troubled backgrounds serves to both highlight and trouble the more utopian aspects of a series' setting (if that is the show's focus). When Jess comes to Stars Hollow, he disrupts the main characters' lives by showing them how their current relationships are built on quicksand; he does this primarily by invading

space people count as sacred—like the diner or Rory's bookshelves. In this way, space often reflects larger character arcs in the family drama.

When Lorelai and Rory are not in Stars Hollow, they are in Hartford—visiting Lorelai's parents, Richard and Emily, or at Rory's school, Chilton Preparatory—or New Haven as Rory goes off to college at Yale University. When the series switches to Hartford, the feeling of comfort found in Lorelai's home disappears. Emily and Richard Gilmore's home is vast; a common way of introducing Stars Hollow characters to the estate is to have them stop and stare up at it. Interestingly, the cinematographer never pulls back in a long shot; the effect given is that all the characters can take in is the part in front of them because it is all so overwhelming—everything else is just too far outside a regular person's milieu. While Stars Hollow is full of cozy Victorians in various colors, the Gilmores' home is austere stone with ivy vines, a long driveway, and thick wood door. Nothing about it invites visitors, but it is grand and impressive—it screams old money and roots in the community. Inside, Emily has had complete control over the decoration of the estate, as befits her position in the marriage, and it is carefully put together both to reflect their wealth and to impress others. The furniture is clearly expensive but not built for vigorous use; for example, her parlor couches have gilded edges and are upholstered in light fabrics, as are the chairs. The walls, many of which have decorative molded paneling, boast oil paintings. Lorelai comments often that the house has not changed much since she was small, indicating that Emily felt this was an appropriate environment for a child to grow up in. The Gilmore house has a repressive atmosphere; there is nowhere to play without the fear of breaking something expensive

(and potentially historical), the light fabrics require staying clean at all times, and the vastness of the estate encourages disappearance, as Lorelai has hinted at.

Because the family drama does not feature many truly rich characters, as noted earlier, we must consider the Gilmores' purpose generically. First, they are Lorelai's parents, and parents are always of great consequence in the family drama. Here, it becomes clear that the Gilmores' money is simply a narrative tool; this setting is used to reinforce the great gulf of misunderstanding between Richard and Emily and their daughter. Lorelai was born to parents who are fundamentally different from her. Another series may have accomplished this by having Lorelai reject the family faith. The point is, money has so permeated how the Gilmores engage with each other and society at large that it is impossible to separate them from their wealth. Every time Lorelai returns to Hartford and sees the home in which she felt so confused—even unloved—as a child, these issues return for her, setting the stage for what her parents view as "acting out" and the writers are clearly establishing as a type of post-traumatic stress. In the family drama, setting is never simple, though it may come in the form of an innocuous Victorian or an immaculately maintained mansion. In other genres, such as the teen soap, audiences have gained the cultural capital over seasons of viewing to know that these same settings will hide family problems, as well. Instead of feeling misunderstood, however, those children will find bigger skeletons in the family closet—perhaps even literal ones—that are likely to explode the family when exposed. Lorelai, like many characters in the family drama, simply needs some counseling—these series feature a great deal of repressing ones' feelings.

Clothing: *Life Unexpected*

Much like setting, clothing tends to reflect character development. In the family drama, it is often more traditional in the sense of looking like something one might find in middle America; while the wardrobe department makes the teenagers' clothing aspirational, it is in the sense of personal style rather than monetary value. While Lorelai's clothes tend to receive more attention than Rory's in *Gilmore Girls*—likely because in the first few seasons Rory is either wearing a school uniform or is not dressed particularly distinctively, and in general because Lorelai's clothing reflects her loud personality—other family dramas emphasize the teen characters' clothing. For instance, *Life Unexpected* (2010-11, the CW) offers a useful example of how clothing iconography can work in the family drama; where other subgenres like the teen soap use clothing to invite viewers to identify with particular characters, or, in the case of the young adult fantasy drama, to give emotional expression in shorthand, in the family drama, clothing is tightly bound to character expression. *Life Unexpected* features a central teen character whose clothes are very stylish for her age group—and even the next one up—but the narrative makes it quite clear that Lux chooses these clothes for herself, not because magazines have said they are the "must have" for the season.

This aspect of Lux's personality points toward an important marker of the subgenre; here, clothing is chosen because it most accurately reflects the character and their development at that point in the narrative, not because the series is attempting to sell an identity to viewers—or, from a more cynical standpoint, attempting to sell clothes, period. This is an aspect of the teen soap, however; there are entire blogs devoted to

chronicling the clothing worn by the main characters of *Pretty Little Liars*, and the costume designers for both multigenerational and teen soaps gain a celebrity all their own. When interviewed, stylists are asked about what they are "putting on" the actresses (and, to be fair, the actors as well)—rhetoric that implies that costume designers are more involved in playing dress-up than engaging in character work. For example, the website *Fashionista.com* actively chronicled the work of Eric Damon, the costume designer for *Gossip Girl*, a multigenerational soap known for its high-fashion aspect as well as the enviable style of its stars. Now, the website seems to be gearing up for similar coverage of *Riverdale*, mirroring the emphasis given at other fashion-focused sites like *TeenVogue.com*.

Life Unexpected received some coverage of fashion choices, but in line with typical audience and media engagement with that piece of the text, it was not significant—the teen characters' clothes are not meant to outshine the narrative. The series features sixteen-year-old Lux and her friends as well as her young Millennial parents, Cate Cassidy and Nathaniel "Baze" Basile. Cate and Baze are more unprepared for parenthood than most—Baze never knew Lux existed until she showed up on his doorstep, and Cate had given her up after she had been assured Lux would be adopted, something that Lux's serious illness as a child prevented. Cate and Baze only reenter Lux's life when her petition for emancipation is rejected and the judge grants them temporary custody of their daughter so she will not have to return to the foster system. For Lux, her clothing choices are indicative of her own reality and identity rather than what magazines tell her she should be. In the family drama, teens' clothing is intended to

be “authentic”—not that every viewer would necessarily be able to find these pieces or even be able to pull them off, but the idea is that a character like the one in question would choose these things. As a result, teen characters in family dramas are rarely “glamorous,” but that does not mean that their viewers would not find their styles worthy of copying. Perhaps because of the family drama’s emphasis on authenticity of representation, teen characters like Lux feel approachable, which lends their styles a similar feel.

Life Unexpected is set in Portland, Oregon, and reflects the local aesthetic (and weather). These characters dress very casually, which resonates honestly with the audience: Lux is a foster child who has been living on her own in a very cheap apartment; Baze is an unsuccessful bar owner who rarely rises before the afternoon; and Cate is a morning radio host. As in teen drama in general, audiences can draw on their cultural capital to interpret the characters’ clothing, because “television genre categories work to form a set of assumptions which individual programs draw upon and respond to” (Mittell *Genre and Television* 19). Focusing specifically on the main teen character, audience can look to their experience with similar character types in the genre for clues to decoding Lux’s character. Markers abound in her clothing choices. Lux is rarely seen in anything other than jeans and boots; her boots are not the type that are increasingly fashionable for women, but motorcycle boots, signifying her toughness. She prefers layers beginning with t-shirts and/or tank tops, followed by some type of jacket. Lux’s frequent incorporation of tank tops signal her resistance to her difficult life’s constant attempts to take away her softer, more feminine side. She often wears a knit beanie and scarf as well,

which, given their deep attachment to hipster culture, signify intelligence in teen dramas—the more self-referential series often comment on characters who wear them as being “hipster” or “too cool,” code for intelligent and frustrated by a limited environment. Lux is coded similarly.

While Lux’s initial presentation showed her in darker colors, after moving in with Cate she introduces some more traditionally feminine pieces into her wardrobe, so her tank tops are often jewel toned and made with lace, for example. As her character evolves, her clothing choices expand to reflect that. However, her new tops are still paired with jeans and part of a layered ensemble. When she wears jewelry, it is generally small and unobtrusive. Lux is a fascinating entry in the family drama subgenre—for one thing, there are very few survivors of sexual abuse, and she represents that character type—but in terms of her clothing, she is fairly typical. On a simple, functional level, her clothes allow Lux to spend a great deal of time outside in the Portland weather, which has been necessary in her more dysfunctional foster homes; later, the ability to dress for multiple times of day and weather patterns has clearly become necessary as she spends time with her friends, the majority of whom are in similar situations. These clothes are fashionable in middle America, but in Lux’s city, they allow her to blend in, a necessity for a teen on the streets. The connotation of Lux’s clothing choices is not difficult to comprehend; she is a very guarded person as a result of her time in foster care. The layers of clothes she wears represent the shell she has built around herself for protection. It is no coincidence that as Lux feels more comfortable in Cate’s home, the fewer layers she wears around her, and as she and Cate form a bond that cracks her shell entirely, allowing

her to let others in, her wardrobe begins to transform, bringing in skirts for everyday wear, for example—something that signifies a softer personality as well as a more settled person. Here we see that clothing works as a clear signifier for a character's personality; the family drama layers deep meaning in their characters' wardrobes where other genres may spend less time there, preferring instead to develop the setting—as in teen soaps, where setting is so often an integral part of the narrative and clothing is highlighted in a different way.

The Teen Soap

The teen soap adheres more closely to what the general populace conceives of as a teen drama. Series such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000, FOX), *Riverdale* (2017-present, the CW), and *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-present, ABC Family/Freeform) offer viewers a look into the lives of teenagers whose adolescent experience is significantly more exciting than the average American teen's—and in the case of some of these series, much more dark and dangerous, as well. The iconography of these series is well-defined after nearly thirty years. In the following paragraphs, I will showcase how the teen soap's iconography differs from the family drama's, as well as the implications of these differences for the larger genre.

Character: *Beverly Hills, 90210*

Whereas in the family drama it is not uncommon to find actual teenagers playing teen characters—Alexis Bledel was eighteen when she was cast as Rory Gilmore, for example—teen soaps are primarily populated by attractive young adults who can pass for

teenagers. This allows for a sheen of perfection, which is important in soaps and not as emphasized in dramas; these adult actors do not have to deal with the vagaries of adolescent bodies that might cause problems in the makeup or wardrobe trailers. A wide variety of characters are shown in teen soaps, particularly in the teenagers—"wide variety" meaning that categories are checked off: the All-American one, the sweet one, the bad one, the artistic one, the sporty one, the fashionista, the preppy one, the rich one, the one with a bad home life, the nerdy one. As we move into the 2010s, there are more categories included, primarily teens with disabilities; minority teens other than African-Americans have also become normal casting practice, as have LGBTQ teens. So many teens are shown in this subgenre as compared to others because in the teen soap, teen characters are shown to have extensive friend groups—the shallowness of many of their friendships is a reflection of the increasing shallowness of contemporary society in general that so many of these series spend their time calling out. Teens in family dramas tend to be part of smaller, more tight-knit groups because of their need for deep connection; those featured in fantasy series (both soap and drama) have smaller friend groups out of a requirement for secrecy in their various attempts to save their worlds or peoples. This time period has also brought in a wave of younger, hipper parents, often veterans of young adult roles in primetime or teen soaps themselves; these actors show the evolution of the genre in a tangible way for the viewer but also bring along character residue that enhances the narrative.

The earliest of teen soaps[10], *Beverly Hills, 90210* is a good place to look for examples of character iconography. Though it does not reflect recent trends in the subgenre, it does establish the grammar audiences expect to see today. It also "introduced two crucial developments into the evolution of the teen melodrama: the first pairing of a beautiful boy with a more rugged, rebellious best friend, and the first steps toward the erasure of the parents . . . as central figures within the drama" (Banks 21). Brandon Walsh, the "beautiful boy," and Dylan McKay, "the rugged, rebellious best friend," begin the subgenre's dichotomy within the form of types of attractiveness that work on multiple levels: the more traditionally aesthetically pleasing boy is cast as the primary female character's love interest, while his friend, whose looks are what Banks terms "rugged," but are simply more masculine in nature, is positioned as an immediate or eventual rival for her affection. This casting proved so popular that it was eventually mirrored across the entire genre for a significant part of its history; pitting physical opposites against each other in romantic storylines allows viewers more latitude in "choosing" their own fantasy partner. Later, as the teen drama skewed more toward the WB's brand of coming-of-age series like *Dawson's Creek*, the network added their own innovation by developing the boys' internal lives; admittedly, Brandon and Dylan could be a bit two-dimensional, with Brandon "good" and Dylan "bad." Dawson and Pacey brought the idea of emotional connection into play—Joey chose between the two (multiple times) because of how she

[10] Teen soaps are sometimes called teen melodramas by scholars, likely because of the melodramatic mode within soap opera in general and an earlier call by soap opera scholars to distinguish between daytime and primetime serials.

interacted with each of the boys, not because of an intangible quality either had, which is how *Beverly Hills, 90210* often chose to explain Brandon and Dylan's attractiveness.

Connotatively, Brandon and Dylan's physicalities work another way. Brandon's type represents safeness; his beauty is almost androgynous. He does not sport facial hair, or even the hint of it. He is clean cut and pure-looking. Often, these boys are blond or sport blond highlights, yet another mark of purity and eliteness. He wears trendy yet appropriate clothing—nothing that would alarm adults. We trust these boys with our central heroine. Contrast this with the rugged Dylan, who is dark-haired and brooding, almost pathologically quiet where Brandon is chatty and friendly. Dylan wears a lot of t-shirts with a leather jacket, deliberately cultivating a James Dean vibe; it is also not uncommon for his ensemble to be partially unbuttoned. He exudes masculinity, and, therefore, sexuality. He is dangerous to our heroine but constantly attracts her. On his side, the damaged part in him is attracted to her goodness. The narrative will use this triangle as long as possible; *Beverly Hills, 90210* made it work for ten years.

While the presentation of two physical and emotional opposites may seem fairly simple on the surface, it speaks to a larger concern when one considers the cultural work the series did as well as the foundation it laid for future teen dramas of all kinds. The viewers of teen soaps are largely female; when one considers a teenage audience—an audience who is still forming their ideas about dating and romance—this setup presupposes a great deal. As Angela McRobbie has argued, "[r]epresentations are not expressive of some prior reality, but instead are actively constitutive of reality" (qtd. in Hollows 21). By setting up such a limited dichotomy—a white boy and another white

boy, admittedly more "rugged"—viewers who are not attracted to any of these categories are excluded from the common practice identified by both Ien Ang and Christine Geraghty wherein soap opera viewers engage with the series' romantic relationships by putting themselves into the female subject position and trying the relationship on for size.[11] Unfortunately, it takes years for the teen soap to establish more options with which viewers may identify without narrative baggage; for some reason, West Beverly High is not especially diverse. While Andrea enters into the genre's first interracial relationship with Jesse Vasquez, it comes complete with a teen pregnancy—and leads to Andrea's leaving the show entirely—and gay and lesbian characters are nearly nonexistent. Through the establishment of two romantic heroes whose personas echo so many ideas of traditional masculinity, either that of the man who protects through money and/or security or the one who will protect through force, the narrative sets up problematic character types for the subgenre. Indeed, shades of Brandon and Dylan can be seen throughout the teen soap and in the teen drama as a whole, as *Beverly Hills, 90210* had a great deal of cultural reach—the brooding bad boy our heroine needs to save at the expense of her relationship with the more relatable, safer beautiful boy comes through not only in contemporary teen soaps like *Pretty Little Liars*, where Aria is drawn to potential murderer Jason DiLaurentis while in a relationship with Ezra Fitz (whom the narrative positions as safe, though viewers can see the problems there), but also in family dramas

[11] See Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. Trans. Della Couling. New York: Methuen, 1985. Print.; Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime-Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity P, 1991. Print.

like *Gilmore Girls*, where Rory Gilmore spends the majority of the narrative torn between the beautiful (good) boy and the bad boy.

Another important trope of the subgenre was established in *Beverly Hills, 90210*—the central heroine or heroines are treated as damsels in distress; in her role as Kelly Taylor, Jennie Garth may have had more truly distressing issues to deal with than any daytime soap actress has had to play out. She became addicted to cocaine, was stalked in a *Single White Female* homage, was raped, shot her rapist, joined a cult, suffered a miscarriage—ten seasons made for a lot of pain, and while she occasionally picked herself up alone, more often than not her love interest was there to do it for her. The implications are clear. However, Kelly generally remained positive throughout all of this, giving rise to another trait: the aspirational female protagonist. As primetime soaps have evolved from their daytime roots, scholars have noted that viewers now take pleasure in multiple identification points:

> [p]art of what makes soap operas a (guilty?) pleasure for female viewers is the emotional identification and excess and the chance to imaginatively occupy a very different role—temptress, villainess, ingenue—than they do in their everyday lives. This work of "imaginative projection" may be even more important as roles and images of women have expanded in the wake of the feminist movement, because it requires more (conscious) choices to develop a feminine subjectivity. (Beail 100)

Teen soaps usually star beautiful young women who are written to be someone their target demographic, women ages 12-34, wants to become—in a potentially achievable

way. From an initial viewing, producers hook viewers with characters' style and beauty, but as the series continues, they must distinguish each female character as a type, one viewers might admire for their personality. However, in its early form—as evidenced by *Beverly Hills, 90210*—the teen soap has some difficulty with sending a consistent cultural message to its viewers. While the villainess gives viewers a strong female protagonist, one who encounters great obstacles and overcomes them either alone or in a mutually beneficial relationship with a male character, the fact remains that she is in the position as antagonist; she must make morally grey (or even evil) decisions throughout the narrative. She cannot truly be positioned as a model for real-life behavior. While later teen soaps like *Pretty Little Liars* manage the good/bad girl dichotomy better—in fact, they prefer to stay in the grey area a bit more, reflecting real life—early teen soaps find it difficult to give female characters real dimension. If female viewers are trying on these presented identities, it is important that they are given ones with emotional and intellectual weight; when the villainess—like *Beverly Hills, 90210*'s Valerie Malone, or Brenda Walsh in her later years—is the only truly interesting character in a series, we have a problem. Thankfully, later incarnations of the teen soap are making headway in this arena, as Chapter Four will further explore.

The most important aspect of a teen soap is significant to complete parental erasure; these teenagers receive very little supervision, if any, and their parents are only involved in their lives in such a way as to help drive their children's storylines. The narrative centers on the teen characters, and the way the characters are presented makes this clear; their parents exist as narrative obstacles, and when they are fleshed out, they

generally fall into three types: the good parent, the incapable parent, and the abusive parent. Generically, absence of authority figures to whom the teens must report is a necessary aspect of teen soaps, where adolescents often act like adults. If these teenagers had lives like their viewers, with curfews and organized family dinners, the structure would be distinctly problematic for writers who are trying to script adventures that happen at the drop of a hat. As a rule, teen soap characters do not check in with parents before going off with their friends; these calls signal that a character has "too many rules" and must be liberated from their parents' oversight. Teen soaps call to viewers who are frustrated with similar restrictions in their own lives, but at the same time, they do offer a subjectivity for viewers to try on: a teenager with parents who are both hands-on and trusting, allowing the characters to make mistakes but come to a loving home afterward. The Walshes offer such a position.

Brandon and his twin sister, Brenda, are the only regular characters to have a functional family in this series. Most of their friends' parents are divorced, some were never married, and the ones who remain together seem deeply unhappy. Primarily, the West Beverly crew's parents are incapable; they love their children, but they cannot or will not properly parent them, and as a result, these teens are raising themselves. In Kelly's case, with a drug-addicted, alcoholic mother, she is raising them both. The friends often run across classmates with abusive parents; for example, Dylan McKay's father, Jack, is clearly emotionally abusive, but the series shies away from dealing with it. These parents are types—not much else is given to them but adjectives to characterize them.

Essentially, Jim and Cindy Walsh exist to add a sheen of reality; it would seem ridiculous for every main teenage character to live fancy-free. Also, it is helpful to have the specter of an adult presence for moments in an episode when the teens need a more rational opinion. This structure provided yet another blueprint for the subgenre and has been taken up by others focused more on teenagers rather than the family as a whole. Still, the Walshes do not really get any time that is just about them; in ten seasons, there is only one real storyline that revolves around the two of them as people, not as parents of teenage twins or as stand-ins for the absent parents of Brandon and Brenda's friends. They have no internal lives, reflecting perhaps a typical teen perspective and self-absorption. The narrative does not privilege Jim and Cindy because their teenagers do not. I do not mean to suggest that the teen soap's adolescent characters do not love or respect their parents (as a whole—there are always outliers); they simply do not consider that they might have a perspective on situations that do not begin and end with their positions as parents. Essentially, once Jim and Cindy's work as parents is done, we—like their children—are to forget about them. This helps set the tone for the teen soap, where parents on screen generally feel gratuitous; storylines establish even the good ones as supportive but ultimately unnecessary in a world where teens act like adults—or what they decide adults are. As the teen soap evolves, good parents are allowed a bit more of a life—most likely as a nod to the subgenre's expanding audience, many of whom, now parents themselves, were the subgenre's original viewers—but remain a mystery to their children, both in terms of their motives and lives beyond that of being a parent.

Setting: *Riverdale*

In a similar fashion, *Riverdale* (2017-present, the CW) features a number of parents whose teens are confused by the actions of the adults around them because, most of the time, they do not think of their parents much; as a result, these teens—and the audience, by extension—cannot understand their parents' motivations. The series is populated with teens who make decisions without the benefit of parental input—and when it is offered, it is not welcome. *Riverdale* represents an interesting addition to the subgenre and shows how the teen soap, like the family drama, relies on setting to reveal character and suggest larger conflicts. However, in *Riverdale*, other aspects of setting are emphasized. In the millennium, where teen dramas are increasingly sourced from teen literature from publishers like Alloy and Harper Collins, there is an increasing intertextual aspect, an automatic comparison to the original text. Additionally, teen soaps often set their stories in outwardly perfect towns—and increasingly in small towns—in order to highlight the corruption underneath. *Riverdale* is a mystery-based soap in the vein of *Pretty Little Liars*, but in its staging in Riverdale, the home of teen comic hero Archie Andrews and his friends, the combination offers a stimulating semiotic reading, particularly in terms of setting.

Riverdale opens with a dark voiceover from Jughead Jones, who is later revealed to be writing a novel about the murder of Jason Blossom, in the vein of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*.[12]

> JUGHEAD: Our story is about a town. A small town. And the people who live in the town. From a distance, it presents itself like so many other small towns all over the world. Safe. Decent. Innocent. Get closer, though, and you start seeing the shadows underneath. ("The River's Edge," 1.1)

Though this picturesque town is not what is appears on the surface, the audience does not need his help in determining this. Riverdale is a little too perfect. Its motto is "The Town with Pep!" For anyone who has seen *Twin Peaks*, Riverdale feels familiar from the beginning. However, viewers with experience in the teen soap will also realize that Riverdale's perfection must hide problems; these series are intrigued by the dichotomy of surface and reality. The glossiness of these towns and their inhabitants is supposed to make the audience wonder what is going on underneath the surface; no one is this happy or beautiful all the time. Adding the 1950s aspect to Riverdale lends another layer of suspicion; most educated viewers have learned the realities of 1950s America, whether in history classes or through filmic and televisual representations of the era, countering the popular narrative of it as "a better time." Thus, when Jason Blossom's body is discovered, we understand that Jughead is correct: the crime is not a violation of an idyllic community but an outgrowth of the corruption that already exists there. In many

---

[12] The series revels in intertextuality; an example comes early on when Veronica Lodge, a transplant from New York City, tells Archie Andrews and Betty Cooper, "I'm filled with dread … Are you familiar with the works of Truman Capote? I'm *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, but this place is strictly *In Cold Blood*."

ways, *Riverdale* represents important steps forward in the teen soap, but in its basic setting building blocks, it does not stray far from subgeneric foundational ideas. Unlike the family drama, the teen soap may focus more directly on the darker side of life, whether in a small town or in Beverly Hills. As an outgrowth of the primetime soap, where these dark storylines have been brewing for over thirty years, audiences have come to expect it—seedy small towns are part of their cultural capital.

However, for those fans who have the ability to read the series without intertextual help beyond the subgenre, *Riverdale* works distinctly in the tradition. Teen soaps make spaces for their youths to congregate in hip places like diners, coffee shops, and other hangouts that viewers can eye enviously and wish their hometowns boasted. Again we can see the difference between this subgenre and, for example, the family drama: teen soaps more aggressively market their characters as types of identities that viewers might want to imitate. Teen soaps hope to be on the cutting edge at all times—ahead of trends, creating them—so that they attract and keep viewers. One way to do this is to use settings that teens may feel are more "grown up" or simply cooler than what they have available to them in real life for series' characters' typical assemblies. As these series become more millennial in tone, these locations may reflect this and be a bit more "hipster"—gastropubs, dessert bars, etc.

The town of Riverdale features Pop's Chock'Lit Shoppe, a twenty-four hour diner.[13] Pop's, like the rest of the town, has an aura of the 1950s, from the waitresses'

[13] Diners are interesting settings; they are increasingly popular with the millennial set, who are drawn to "authenticity," so some of them do hit local diners that have been around since the 1950s—like Pop's would have been—while others find themselves at new diners, built to capitalize on this swell of interest.

uniforms to the building itself, with its chrome trim and neon sign. Inside, the booths are red leather with chrome tables; each booth has a mini-jukebox atop it. There is a long counter for patrons who choose that route, as well. Thus far, Pop's is featured in every episode of the series, as befits the local teen hangout in a small town, but it is a major clue that things in Riverdale are not as perfect as they appear. At night, the diner glows with all the neon used on the exterior; Pop chose to use only red neon, giving the inside of the diner a malevolent glow, which is appropriate, considering most of what is discussed in Pop's at night concerns Jason Blossom's murder or other sinister and/or illegal activities the teenagers find themselves getting involved with. This is also where Jughead chooses to write his novel. On the surface, it is just a convenient spot; they are open twenty-four hours and the coffee is likely unlimited as long as he orders food, like many diners. However, the ominous atmosphere is perfect to tell his story on both levels—to the future readers of his novel and to the audience. Unlike the sunny Stars Hollow town square where Rory Gilmore has many of her exploits, the settings of the teen soap tend to be darker, both literally and figuratively. Characters in teen soaps require more shadowy meeting places like alleys, deserted hallways and buildings, and other isolated areas; these increase the potential for exciting incidents and cliffhanger moments.

Riverdale's characters live in homes right out of basic teen soap iconography, as well. The characters' homes are of varying size, but are made with large rooms because scenes are often blocked in such a way that characters move around a great deal. The teens' bedrooms play a big role, both as a place to congregate and somewhere to

withdraw from life. For example, Betty Cooper's room is an important center of activity; it is a flawless update of the '50s teen queen's room: white wood furniture, pink floral wallpaper with a pink floral comforter in a complementary pattern, soft lighting with lamps rather than an overhead light, and a makeup table, which is where we see Betty for the first time, wearing a—what else?—pink bra and putting the finishing touches on her makeup, including pink lipstick. The color pink surrounds Betty; pink connotes girlishness and happiness, both of which are Betty's signatures at the beginning of the series (and, intertextually, from the comic series). The producers of *Riverdale* expect that their target audience will, as Annette Kuhn has noted, "belong . . . to a social audience already divided by gender" (152). The teen soap, aimed at a female audience, presupposes a certain amount of cultural capital outside of the genre on the part of its viewers; as a result, viewers of *Riverdale* should see more than just pink in Betty's room. It is her haven, her dreaming place, her space for gossiping with her best friend—in other words, Betty's room holds her identity in ways that viewers could only access by reading her diary.

One secret that Betty's room holds is her love for Archie Andrews; unrequited love is a common trope in teen drama, but it is more often found in other subgenres, which makes its appearance in *Riverdale* particularly interesting. However, Betty's feelings for Archie are merely a vehicle for larger concerns. Betty's house is next door to Archie's, and she can see directly into his bedroom window, a common trope of teen movies and television. Betty is not alone in her room; she discusses her feelings for

Archie with her other best friend, Kevin Keller.[14] Her talk is innocent, for the most part, but Kevin's is not.

> KEVIN: Game changer! Archie got hot! He's got abs now. Six more reasons for you to take that ginger bull by the horns tonight.
>
> BETTY: (*speechless*) ("The River's Edge,"1.1)[15]

Even this admittedly tame admiration of Archie's form is too much for Betty, though she does admire Archie from the window for a bit, backlit by pink light as a result of the lights in her room bouncing off all of the decorations. In her room, where so much of who she is supposed to be is everywhere around her, speaking her attraction is too much at the moment. Betty is stifled in many ways. As the series progresses, it becomes clear that all of the pink is misleading—it is her mother's choice, and Betty would like to try red lipstick for a change, much like her elder sister, Polly, who is currently living in a sanitarium. All of the softness around Betty—the white and pink, the soft lighting, the mini chandelier on her wall—is literally a child's bedroom. Her mother decorated it. However, in a teen soap, this setting suggests that Betty is the character most likely to rebel; she is the one who will ask questions and start trouble, because too much parental direction equals defiance in this subgenre.

---

[14] Kevin is another update from the 1950s version of *Archie*; a gay teen at Riverdale High and the sheriff's son, he is a recent addition to the comic diegesis.

[15] It must be noted that Betty's visible appreciation of Archie's nude chest is important; the soaps under the teen drama umbrella are much more likely to embrace teen female sexual desire openly and without judgment or punishment; while Annette Kuhn argues that "soap opera and . . . melodrama . . . at least raise the possibility of female desire and female point of view" (153), producers often falter when teenagers are brought into the equation.

Cars are important locations, as well; they give the teenagers their own space away from their parents and allow everyone quick ways to leave uncomfortable or dangerous situations. In some series, they are even used as weapons. As a whole, cars connote a move toward adulthood, too. The main idea behind having access to a license and a vehicle is that one's parents trust them.[16] In *Riverdale*, as in other teen soaps, cars function as private spaces in which the teens feel free to be vulnerable and open, so a great deal of important plot details unfold here, even if those scenes seem to be short. These teens do not always own cars, but when they find their way into them, it is important. Archie does not seem to have access to a vehicle and walks everywhere;[17] when his music teacher, Ms. Grundy—here, much younger and prettier than in the comics—offers to give him a ride on a hot day, it leads to sex in that same car later that night. Ms. Grundy drives a Volkswagen Beetle; signifying youth and the counterculture, this is a natural choice for a musician as well as the adult in the series who has an affair with a teenager. The next time the car is seen, they are outside of it, next to Sweetwater River on the morning Jason Blossom disappears. The gunshot that Archie and Ms. Grundy assume is tied to Jason's death—later revealed to have come from Dilton Doiley and his Scout troop—interrupts their interlude; again, while Archie exposes himself—physically and emotionally—the car must conceal more secrets about their relationship. Cars appear often in teen soaps, reinforcing an aspect of the subgenre that its writers strive to highlight: these teens' agency. As The New Childhood Studies emphasizes,

---

[16] A secondary connotation is that one has the money for a car, but this connotation is often different when taken into cultural context—who paid for the car, specifically, becomes the concern. As television is whitewashed, one generally assumes parents pay for these teens' things unless the narrative makes a point to say otherwise.

[17] This is perhaps a nod to the comics wherein Archie's jalopy often breaks down, forcing him to walk.

children are increasingly active agents in their own lives: they are "meaningful, engaged, independent social actors whose activities and practices influence a variety of social contexts and settings" rather than the "passive actors" they tend to be characterized as (Best 58). In their cars, teens may choose to stay at home or leave, continue with an investigation or follow a new lead, meet new friends or leave old ones behind; no matter what they decide, the point is that *they* are the ones doing the choosing, and they have their own transportation to back up the decision. Narratively, cars speed up the story, allowing for a host of possibilities—namely, in the teen soap, these characters may end up any number of places, which is vital when a series is based on secrets and unpredictability.

Clothing: *Pretty Little Liars*

In its emphasis on a town full of secrets and the teens who must keep them, *Riverdale* follows in the steps of *Pretty Little Liars*, another show based on a book series—this one a YA series from Alloy. *Pretty Little Liars* boasts an ardent following even as it finishes its final season and contributes to the teen soap's growing iconography with its impressive costuming.[18] The series is set in Rosewood, a fictional small town in Pennsylvania, and follows four teenage girls, Aria Montgomery, Hanna Marin, Spencer Hastings, and Emily Fields, who find themselves terrorized by a shadowy presence, "A," that threatens to reveal their secrets—and eventually take their lives—after the body of their missing friend, Alison DiLaurentis, is discovered. At her funeral, A tells the friends that he/she knows every secret they ever told Alison, which is quite a lot, and the girls

[18] See Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of this series.

struggle to keep A from destroying their lives. Later, Alison is revealed to be alive, which further complicates the narrative.

Viewership of teen soaps is overwhelmingly female and under twenty-five; the goal is to have viewers identify with at least character in some way so that they commit to the show. It is the pleasure of the televisual text, if I may paraphrase the title of one of Barthes's works. Barthes addresses the same idea in his piece on electoral photography: "a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type. This glorification is in fact the very definition of the photogenic: the voter is at once expressed and heroized, he is invited to elect himself" ("Photography and Electoral Appeal," 1320-21). This idea is certainly at work in television series directed toward women; they often work to create an emotional connection with their audience. Teen soaps tend to go a step further and hope their viewers *become* the characters; *Pretty Little Liars* fans speak of being an Aria or a Spencer, for example. As an extension of its parent genre, the soap opera, the teen soap invites the viewer to try on various subjectivities as a viewer, realizing that, as Ien Ang has argued, their identities as women are not static—just like the characters they watch, who represent varying types of womanhood. Because women are in a constant process of defining themselves through and against society's version of who they are and what they should be, assigning one subject position to women is problematic at best (Ang "Melodramatic Identifications" 163). By presenting viewers with a variety of female characters in this "choose your own subjectivity" game, producers can safely bet on a wider fan base. Also, as the genre has evolved, possible

subjectivities are slowly expanding; while initially, viewers nearly always saw thin white women from the upper middle to upper class,[19] women of color have found what appears to be a permanent home in the subgenre, and body types are more varied. For instance, *Pretty Little Liars*' Alison is nearer a size twelve than a two in her adult years, and the series never addresses it; this is simply part of who Alison is now, and it does not limit her in any way as it might have in years (and series) past. This series, in particular, is an especially good example of how teen soaps work with female subjectivities to attract and keep an audience.

Viewers of teen soaps are some of the most passionate—they may be rivaled only by science fiction fans—and when they see themselves in a series, they stay with it. Producers and studios know this, and they choose their young female stars appropriately. There is a reason the stars of *Pretty Little Liars* have such different styles; the goal is to reach as many viewers as possible, to let them all "elect" themselves. These shows are aspirational. If a series focuses on four teen girls, they must be distinguished in some way so that viewers will immediately know what to think about each of them. This is done in a way that appeals to teen girls—and if we are honest, to audiences in general: through what the girls look like. From the first time we see each Liar (as they are referred to by television critics), their personality shines through, from their physical appearance to the clothes they choose to wear.[20]

---

[19] While *Beverly Hills, 90210*'s Andrea Zuckerman was an exception, her lower-class status and Jewishness were not foregrounded—both were used as narrative tools when convenient, not as true character elements.
[20] The Liars' style has been so successful that in 2014, during Season Four, Aeropostale partnered with the series' costume designer Mandi Line to release a *Pretty Little Liars* clothing line ("*Pretty Little Liars'* Mandi Line Spills Her Secrets About the New Aeropostale Line, Now Available!")
.

And if we are to keep our ideas of genre television as a place where semiotics are greatly in play, matching the Liars' clothes to their personalities would be a foregone conclusion: in "Language and Clothing," Barthes reminds us that "clothing is supposed to express a psychological depth" (25). When we look at what a character is wearing, we should be able to understand things about them. While other subgenres take this a bit more seriously, choosing to emphasize the "character" part of "character's costumes," the teen soap loves to take the fashion aspect as far as possible. Still, the clothes match the character; they are just intended to be an important part of the subjectivity the viewer is invited to try on. Aria is the artsy one; a writer and art enthusiast, she stands out from the masses at her school. Her clothes are rarely what the average teen girl would put together; the viewer often has to look at what she is wearing twice just to take it all in. Of all the characters, her look is the most obviously "designed." There are layers of textures and fabrics—it is not uncommon for her to pair a skirt with bright crinoline and a leather jacket. As an adult, she learns more about fashion and its place in the business world and dials down the punk aspects, but her interest in sartorial adventure is still clear. She likes to walk the line between quirky and dangerous. For Aria, every day is a fashion show because every day is a chance to express herself. She calls to the young girl who sees beyond high school to the world beyond it, one who perhaps is not as confident as Aria, but hopes to be.

Offering another potential identity for viewers, Hanna is the typical queen bee, blond and beautiful with big dimples and an innocent face that belies the deceit that comes so naturally to her. Still, she is sweet at her core, something left over from her younger years when she was chubby and less popular and still felt comfortable showing

her true emotions—she did not yet know how they could be used against her. Hanna dresses in whatever is hottest at the moment, and like some girls voted "most popular" in suburban high schools these days, she is often seen in casually beautiful clothes: dresses, close-fitting pants and shirts, anything that fits well and looks expensive without being gaudy. She wears a lot of chiffon, hinting at her body without showing it—a natural choice for a young woman with body image issues. Hanna's style screams a type of confidence that comes from knowing that you are beautiful and feared. As an adult, she moves to work in fashion, and her style evolves to be a bit more daring and edgy; this shift is a natural expression of who Hanna becomes after the Liars' kidnapping and torture at the hands of A in Season Five. Her costumes incorporate more leather, black, and heavy jewelry; a cursory reading would blame her New York residence, but a more careful consideration sees that Hanna still feels unsafe in the world. These clothes make her feel tough. In this way, her clothes reflect her character's arc.

In high school, Emily radiates confidence as well, and her clothes reflect that, but it comes from a different place. She is one of her town's few people of color—her mother is Latina and her father is Korean[21]—and she is a champion swimmer. As a result, she is strikingly beautiful and in great shape; her clothes reflect a personality that is both low-key and self-assured. Emily is the tomboy of the group, and she is often seen in jeans, tank tops, and button-down shirts. However, everything she wears reflects a high degree of body consciousness—the jeans are tight and the shirts are fitted and low-cut. Emily is not afraid of dresses; she is quite comfortable in them, in fact, and out of all the girls, she

[21] The actress who portrays Emily is of Filipina, Irish, Scottish, and Spanish descent.

is the most likely to wear something that would get her kicked out of the school dance. This style continues into adulthood. However, while her friends move on to a more adult look, generally wearing casual clothes only when the narrative indicates they would be tired or sick, Emily continues with her tomboy look. A quick overview would indicate that Emily simply enjoys her clothes; however, when paired with Emily's storyline, this surface reading becomes less convincing. Emily has dropped out of college and is floundering with what to do with her life; her clothes are emblematic of her stasis. She is stuck in her old life and unable to move forward. Once Emily starts to accept why she has come to this halt—namely, she has not fully processed her father's death, she is able to move on make positive changes. Her wardrobe begins to shift, as well. While she still wears jeans and button-downs, she incorporates them into a more polished, purposeful look. Emily's style tells viewers that she is confident in her abilities and her beauty, a tough girl who can take care of herself.

Spencer dresses quite differently than her friends; a member of the country club set, her clothes identify her as such, especially in the beginning. Spencer's outfits say nothing so much as money, and lots of it. She dresses in luxurious, expensive fabrics—deep velvet blazers with Italian leather boots, handmade sweaters, and delicate dresses. These are pieces of clothing that require careful laundering by someone who does it for a living. Her choices complement her delicate beauty; Spencer is, quite frankly, built like a bird—and interestingly enough, she is fond of bird and other animal prints in her youth. Unlike Spencer, animals have freedom of choice and movement; her parents are overbearing and expect a great deal of her. Her clothes always emphasize her small frame but do so in an attractive way; she projects an image of someone who is well put-together

and calm, something that perfectionist Spencer strives for every day. As an adult, she leaves the animal prints behind in favor of more traditionally preppy prints, like plaid, which she favored as a teen as well. Spencer also moves toward more unstructured cardigans, something she was previously only seen wearing in her most vulnerable times—like when she checked into the Radley Sanitarium. Large, soft cardigans signify comfort and a casualness that are at odds with the put-together façade Spencer strives to send. Her clothing choices as an adult reflect her eventual standing up to her parents and establishing her own identity as well as the trauma she underwent at the hands of A, specifically the A that was revealed to be Charlotte DiLaurentis.[22] Still, Spencer maintains a convincing outward appearance of strength and resilience. Those viewers who elect to identify with Spencer choose to do so because they see the same qualities in themselves—or, at least, they hope they do.

Now that I have set out a distinct explanation of the types of clothing the Liars wear and what it is intended to represent, what should one do with this information? As Barthes reminds his readers in "Language and Clothing," when it comes to clothing, "meaning is not located in the finished object, it can be found in a tiny detail or in a complex outfit" (28). In other words, we do not look at the simple outfit on its own and draw meaning, but either break it apart or see it in its complexity—that is, as it is worn by a character. Fashion, when taken into consideration as iconography, is especially significant in that it signals to the audience not only how to think about a character, but

[22] The series has multiple people behind the A personality; each reveal is shown to be a more vindictive and dangerous person. Charlotte held the four Liars hostage and inflicted mental torture on them that has, among other problems, given Hanna clear PTSD issues that currently drive the narrative.

how that character thinks about themselves. In the teen soap, fashion goes one step further by becoming part of how the subgenre constructs subjectivities for the audience. By using clothing to create distinct types of female characters, the audience can "try on" very different subjectivities—or disregard ones they do not care for altogether.

The Young Adult Fantasy Drama

The young adult fantasy drama makes a place for itself within the genre by featuring a space where teens exert power over adults, not the other way around. Here, these teen characters are often the most powerful people in their diegesis, leading to a particular type of concerns and characters. This is the reason we term this subgenre "young adult" and not "teen"—whereas in the teen soap, where characters may physically age while their emotional intelligence does not significantly increase, the teens of the young adult fantasy drama are burdened with the weight of the knowledge that their decisions affect the world, not just them. As a result, they age emotionally much faster than many others within the larger genre. Series such as *Star-Crossed* (2014, the CW), *The Shannara Chronicles* (2016-present, MTV), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003, the WB/UPN) offer an excellent introduction to the subgenre and its iconography.

Character: *Star-Crossed*

Unlike the majority of the series under the teen drama umbrella, the young adult fantasy drama and young adult fantasy soap are a bit different in their casting practices; they have to be. While their teen characters can be played by actors roughly fifteen to

twenty-one—or at least by actors who appear to be that age—their love interests are not usually in that group, at least not mentally. It is much more common to have a structure in which the protagonist is in high school (and the physical and chronological age for it) with similar friends, and encounters a world they never imagined existed—a world populated by people who tend to look much younger than they actually are. The majority of these series begin with the subject positional character as human—or at least believing they are human—or a non-human character surrounded by humans attempting to protect and help them on their quest. The most usual type of these series is supernatural in nature and feature vampires, witches, and werewolves: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is obviously the ground-breaking series for this subgenre and for critical attention on teen television in general. However, since I will examine character considerations in *Buffy* at length in a later chapter, I will turn to the CW's *Star-Crossed* (2014) for an analysis of significant tropes. This series also suggests the increasing popularity of science-fiction and post-apocalyptic series.

Inspired by *Romeo and Juliet* with a little *District 9* thrown in, *Star-Crossed* tells the story of Emery "Em" Whitehill, a teen girl from Edendale, a town outside Baton Rouge, Louisiana whose high school is a little different from the average American teenager's: hers is the testing site for integrating alien life into American society. When Em was six, an alien ship crash-landed in her hometown; unlike the legendary incidents in Roswell, this ship was full of families, and many survived, though the National Guard killed a number in what they perceived to be an attack. The military rounded up the aliens—called Atrians—but one escaped, and Em hid the boy in her garage for a night.

He was captured the next morning, and the Atrians were housed in a militarized sector. When the government decides the Atrians should slowly integrate into American society, they choose seven Atrian teens to attend Edendale's Marshall High School, and Roman—the boy young Em helped—is one of them. The transition is far from easy, though, as the townspeople resist having alien children among their own and a terrorist cell forms to force them all out by any means necessary.

Star-Crossed works within the young adult fantasy drama tradition which has an eye to realism, casting both adults that can be trusted—primarily, the parents of the central leads, Em and Roman. These adults will often parent the rest of the teens and sometimes the supernatural characters as well. In Roman's case, his father, Nox, is their tribe's leader and the Atrians' spokesperson; his death in the pilot sets off a chain of events that powers the rest of the narrative, but his lessons to his children, particularly Roman, permeate it, too. *Star-Crossed*'s characters call to mind the battle for school integration—the setting in the American South is hardly a light touch—and racial tensions in the United States, as well as the immigration debate. As Roman explains, their arrival on Earth was not meant to be an act of aggression: "For my kind, it was meant to be a day of liberation. Refuge. But for everyone else, it was an invasion" ("Pilot," 1.1). Later discussions of Atria make it clear that the Atrians' choice to come to Earth was one of survival, and they did not expect such hostility—some, but this level has been a surprise after the wonderful things they had heard about humanity. However, their first few days of integration are met with extremely confrontational students who do not

hesitate to bring up concerns like miscegenation, for example, charging Roman to keep away from "their" girls.

As *Star-Crossed* (and classics like *Buffy*) exemplify, young adult fantasy dramas have a great deal of interest in the authority system the protagonist and their friends are held under; there is usually one representative who can be trusted—a parental figure or caring teacher, perhaps—that allows them to retain some hope, but overall, the system is corrupt, as Chapter Five will examine in more detail. Adults have their own agendas to focus on, and most of them do not have the needs of the teens in mind; it seems everyone who is supposed to take care of them wants to control them at worst and simply does not listen to what they want at best. Because of this, the teenagers become self-sufficient fairly early on and each has a general skill set: there is a smart/talented one to solve real-world problems, a witch or someone trained to deal with the world they come from to handle supernatural or otherworldly issues, a fighter, a sensitive and caring one, and a bookish one to do research. Characters may jump in and out of these categories or straddle more than one; of course, there may be multiple characters in each. Some begin their time as protected assets, such as younger siblings or friends who travel in from other lands. Mentor figures are often necessary to teach and guide the protagonist, particularly if they are involved in saving the world or fighting evil. In terms of cultural work, the lack of truly helpful and caring adult figures—or at the very least, the idea that the world is imbalanced, with a preponderance of evil or simply indifferent adults—suggests to viewers that they are on their own in the world, that adults are not a source of guidance for them. Even when these parents are "good," they are clueless. In an American culture

where teenagers are increasingly turning to each other for knowledge of how to conduct themselves because they feel their parents do not understand how contemporary teen social structures work (see Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees and Wannabes* for her exposure of today's "Girl World," for example), the metaphorical message rings true. Here, unlike many other subgenres where metaphor is not utilized quite so heavily, characters must operate on multiple levels. Otherwise, the message falls apart.

Star-Crossed works within the young adult fantasy drama tradition by having characters from each side of the universe inhabit these character types, particularly the teenagers. Em's friend from childhood, Lukas, is tech-savvy and utilizes these skills whenever necessary, representing the need for advancement from the young to topple the corruption of the old. Julia, a friend Em made while in the hospital for her immune deficiency, represents the curious and culturally sensitive teenager who wants to make the Othered feel welcome; she finds her counterpart in Roman's sister, Sophia, who simply wants to make friends on her first day, something that offends her mother—she is only there to learn. However, the racist views of their fellow students make their goals difficult. As Stuart Hall explains in "New Ethnicities," "[r]acism . . . operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness" (445). In Edendale, these teens can see literal boundaries with the Atrian teens living in a military-patrolled sector, but the rhetoric surrounding the presence of Atrians on Earth references and reinforces how different humans and aliens are—they cannot understand or truly trust each other

because of it. As such, their children should not mix. The Atrians' experience is a strange one: not colonized, as their homeland has not been invaded, they are the invaders, yet still overpowered and held down in seeming perpetuity. At first glance, it would appear that ideas of Othering—in the sense that Edward Said uses it (as often does Stuart Hall, particularly when examining Blackness in Britain), as something done by the imperialist—do not apply here. However, this series works to show that one can be Othered in many ways. It begins with stereotyping, a concern for many teens, which Hall argues in "The Spectacle of the Other" is "part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order" (258):

> It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant,' the 'normal' and the 'pathological,' the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable,' what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them. It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community' and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them—'the Others'—who are in some way different—'beyond the pale'. (258)

Stereotyping makes it very easy for teenagers to choose who to avoid—as well as for their parents to tell them whom they must avoid—and in Edendale, the Atrians' outward appearance and planet of origin are an obvious place to start. In their offerings of friendship, Julia and Sophia mirror the feelings of Em and Roman in their romantic relationship—physical differences have nothing to do with matters of the heart and mind. The series uses characters to send moral and ethical messages to the audience at home, a common device across the teen drama genre, but one seemingly required in as many

aspects of a young adult fantasy drama series as possible, for in these shows, power and difference are used as metaphors:

> . . . these shows deal with questions of difference, otherness, increased power and the impact of these on personal and community relationships: a significant number of them draw on other cult television forms, using supernatural power as a motif through which to explore these concerns. Many shows give the sense that to be a teenager is to be not quite human. (Moseley 43)

Star-Crossed is a bit heavy-handed—after all, half of these teens are literally not human—but their friends are treated as race traitors for even believing that the Atrians might belong on Earth. The series' characters, like those of their subgenre, represent different approaches to finding oneself in this alternative environment and invite the audience to imagine—how would you react to a new universe?

Setting: *The Shannara Chronicles*

As this brief discussion of *Star-Crossed* suggests, setting plays an important role in the young adult fantasy drama. *The Shannara Chronicles* (2016-present, MTV) offers an excellent example of how setting works in this subgenre. The series focuses on three main teen characters. Amberle is an Elven princess whose challenge of gender norms within her race through her winning of a traditionally male competition to become a protector of the Ellcrys—a tree that helps guard the world from demon forces by keeping them trapped in another dimension—sets off a chain of events that leads to her becoming psychically linked to the tree. Much like her counterparts in this subgenre, Amberle

constantly finds herself fighting patriarchal ideas about what she can or should do as a woman in her society, but—also like young women in the subgenre—her femininity is marked as an asset.[23] Wil is a half-human, half-elf whose quest to become a healer is disrupted by his inheritance of the Elfstones, powerful magical stones which Wil is charged to protect—and whose very presence on his body keeps him in constant danger from those who want to steal them at any cost. Eretria, a human thief who initially presents herself as an antagonist and obstacle to Wil's quest, reveals herself to be much more complicated, as she is held captive—under hinted sexual servitude—by her band, the Rovers. The settings for these teens' story are particularly interesting from a semiotic standpoint, because while it is filmed in New Zealand and quite beautiful, we are meant to take something else away from it than an appreciation for their untamed forests.

The Shannara Chronicles is a unique entry in the genre; as a fantasy series, it is set in the far future, though this is not immediately obvious. Based on Terry Brooks' popular *Shannara* high fantasy novel series, begun in 1977 with the release of *The Sword of Shannara*, the series is set on a post-apocalyptic Earth in which war has so greatly changed society that we have gone back to magic to supplement the science we have lost. In essence, this new world blends the two, so that early technology is still around but those elements that speak to fantasy fans—elves, magic, and Druids—are prominent. In terms of setting, the series boasts elegant, sweeping castles, much like those found in Disney animated films; foggy forests; and high mountains with symbols of the kingdoms carved into them. The castles activate feelings of romance in the viewer with their

[23] See Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of the subgenre's concern with patriarchal authority.

resemblance to animated love stories from their childhoods, but additionally, these castles are clearly strongholds, representing power and military might. They are built to last, an idea reinforced in all of the discussion about the Great Wars—they have functioned as citadels in the past. The castles are also beautifully appointed, calling to mind just how much wealth has accumulated in the Elven tribes; this is an important parallel when one considers the forests. The fog allows people to hide, but it also seems to have encouraged many to hide permanently. There are a number of settlements in the forest, growing from many human groups who feel disenfranchised and have turned to thievery. The fog connotes secrecy and fear; what is contained within? The mountains are beautiful and allow for shots placing the teen characters against the vista, showing just how far they have left until they reach their destination, but the mountains also represent division. They keep these four races apart; some members of each actively use them to hurt each other, setting traps and walling themselves up inside, waiting for unsuspecting victims. The mountains actively discourage mixing with other races, as the weather conditions make crossing them very difficult. While the series has not yet gone into detail about the "cataclysm," the many wars of generations ago actually changed the topography of the planet, so it can be inferred that the mountains in the Pacific Northwest as we know them today are significantly more treacherous for these characters.

For those viewers who are not familiar with the books, the setting initially seems like a parallel universe; however, there are hints in the dialogue of "the world that was." Still, if those go over the audience's head, it would be hard to miss the ruins of the fallen Space Needle in the opening scenes (and prominently displayed on the posters). We are

not just on Earth; we are in Seattle. Author Terry Brooks notes that the network never wanted to disguise this; in fact, they decided to highlight it:

> "MTV was drawn to that particular aspect of the work, and they wanted to make it clear right from the first where this was set so that the viewers would have an immediate identification with this world in the future . . . And, obviously, in our current political and our science climate that we have right now—our concerns over environment, our concerns over the changes in the weather and so forth, global warming and all that—it's kind of necessary that they can connect to that in a way that this book goes where everything has gone south." (qtd. in Burks para. 9.)

Brooks brings up another thought-provoking semiotic aspect of the series. By setting the series in Seattle, the producers remind the audience of our current cultural narrative about the Pacific Northwest: socially liberal, environmentally friendly, full of locally sourced food, and home to big businesses like Boeing and Microsoft. However, we are forced to rework our immediate connections because these things no longer belong to this setting. The new Pacific Northwest is home to regressive gender roles, for example. The only business that has survived seems to be the black market. The signification here is third-order: ideology. The television series is warning its viewers, much like the book series, of the possible downside to all of our advancements. There are those who will use science for evil; people exist among us who still think regressively, even if you do not. Here are some models of teens who are using their voices for good—you can do the same.

Clothing and Accessories: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

While some pieces of setting may be found in other subgenres—and just signify slightly different things—in terms of wardrobe, the young adult fantasy drama is a bit different from many other subgenres in that some of these characters have specialized costuming for their secret lives. Still, others, primarily female main characters, generally wear clothing impractical for their activities. Unless the storyline precludes it, these teens also dress in clothing that seems accessible to the audience; it may come from designers' closets, but it looks familiar to audiences. They know people who dress this way—perhaps themselves. A series that works well with wardrobe is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003, the WB/UPN).[24] While the idea of costume styling may seem similar to the family drama in that clothes are less aspirational and more approachable, the difference between the two subgenres is that here, these characters tell their emotional stories through what they are wearing in a sort of shorthand. The family drama may layer a character's personality and story into their clothing, but the narrative will quickly reveal them—as such, the clothing becomes a helpful visual hint. In the young adult fantasy drama, wardrobe must work alongside the narrative to tell its own story. While an entire chapter could be written about this topic, I will limit myself to a discussion of three characters: Buffy, Giles, and Spike.

Buffy Summers is very fashion-forward; in her first appearance in "Welcome to the Hellmouth," she is shown wearing a shrunken cardigan, low-cut tank top, mini skirt,

[24] See Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of this series.

and knee-high boots. In 1997, this was a very fashionable ensemble for a teen girl.[25] The light colors of the tops—a very light blue for the cardigan and white for the tank top—suggest purity and trustworthiness, something Buffy is trying to project on her first day at a new school. The cardigan would also help in this manner with her teachers, but she cannot help but choose the most fashionable version of it. Buffy pairs these with a dark pink miniskirt; pink projects the femininity of which Buffy is fiercely proud, but the darker tone suggests Buffy has a less childlike side. An all-pastel look would signify innocence, and Buffy is no longer that. The audience can infer Buffy's adult mindset from her role as Vampire Slayer, but as the narrative unfolds, we learn more and more about her time in Los Angeles before the series opens, where she not only burned down a school, but witnessed the dissolution of her parents' marriage and the death of her former Watcher. However, in her initial presentation, she is simply worried about fitting in and shutting down The Harvest—a basic plot for the subgenre. Her clothes, however, work overtime.

As the series progresses, Buffy moves toward more direct signification of this assertion; Season Three, where Buffy battles Faith, a rogue Slayer, shows Buffy in more mature clothing—she dresses less like a teen and more like a young adult. Though she still brings out the cardigans, they function more as decorative coverage for her many cute tops. The interesting fashion change comes in her pants—this is the season Buffy really goes for leather, which is a signature of Faith's look. Leather signifies bad behavior and a bad attitude, which makes perfect sense on Faith, and it begins to show up in

[25] Buffy's fashionista status was reinforced by the actress's many appearances in teen magazines, most of which detailed her clothes on the series in some way.

Buffy's wardrobe when she starts emulating Faith's "want, take, have" outlook on life. However, the leather comes to mean something different when she wears it to confront Faith on graduation day in the Season Three-ending episodes; here, the red leather pants connote, on one level, blood—she intends to kill Faith because she needs Slayer blood to cure Angel from a poison Faith injected him with—and on another, the moral grey area she is moving into. Buffy has had to make difficult decisions before, but this is the first time she has committed murder. Previous deaths on her hands, such as Angel's, were to serve the common good; the nicest way she could term Faith's is an execution for crimes committed. A more cynical view is that she is killing Faith to save her boyfriend. While a case can easily be made for it as Angel serves humanity and Faith has chosen to work for the Mayor (the villain of that season's story-arc, or as *Buffy* refers to them, the Big Bad), Buffy is moving into new territory. Her wardrobe as she fights shows this, as do future choices in similar situations.

When the audience first meets Rupert Giles, Buffy comes to him for books in his role as the school librarian. However, he reveals himself to be her new Watcher in her role as Vampire Slayer. His outfit of a tweed suit, sweater vest, striped button-down shirt, and tie—all in varying shades of brown—does exactly what he hopes it will do: allow him to blend in. Giles's mission is to support the Slayer in her quest:

> GILES: . . . you are the Slayer. Into each generation a Slayer is born, one girl in all the world, a Chosen One, one born with the strength and skill to hunt—
>
> BUFFY (*interrupting and joining in*): With the strength and skill to hunt the

> vampires, to stop the spread of their evil blah, blah, blah . . . I've heard it, okay? (“Welcome to the Hellmouth,” 1.1)

His goal is to be as unobtrusive as possible, allowing Buffy to continue to work in secrecy. Though her secret is blown in the opening episodes, creating the Scooby Gang, Buffy and her friends still must operate as covertly as possible, so Giles’s wardrobe remains drab. When a spell turns the adults in town into the teenage version of themselves (“Band Candy,” 3.6), his clothes are the first thing to change. As the candy begins to take effect, loosening his inhibitions, Giles takes off his glasses and the suit jacket and unbuttons his shirt. When the drug is fully in his system, Giles is wearing the same white undershirt he has had on all day, but he has now paired it with jeans and a plaid shirt. This change is jarring for the audience, who is unaware Giles owned such things. Tellingly, the undershirt sports holes from the lit cigarette that Giles constantly has in his mouth. These clothes signify a rebellious Giles, someone the audience has a bit of knowledge of from discussions in previous episodes, but seeing him in action is entirely different. Again, the clothes make the man. Viewers can see his ensemble and gain a great deal of knowledge about his emotional state at the present moment, which is vital in a world where magic rules and we may suddenly be treated to an entirely different version of the characters we have grown to love. An untamed, wild Giles is a Giles of which the audience should be wary.

Spike is another character whose clothes are a significant part of his identity. As the human William in Victorian London, his wardrobe reflected his repression—everything is properly covered and tightly buttoned up. His suit choices are light-colored,

as are his ties and waistcoats; each choice reflects his innocence and (likely) virginal state. When he is sired by Drusilla, he switches to darker colors, which could be taken at face value as a necessity for a vampire. However, *Buffy* (and its spin-off, *Angel*) makes it clear that his vampire family, at least, dress fashionably; Angelus is seen in flashbacks wearing brighter waistcoats than one might imagine the brooding present-time Angel choosing. Spike chooses these darker colors because they express his newer, angrier, and more violent personality. He also selects clothing that is less restrictive, particularly a coat that billows around him, something he seems to enjoy, as the effect is grand and impressive. Whereas William preferred only being noticed by the person with whom he was speaking, Spike demands attention from everyone around him. Later, he takes a black leather duster from the second Slayer he kills in battle, Nikki Wood, and makes it part of his everyday attire, so much that it becomes an iconic part of the series. Connotatively, it works much as any other leather piece would, but the fact that he took a piece of clothing intended for a woman and wears it without any reservations means a great deal in terms of Spike's character. He is much more at ease with himself as a vampire than he ever was as a human—though he still has some deep emotional scars and insecurities—and sees no problem in taking on some feminine aspects in his gender presentation. He is still menacing in his coat, no matter for whom it was originally intended.

Buffy is also a good example of the special iconography found in young adult fantasy—weapons and occult objects. Regardless of the type of adventure these characters find themselves embroiled in, some iconography remains constant: weapons,

primarily of the ancient or medieval kind, are present from the beginning. Finale and sweeps episodes will often deal in "superweapons" of the *deux ex machina* variety; *Buffy* pokes fun at this one-upsmanship of weaponry with villains like the Judge—in their research on the demon, the Scooby Gang learn "no weapon forged can kill him" ("Surprise," 2.13). Occult paraphernalia and spell books, mostly in dead and/or foreign languages are accessible to both sides, but they are seen more often with the "good guys," along with books of lore or mythology, including information regarding where the characters came from or how their powers work. These books come in handy for the ubiquitous "world out of order episode" wherein things suddenly go awry: spells are cast, someone is possessed, powers are lost, or some mysterious artifact from the home planet shows up.

Conclusion

By identifying three distinct subgenres through brief analysis of relevant series, this chapter argues that even though its various subgenres are often lumped into one category, the teen drama is actually a multifaceted televisual form that performs its own cultural work. Because the teen soap is so widely popular—and therefore highly criticized—it is the subgenre most often seen as representative of the entire genre of teen dramas. However, as this chapter suggests, this generalization does not reflect the range of teen drama series. While all subgenres are interesting in their own ways, they should not be taken together as a monolithic entity. The family drama offers up series loved by audiences and critics alike, such as *Gilmore Girls*, as well as shows that never found a large following but represent a twenty-first century view of the family, like *Life*

Unexpected. It is difficult to see what these shows have in common with a teen soap like *Pretty Little Liars,* which prides itself on keeping the drama at a constant fever pitch by putting its characters in physical and emotional peril each week. Still, these series vary greatly from offerings like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The Shannara Chronicles*, which present their versions of the teenage world through metaphor and a fantasy lens. Putting these series under the same umbrella leads to misreadings and misunderstandings for both critics and viewers; both audiences might expect something that may not appear and are shocked by elements that, in their opinion, should not be there. As this study suggests, only when we start giving these series a more nuanced approach can real understanding and critical analysis begin. Jason Mittell has rightly noted that historically, "traditional genre analysis has tended to avoid detailed specificities in lieu of sweeping generalizations" (*Genre and Television* 24). However, more nuanced approaches have begun to be taken to what is considered "quality TV"—that is, television with male protagonists or television that focuses on the more "serious" aspects of the adult world. It is my hope that this chapter has made it clear that not only it is time we as scholars stop writing and speaking of the teen drama in these generalities, but we need to recognize the important cultural work these series perform. Thus, Chapters Three, Four, and Five will explore three popular series—*Gilmore Girls* as a family drama, *Pretty Little Liars* as a teen soap, and *Buffy* as young adult fantasy drama—in light of this cultural work, particularly the representation of feminist concerns and the implicit messages directed to a mostly female audience.

CHAPTER THREE: "WHERE YOU LEAD, I WILL FOLLOW": THE PROBLEMATIC WHITE LIBERAL FEMINISM OF *GILMORE GIRLS*

In 2000, the WB premiered a series about a young single mother, Lorelai Gilmore, who lives in a quirky New England town, the fictional Stars Hollow, with her sixteen-year-old daughter, Rory. This series has an interesting gimmick: its mother and daughter are more like best friends than anything else we might expect to see from a harried single mom and her teen daughter—in fact, this single mom is not even particularly harried. She is sometimes absent-minded and always runs on coffee, but those aspects of her personality are played for laughs more than anything else. *Gilmore Girls* encourages its audience to forget about the absence of Rory's father, Christopher—who is not even shown until the fifteenth episode—because, much in line with the thoughts of one of Rory's heroines, Hillary Rodham Clinton, she is being raised not only by Lorelai, but the small village of Stars Hollow.[1]

As discussed in Chapter Two, *Gilmore Girls* is an excellent example of the idea that single parents whose subject positions are privileged in family dramas find a great deal of help raising their children in small towns. The series also starts to play with the subgenre's increasing concern with class issues—seen perhaps most effectively in *Friday Night Lights*—by juxtaposing the world of Stars Hollow and Hartford, where Lorelai's upper class parents live, but *Gilmore Girls*' engagement with class in any real measure begins to slip away as the series sets up Rory's coming-of-age in connection with white

[1] In 1996, then-First Lady Clinton published *It Takes a Village*, in which she explained the ways in which she saw society as equally responsible—if not more—as families for the way children turn out. She includes a number of groups in her book, such as grandparents, neighbors, businesses, and teachers, all of which are important in the *Gilmore Girls* universe.

liberal feminism, all while giving her foils in her friends Paris Gellar and Lane Kim—the former is a more militant and emotionally stunted version of Rory while the latter offers an interesting consideration of how race and religion impact feminist explorations. This chapter suggests that with its representations of strong female characters not only in several generations of Gilmores but in both Rory and Lorelai's close female friends, the series invites considerations of feminist concerns but is limited by its implicit endorsement of white liberal feminism.

Gilmore Girls sets up its audience for a feminist narrative about the journey of a single mother and her daughter as they both grow into maturity. However, as the series goes on, it becomes clear that this aspect is really just the trick that series creator and executive producer Amy Sherman-Palladino used to get the WB's attention (as well the audience's) rather than a deep ideological basis. While Lorelai and Rory do operate as equals most of the time, this equality emerges not from a feminist egalitarian familial structure, but is the result of a rebellious child having a child of her own and refusing to be like her parents. Still, this limitation does not mean that the series does not have a feminist perspective. Directed at a general and not academic audience, the series' definition of feminism is consistent with bell hooks' straightforward argument in *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*: "Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. . . . Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult" (1).[2] Over the course of seven seasons, the central

[2] In hooks' importance in the third wave, she would have been difficult for writers of the series to have missed; I also chose her definition because, like the series purports, it is "for everybody." However, while

female characters bristle at the idea that they cannot achieve their goals, speak their minds, or even be their natural selves—and these concerns are often at the center of the narrative. And when asked about the series' feminist vision, Amy Sherman-Palladino stands by this principle, noting for example, that she is frustrated by fans' emphasis on Rory's love life in the series' Netflix revival, *A Year in the Life*, as she always felt that *Gilmore Girls* was "about a smart, ambitious girl and her family, not about Rory's romantic prospects" (Dockterman para. 2). We are the problem, Sherman-Palladino alleges, for implying that a show about two women must be centered on their romantic relationships and that their scholastic and career achievements are just window dressing. On the other hand, while the series can be commended for showing teen girls—and their families, as this is a family drama—excellent models of how to deal with various situations that arise in their lives, it also reinforces, as this chapter will argue, problematic assumptions about gender and class, particularly as the show evolves into *A Year in the Life*.

First, it is important to understand that feminism is not a monolithic term; as Imelda Whelehan contends, "the term feminism itself is problematic, because the theories that inform it are heterogeneous" (25). Unfortunately, the series seems to forget this heterogeneity and paints everyone with the same brush—that of white liberal feminism. While a detailed overview is outside the scope of this study, liberal feminism in America has its roots in the work of English thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, who engaged with the idea of women's rights long before the term feminism was in use. Wollstonecraft

---

the series sets up the egalitarian viewpoint in the first part of the definition, it falters as well, falling into the second issue hooks illustrates.

advocated for education for women, explaining that "that bare physical facts of biological difference should not be unquestionably extended to create distinctions between the mental or rational capacity of men and women" (Whelehan 30). Liberal feminism also looks to the nineteenth-century American suffragettes, whose Declaration of Sentiments echo the Declaration of Independence's ideas of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[3] Where Marxist feminism sees the capitalist society as the key to women's oppression (and argues that only through destroying its inherently unequal institutions can real gender equality begin) and radical feminism sees women as a class unto themselves—one which is oppressed simply because of their biology—who are constantly subjected to patriarchy throughout their lives, liberal feminism works on a smaller scale. Liberal feminism prioritizes the individual above all—one's rights, one's goals, and one's happiness. The individual should be able to pursue her own destiny, and it is not for others to encroach upon these rights, a viewpoint *Gilmore Girls* decidedly upholds, particularly with the eccentric Stars Hollow as a background. However, an important aspect of liberal feminism is:

> that while the rights of the individual are sacrosanct in liberal philosophy, it is up to the individual to pursue success through 'merit'. This construction quite blatantly chooses to ignore the existence of other social or other cultural factors which might make it quite impossible for an individual to acquire the means to realize such potential . . . liberal feminism is centred on the needs of middle class

[3] When considering the Declaration of Sentiments and its predecessor, knowledge of that document's roots in John Locke's concept of "life, liberty, and property" give the oft-quoted phrase an entirely different spin. And, indeed, modern white liberal feminists often see their liberation measured in abilities to make headway in capitalist society.

> women, and would possibly not accept class or racial difference as a significant handicap in the path to self-advancement. (Whelehan 37)

As I will suggest throughout this chapter, *Gilmore Girls* sits firmly within the white liberal feminist tradition; generally speaking, it ignores the privilege that Rory and Lorelai enjoy as middle-class white women (and truly, upper-class white women, though they choose to ignore their class of birth). Additionally, though race is not the focus of this chapter or study in general, it is important to point out that scholars have noted the problematic handling of race in the series since its inception, leading to my additional emphasis on *white* liberal feminism.[4] Because the series is a family drama, one might hope that class (and race) would be handled in a more realistic and sensitive manner, aligning the series with the subgenre's concern with authenticity of representation. However, when compared with series in other subgenres—for example, *Pretty Little Liars* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—it may win in terms of a more realistically drawn world, but its representation of feminist concerns is significantly weaker—and especially worrisome considering its young audience, who are likely just now becoming aware of the many facets of the philosophy.

Because *Gilmore Girls* constantly reminds the audience of Lorelai's moneyed beginnings—and, later on, Rory's elite status as a Yalie of means and a Gilmore—the specter of intersectionality is ever-present but the series does not explicitly engage it. Intersectional feminism recognizes that feminist practice must not forget that it has to be

---

[4] See Hye Seung Chung's "Escaping from Korea: Cultural Authenticity and Asian American Identities in *Gilmore Girls*" for an especially well-considered treatment of Lane's character.

inclusive; women's concerns intersect with their genders, races, classes, disabilities, and religions. Critical race theorist and law scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," where she explains that "the politics of racial otherness that Black women experience . . . prevent Black feminist consciousness from patterning the development of white feminism" (162). As Crenshaw explains, white feminism is created in distinction and opposition to white men, but the community that Black women live in is defined by color and culture first, which places them in alliance with Black men. bell hooks ties into this idea when she terms the problem "the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (4).

We can see the seeds of the intersectional concept as far back as the 1850s; for example, Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech, given extemporaneously at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, invokes her position as not only a woman, but a Black woman—which, at the time, particularly brings to mind her class position as well. Though the term was originally coined to name the unique experience of Black women—the intersection of oppression of gender and race—especially in America, it has expanded to include anyone who is marginalized in our white capitalist, patriarchal society. As Patricia Hill Collins explains, "[i]ntersectional paradigms view race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, among others, as mutually constructing systems of power. Because these systems permeate all social relations, untangling their effects in any given situation or for any given population remains difficult" (11). Collins' "others" includes those with disabilities, followers of non-Judeo-Christian religions, and those

who do not fit the socially preferred body type, the latter of which is prominent in *Gilmore Girls*. The idea of intersectionality is essential because, for these women with more than one marginalizing factor, it is impossible to determine which part of their identity is impacted by a particular issue. However, for many white feminists—particularly liberal feminists who take their cues from second-wave thinkers who excluded women of color—these concerns are not necessarily an issue. Still, the evolution of public mainstream feminism in America remained largely white and middle- to upper-class in its presentation during the series' run.

This chapter argues that *Gilmore Girls* certainly endorses a feminist perspective of the world; however, in its execution, it stumbles. In their examination of the Netflix revival, Aaron Kappel and Jessica Friday point out that Amy Sherman-Palladino "only appears to afford true empathy to characters that resemble her most—white, cisgender, able-bodied, and heterosexual. Anyone not Gilmore enough—meaning mentally ill, slow on the uptake, fat, not white, not English-speaking, not gender-conforming—is ejected from the inner circle" (para. 9). While these authors do not refer to the original series in this way, I argue that this rejection of Otherness is also the case for *Gilmore Girls*, though the Netflix series, perhaps reflecting the freedom Sherman-Palladino was given, is much more open in its love of snide remarks. Repeated viewings of the original series make it clear that while Stars Hollow may be multi-racial—though not greatly diverse—and only Michel Gerard offers a clear reading of a closeted man,[5] these characters, with the exception of Lane, are more often a source of jokes than given a chance to become fully

[5] All the same, a case could be made for Taylor Doose.

three-dimensional people with complicated concerns. Still, I do not mean to suggest that there is nothing redeeming of a feminist nature about the series. It does offer some wonderful examples in terms of living one's life as a woman in this country, particularly a young woman.

***The Positive Representation of Feminism on* Gilmore Girls**

One area in which *Gilmore Girls* excels is the endorsement of education for women, a mark in its favor and one which distinguishes it not only in its subgenre but from other teen dramas in general; in the young adult fantasy series, school is another patriarchal institutional structure, and in many family dramas where the teen protagonist is a gifted young woman, school is simply a hassle. The series opens because Lorelai is prepared to do anything to help Rory attend Chilton Preparatory School—inspired by Choate Rosemary Hall—where she will finally be challenged. In Season Six, Richard gives an (unrelated) rundown of the kind of intellect Rory has exhibited since her early years:

> RICHARD: What she tackles, she conquers. This girl could name the state capitals at three. Recite the periodic table at four. Discuss Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche when she was ten. She's read every book by every author with a Russian surname and had a 4.2 grade-point average at one of the toughest schools on the East Coast. ("We've Got Magic to Do," 6.5)

For someone who showed this kind of giftedness as a child, growing up in Stars Hollow must have been difficult, because its educational system is shown to be deeply flawed. In the pilot, Rory sits in an English classroom, where the students have been studying

Huckleberry Finn, as her teacher gives an assignment: "For those of you who have not finished the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* you may use this time to do so. For those of you who have, you can start on your essay now. Whichever task you choose, do it *silently*" ("Pilot," 1.1). The students we can see immediately choose secret option 3: painting their nails and talking about Rory, who has already begun the assignment with gusto, smiling as she writes. The girls around her whisper about what she might be doing—love letter, diary, or slam book—and finally realize, disgustedly, that it is actually the assignment. Rory is clearly marked as of a higher class than her schoolmates, who do not recognize the value of education, particularly that of reading. When she moves to Chilton, where the students come from her same type of bloodline (if not nurture), she sees a respect for literature and schooling of all kinds; students are often shown reading. Additionally, even if every student does not take school seriously, they do not disrupt the class and they follow instructions.

Rory's original classmates' attitudes are really not much of a surprise; at Stars Hollow High School, education does not seem to be much of a priority. As Matthew C. Nelson points out, these students exist in a "rather depressing learning environment" (205), which indicates that, for a community that seems to be fairly prosperous, very little money is put toward improving the school in ways that reflect current educational practices—or, more likely given the way school officials interact with Rory and Jess Mariano, another gifted teenage mind who chooses to leave Stars Hollow, these educators do not keep up with current best practices. Jess, diner owner Luke's nephew, is proven to be a success later in life, but this is "*in spite of* his education in Stars Hollow, not because of it" (Nelson 206). The school simply is not equipped to deal with Jess—or Rory—and

his character works to reinforce the idea, introduced with Rory, that Stars Hollow High—and by extension, the town—does nothing to support bright, inquisitive minds. Even for those students who do not show any traditional educational promise, Stars Hollow High holds no interest. Lane, Rory's best friend, is simply biding her time until she can graduate; her natural intelligence gravitates toward expression in music, so she drops out of college fairly quickly to play in her band full-time. Other supporting characters like Dean, Rory's first boyfriend, his eventual wife Lindsey, and his friend Kyle give an idea of the kind of people Stars Hollow High produces: Dean is hardworking and supportive but unable to understand the things that interest Rory; Lindsey is sweet but a little vacuous with her insistence on acquiring material things as markers of marital happiness and success; and Kyle might be a good friend but is pretty silly and dim overall. Dean's later insistence to Luke that Lorelai and Rory can never be happy with men like them—"They want more than this . . . And all you are is this" ("To Live and Let Diorama," 5.18)—implies that the town itself has a class ceiling. Stars Hollow is full of working people; some might own businesses, but they are simple people with simple wants and needs. Lorelai and Rory's complex minds come from Hartford, not Stars Hollow.

It can be inferred that Lorelai's "enthusiastic pursuit of [Rory's] enrollment" ("Pilot," 1.1) at Chilton is a reaction to what she has seen as a Stars Hollow parent. Rory's excitement over her acceptance to Chilton and the chance to leave Stars Hollow High confirm that she has not been challenged during her time there, but later interactions between Lorelai and the school's parents prove that there is an overall atmosphere of repression. In "One's Got Class and the Other One Dyes" (3.4), Lorelai is invited to speak to a group of students about how she, as a prominent local businesswoman,

achieved success. Unfortunately for Lorelai, the students derail her presentation with questions about her teen pregnancy, intrigued by the fact that she kept her baby and turned out well, in contrast to the prevailing narrative preached to them by their parents. Debbie, the PTA mom who organized the event, tells the mothers of the daughters in attendance, and they come after Lorelai immediately after the meeting:

> MOM 1: So, you're preaching to our daughters that it's okay to get pregnant at sixteen, am I getting that right?
>
> LORELAI: No, not at all, I was just answering their questions.
>
> MOM 1: Well, it's your answers we didn't like.
>
> LORELAI: Hey, I was talking about my job like I was supposed to, but your kids kept asking about my pregnancy. What was I supposed to do?
>
> DEBBIE: Fend them off; change the subject!
>
> LORELAI: I tried, Debbie, but they kept coming at me like I was Poland and they were Nazis. Remember the old days, girls, when I used to make you laugh?
>
> MOM 2: There's nothing funny about this.
>
> LORELAI: Their questions just threw me off, that's all.
>
> MOM 1: Sounds like you just flaunted your mistakes.
>
> LORELAI: Now, hold on. You have no right to judge me. All I said was that for my particular circumstances things worked out okay. I advocated nothing to them. You're all acting like I—I walked into that room tossing condoms in the air.
>
> MOM 2: You might as well have.
>
> LORELAI: Fine, next time I will. I'll bring a banana and we'll have a little show and tell. How 'bout that?

> MOM 1: What kind of mother are you?
>
> LORELAI: The kind that doesn't gloss over things just because they're a little… uncomfortable. ("One's Got Class and the Other One Dyes," 3.4)[6]

While Lorelai's answers to the students actually do the opposite of what their mothers accuse—for one thing, she tells them that "timing" is essential when it comes to having a child and insinuates that she has been very lucky—the combination of the teens' interest in Lorelai and their mothers' outrage indicate that Stars Hollow High is likely bending to parental wishes when it comes to accurate and helpful sex education classes wherein students' concerns are addressed.

Rory's interests may lie in literature and journalism, but it seems that it is not merely her subjects that have been getting a light hand. *Gilmore Girls* takes Rory out of Stars Hollow and into Chilton Academy, where she meets other like-minded students who have a passion for knowledge and who understand what an education can afford them in life. Placing Rory in the environment of Chilton Academy is one of the ways the series tries to send a broadly feminist message to its young viewers, both male and female. Unlike other series, where the "smart girl" is ostracized in various ways, primarily evidenced through her inability to find romantic partners, Rory enjoys a full life. She finds a core group of friends, one of whom she keeps into adulthood, and her intelligence and curiosity are presented as reasons her romantic partners are intrigued by her. While older, more cynical viewers might wonder at how much Alexis Bledel's

---

[6] In this chapter, dialogue quotations will look very long; however, their delivery is fairly quick. The series is known for having much longer scripts than the average hour-long drama series; Lauren Graham, who portrays Lorelai, notes in her memoir that the scripts averaged eighty-five pages.

physical appearance plays into Rory's popularity, the narrative presents her acceptance as entirely predicated on her personality, which is something that young girls, especially, need to see presented in the genre.

As an extension of this idea, the series also commends women who pursue excellence, in keeping with liberal feminism's emphasis on merit. However, in offering this identity for viewers, the series sometimes plays into stereotypes and turns to comic moments that may imply limits to this drive to succeed. One of Rory's series-long relationships is with Paris Geller, who might personify this idea. Paris is initially introduced as an antagonist, a classmate at Chilton who finds Rory to be a threat to her scholastic and extracurricular reign. In *Gilmore Girls*, teen girls are often initially defined by others through their talent—Rory as a writer, Paris as a student, and Lane, as will be discussed later, as a musician. Paris has none of the social abilities as one might expect from a daughter of privilege; while her peers were taken to etiquette classes and the like, Paris's mother and father left her to be raised by a nanny, whom Paris loves like a mother, and essentially forgot about her for long stretches of time. The series occasionally references Paris's childhood, but it is clear that her parents emotionally neglected her to the point of abuse, so her social blunders must be forgiven to a certain extent when she is young. (Later, however, she is simply being rude, an extension of her gifted personality and yet another result of her lack of parental intervention—Paris does not have a filter to remind her that not everyone is as intelligent as she is.) The Gellers seem to be a family of achievers—Paris notes that five generations have gotten into Harvard in "The Big One" (3.16)—and Paris is determined to shine among them. However, people find her abrasive, which occasionally gets in her way when compared to

Rory, who has equal levels of academic ability but is also generally pleasant. In a series that does not offer viewers many possible teen female subjectivities, the need to reduce Paris to the masculinized, aggressive "go-getter" stereotype does present problems. Perhaps in a nod to this issue—and lest this seem like an anti-feminist text by allowing Rory to triumph because of her likability—Paris is still chosen to be editor of the Chilton school paper, *The Franklin*, over Rory, as well as president of the student council, with Rory running as her vice-president.

Perhaps most importantly in terms of its message to female viewers, the series establishes Paris and Rory as rivals *and* friends, showing that women can be both without devolving into pettiness or cattiness, something that all three series dealt with in detail in this study have in common. For example, both girls dream of going to Harvard, but only Rory gets in; Paris finds out she was rejected on the night she and Rory must give a televised speech for Chilton on C-SPAN. Instead of taking it out on Rory, she seeks comfort from her—after having a breakdown on national television, blaming her rejection on her recent decision to have sex with her boyfriend, something which is played for laughs. However, Paris's despondency over her rejection from Harvard—"They had to really not like me for me to not get in" ("The Big One," 3.16)—speaks to her deep insecurities about herself separate from her abilities. Throughout the series, Paris's character evolves into a more self-assured version of her high-school self, but viewers can always see a glimpse of the insecurity that drives her. In an interesting narrative move offered to no other character, Paris is also given the most agency in her romantic relationships; for example, when Doyle McMasters asks her to give them one more try near the end of the series, he tells her he will move wherever she chooses to go. Not even

Lorelai or Rory is given this much choice in their own primary adult romantic relationships, with Luke Danes and Logan Huntzberger, respectively.

In Lane Kim's character, the audience is given another type of subjectivity to try on; she offers a different facet of feminism with both a racial and religious component, the series' one real example of both. Lane is a wonderful example of women choosing to follow their dreams in the face of outrageous familial pressure and disapproval. Lane grows up in a strict Korean Seventh Day Adventist household; her father is not seen in the original series, though he is shown in the revival, and her mother, Mrs. Kim, is a strong disciplinarian whose conservative views on raising children and what girls should and should not do are often used as comic fodder in the narrative. Lane's household is so severe that she feels she cannot truly be herself; her mother is a fundamentalist who distrusts anything that does not fit into her viewpoint about what is Christian. This includes rock music, trendy clothing, makeup, junk food, and American or non-Seventh-Day Adventist boys. Essentially, Lane is forbidden to explore what it means to be an average teenage girl in America, something she greatly resents. As a result, she simply learns about American culture through her friendship with Rory and uses that connection to acquire what she desires. For example, she eats junk food at Lorelai's house, and when she wants to talk to Henry Cho, a boy she met at a Chilton party, she has Rory call her on three-way calling with Henry waiting on the other line; this way, Mrs. Kim will not suspect the transgression. Still, Lane's rebellions remain generally unfocused and related to most teenagers whose parents refuse them any number of things for the first season and the majority of the second.

However, Lane's character is meant to represent something larger—the frustrated artist, albeit one who is just beginning to come into her talent. In the beginning of the series, it is implied that Lane is acting out without having any real reason beyond being unhappy in her home. This changes at the end of Season Two. Lane realizes that she is most interested in music; in fact, while she hides all of her contraband throughout her room, it is her music collection that gets the most careful, well thought-out system, divided under her floorboards by subgenre. When Sophie Bloom moves into town and opens a music instrument store, Lane is fascinated by a set of drums for sale. She tells Rory, "I've found my calling . . . I'm going to be a drummer," and when Rory raises practical questions about how Lane will buy the drums and where she will play them, Lane asserts her newfound identity:

> LANE: I don't know, I don't know any of this. But I will figure something out, because I am Keith Moon, I am Neil Peart, I am Rick Allen, with and without the arm, because I am rock 'n' roll, baby! I'll call you later. (*hides the drum sticks she's been gesturing with as she goes into the Kim house where we hear hymns being sung in Korean*) ("Help Wanted," 2.20)

The narrative positions Lane as yet another woman with an innate talent that must be nurtured; the owner of the music store, Sophie, recognizes a kindred spirit in her, and though Sophie is a little grumpy, she cannot help but work with Lane.[7] *Gilmore Girls* celebrates women with talent, wherever it may be located and however it may be

---

[7] Sophie is from New York; the implication is that her time in the city has made her this way. By the Netflix special, set roughly fifteen years after these events, Sophie can be described as sweet. The series does have curmudgeonly characters (Luke, Gypsy), but it often implies that small-town living can cure the ills of city life.

expressed, and the narrative works to allow its teen female characters to meet those who will help them on their paths. It is especially significant that Lane's mentor is Sophie, a female musician who is played by trailblazer Carole King—the intertextuality given by her casting adds to the feminist implications of the relationship.

Lane is loosely based on series creator Amy Sherman-Palladino's best friend, Helen Pai, who was raised in a Seventh Day Adventist home and whose stories of growing up often inspired aspects of Lane's life (Tseng para. 10-11).[8] As Lane often reminds Rory and her bandmates, Mama Kim will not approve of her secret life. She goes to great lengths to keep her drumming and band from Mrs. Kim, practicing in Lorelai's garage and planning elaborate cover-ups for any gigs they might get. When the band, now Dave-less and boasting a new guitarist, Gil (played by Skid Row frontman Sebastian Bach), books an important show at CBGB in New York and cannot get back home until four a.m., Lane's schemes are uncovered:

> MRS. KIM: So, I made you do this?
>
> LANE: No, I just—I want to please you so badly, but I can't. I mean, look at you, look at what happened last night. It's not good. I don't want anything like this to ever happen again. I've been thinking a lot about this, our situation, and I think I figured out a way to make everything better.
>
> MRS. KIM: You have?
>
> LANE: I don't want to go to Seventh Day Adventist college anymore. I want to

[8] Pai's husband is also named Dave Rygalski, like Lane's first boyfriend, though actor Adam Brody's earning the leading role of Seth Cohen on *The O.C.* led to having to write Dave out of the series. In true *Gilmore Girls* fashion, Dave went to college in California.

> be able to play with my band. I want to be a drummer. I will happily go to community college, and I will happily live at home and adhere to your curfew, except on the nights when the band plays or practices. This way, I can get what I want and I won't be lying to you or sneaking around. This way we can both be happy.
>
> MRS. KIM: Children do not make the rules. You may . . . move out and live like that somewhere else. ("In the Clamor and the Clangor," 4.11)

Lane knows how much she is risking in order to be part of Hep Alien; she not only drops out of college altogether, she moves in with two of her bandmates, Zack Van Gerbig and Brian Fuller. As she explains, "Eternal damnation is what I'm risking for my rock and roll!" ("A House Is Not a Home," 5.22) While the band is not shown to be particularly successful, Lane sticks with it, determined to follow her dreams, and Hep Alien is yet another part of the rich Stars Hollow tapestry. In keeping Lane on this path, rather than making her music goals just something she pursued in high school—putting characters in bands for a time is not uncommon in teen dramas—the series not only sets a model of racial and religious minorities pursuing excellence, it cultivates "indie cred."[9] Faye Woods has addressed this aspect of *Gilmore Girls*, noting that with the emergence of Lane's musical interest and talent, Carole King and Sebastian Bach join the series, which, in conjunction with Lane's constant musical references, "help to situate the show apart

[9] The Seventh Day Adventist group may be Christian, and therefore part of America's religious majority, but they are a small group among Protestant denominations, making up 0.5 percent of American Christians (Pew Research Center). Historically, they have been viewed askance by many Christian denominations. Also, at the time the series was broadcast, racial and/or religious minorities were poorly represented on teen television in general, particularly as main characters. Critics of the supergenre often noted the need to see the characters who were there be identified as driven, talented, and/or serious about their futures.

from the mainstream, constructing an 'indie' sensibility, and [offsetting] perceptions of conservatism of twee-ness that its storybook New England setting may induce" (132). In doing so, the series works to create a world in which female excellence in all arenas are celebrated. As a family drama, *Gilmore Girls* works within its subgeneric tropes with teen female central characters who give its viewers a positive subjectivity to try on; instead of being based around less substantial aspects like their popularity, beauty, or style, these series strive to create role models. *Gilmore Girls* uses innate talent to create enviable teen female characters.

The Problematic Aspects of Gilmore Girls*' Feminist Message*

At this point in my analysis, it would seem natural to turn to the character of Lorelai, whose pursuit of her dreams of running her own inn is a major plot point beginning in season three. However, while it is admirable that this quest is an integral part of Lorelai's character arc, it must be noted that the *Gilmore Girls* deliberately ignores her privilege while tracing it. In this way, the series' endorsement of self-sufficiency is undermined. Lorelai has preached a message of feminist agency to her daughter, but her dismissal of concepts like intersectionality make one wonder how much she has learned herself. Lorelai has a very hard time acknowledging her class privilege, a problem she passes on to her daughter.

Lorelai likes to wax eloquently about how the world she left is outrageously oppressive—and it can be in many ways—but she takes advantage of its benefits when she needs to, belying the *Gilmore* ür-narrative that Lorelai is squarely within the "work your way up" American middle class tradition. Kimberly Christensen addresses this issue

when she explains that "[t]here is an irony in the middle-class orientation of most feminist organizations, however, for the vast majority of middle-class feminists gained their middle-class status at least partly through their biological, marital, personal, or professional ties with men" (Christensen 634). For example, Lorelai and Sookie hope to one day be able to buy the dilapidated Dragonfly Inn and open their own business, leaving behind their lives as manager and chef at the Independence Inn. On the surface, this seems like it might be a semi-achievable dream, but Stars Hollow is a historic town and the Dragonfly is situated on a decent-sized piece of land—dilapidated or not, this will not be a cheap proposition. Lorelai is about to send Rory to Yale, and Sookie and her husband, Jackson, are never shown to have a great deal of money themselves. One might expect to see Lorelai struggle for at least a season to come up with funding—it would be an interesting arc, perhaps a way to introduce a new character—but instead, her father comes to the rescue with the return on a real estate investment he made in her name to honor her birth:

> LORELAI: I get a check?
>
> RICHARD: You get a check.
>
> LORELAI: Wow! That's . . . [*opens the envelope*] Seventy-five thousand dollars?
>
> RICHARD: Yes, it is.
>
> LORELAI: I get seventy-five thousand dollars for being born?
>
> RICHARD: I thought it would be a pleasant surprise. ("Happy Birthday, Baby," 3.18)

Lorelai chafes at the idea of this money being a gift; Richard assures her it is the fruition of an investment that he is "obligated" to give her—that "it is the law," and she accepts it on those conditions. She hands over the money to her parents, neatly paying off the money she borrowed from them to pay Rory's Chilton tuition, and establishing herself as debt-free for the bank when she and Sookie go to speak to them about getting a loan to purchase the Dragonfly.

One might argue that Richard's gift is an anomaly—that Lorelai does not take these kinds of handouts often. However, this is not the only time Lorelai accepts help from men; when she runs out of money to finish the Dragonfly, she goes to Luke, who lends her thirty thousand dollars. Lorelai's experience does not exactly mirror that of many in the series' audience, who would likely love to have such a check appear in their lives to solve their money problems or be able to ask a friend for money without any impact on the relationship. As Ellen Stebner argues,

> It takes a while to realize just how unheroic Lorelai truly is. At first blush, *Gilmore*'s writers paint their protagonist as brave for renouncing the suffocating world of canapés and cotillions she was born into. But eventually—in Season 3's "Dear Emily and Richard"—we find out that the wonderful, bohemian existence Lorelai makes for herself is actually built on unchecked privilege and the selfish idea that her mother and father are monsters. (para. 4)

Lorelai is a force of nature, that is true, and in many ways, she is a wonderful example for young girls: she has no problem standing up for herself in a patriarchal society, she is true to herself, and she accepts herself. However, she is often emotionally arrested at the age

she became a mother, and while she is a good mother to Rory, her personal life can be a bit of a mess, reflecting those teenage tendencies. Lorelai's refusal to address her emotional issues with her parents—which come up more directly in *A Year in the Life*, where Lorelai has an emotional catharsis once she finally confronts her feelings about her father—hold her back from fully moving into adulthood, which allows for a rich depth of material for the writers to work with, primarily concerning her relationship with Richard and Emily.

Lorelai's teen pregnancy is, in some ways, the catalyst for the series and suggests another layer of the series' treatment of feminist concerns. *Gilmore Girls* spends a great deal of time with its teen girls' concerns about sex, but a close examination of the series' seeming feminist message unearths a complicated relationship between the two. While the series is portrayed as sex-positive, the writers seem especially invested in using each of the central teen girl characters—Rory, Paris, and Lane—and their first experience with sex to play the experience for laughs or begin a melodramatic character arc. Even more tellingly, for each of these characters, their first time is traumatic in different ways.

For Rory, who waits until college to have sex—unlike her peers at Chilton—her first time is part of what the audience recognizes as a problematic relationship. Though she defends it to her mother, who calls her out on its transgressive nature, Rory is excited about the relationship: she begins seeing Dean, her first boyfriend, again. The problem with this is that Dean is married now, and Rory is participating in emotional adultery. This choice is not like the high school Rory, who was thoughtful and mature, but the college Rory is growing rather selfish as she becomes more a part of the elite world she

was born into, and she sees nothing wrong with Dean spending his time with her instead of his wife, of whom Rory does not approve. In truth, Lindsey is a good match for Dean; her goals of staying home and keeping house for her husband align perfectly with what he has repeatedly said appeal to him in a wife, and he has no real ambition outside of settling down and starting a family. However, Dean is not ready for the responsibility of marriage, and he lets the stress of supporting a household at nineteen push him into looking for a way out. When Lorelai unexpectedly walks in after their time together, she can tell what has happened, and she lambasts Rory for her choice. Rory, furious for what she sees as the first time her mother has not supported her, refuses to truly engage in the conversation, and they have a fight, the first real one the audience has ever seen them have:

> LORELAI: . . . Rory, what are you going to do now? Huh? Is there a plan?
>
> RORY: I don’t want to talk about it anymore.
>
> LORELAI: I just want what’s best for you, that's all!
>
> RORY: I don’t want to talk about it!
>
> LORELAI: I just don’t want you to get hurt, Rory. What if he doesn’t leave her? Now you’re all emotionally involved.
>
> RORY: You’re just mad because I didn’t come running to you to discuss whether or not I was ready for this step. I decided it on my own.
>
> LORELAI: Well, obviously, you weren’t ready for this step. The very fact that you chose another girl’s guy to sleep with proves that!
>
> RORY: He was my boyfriend first!
>
> LORELAI: But you dumped him! You rejected him! You picked someone else!

> RORY: Stop it! [*walks into the living room*]
>
> LORELAI: Rory!
>
> RORY: I hate you for ruining this for me! [*storms out front door, pulling on her coat; dials a number on her cell phone*]
>
> LINDSEY [*answering phone*]: Hello? Hello? Hello?
>
> [*Rory hangs up, sinking to her knees. Lorelai exits the front door to see her daughter sobbing on the front lawn, her cell phone clutched to her chest.*]
>
> ("Raincoats and Recipes," 4.22)

The audience can assume that Rory has called Dean's cell phone; Lindsey's proximity to Dean's phone indicates that their marriage is not nearly as finished as he has made it out to be. Lorelai's wisdom in this instance is correct—Rory's first time was not special; it was heartbreaking. In fact, Rory is so distraught that she takes her grandmother up on her offer of a trip to Europe for the summer, thinking she can sort things out there. Her second relationship with Dean does not last very long after his divorce, subject to familial disapproval on both sides and the class/education divide that is rapidly apparent. Rory's devastation over the affair is important to note when considering *A Year in the Life*; it is an important part of Rory's emotional journey to maturity that Amy Sherman-Palladino scripted, yet it seems to be forgotten in the adult version of Rory, who enters into a similar relationship.

Paris's first sexual experience is also traumatizing, but not because she has crossed any established boundaries. Her first boyfriend, Jamie, is a student at Princeton, and her equal in nearly every way. She meets him at a summer leadership conference,

and her insecurities nearly get the better of her, leading her initially to keep the relationship from heading anywhere, but with Rory's help, she is able to show Jamie she returns his feelings. Their relationship grows over the course of Season Three, culminating in their having sex in "The Big One" (3.16). Paris brings it up to Rory while they work on their joint speech, needing her feedback so that she might compile data—she believes that Rory has already had sex with at least one of her boyfriends, though this is not the case. Lorelai walks into the house while Rory and Paris are having their conversation, overhearing Rory give Paris wise counsel about being safe, making sure her partner is respectful of her, and discussing it beforehand. She also hears that Rory is still a virgin, leading her to say, "I have the good one," undermining any message the series might have been sending about sex-positivity, since Paris's experience hit all of Rory's checkmarks of being careful and clear-headed in sexual activity. At the end of the episode, Paris finds out that she has been rejected from Harvard and ties this information to her new sexual activity: "I'm being punished. I had sex, so now I don't get to go to Harvard … She's never had sex. She'll probably go to Harvard. She's a shoo-in. Pack your chastity belt, Gilmore—you're going to Harvard!" ("The Big One," 3.16) While the audience later finds out that Paris's interview is the reason she did not get in—Paris is still learning to read a room and interact fruitfully with others—in this episode, the writers directly tie her first sexual experience to the loss of her greatest dream, and, as Laura Detmering argues, "clearly [suggest] a link between having sex and becoming less academically successful, particularly for women" (10). Paris is left devastated at the end of the episode, yet it is played for laughs. She is unlikely to remember her first sexual experience fondly.

Lane's first time also carries similar weight, though it takes place within marriage. Unlike Rory and Paris, she does not believe in sex outside of marriage—something she does not realize until presented with the opportunity to have sex with Zack, her boyfriend and one of the guitarists in her band, and she finds herself responding, ". . . I have to wait 'til I get married" ("So . . . Good Talk," 5.16). Lane and Zack get married at the end of Season Six, and when they return from their honeymoon in Mexico at the beginning of Season Seven in "That's What You Get, Folks, For Makin' Whoopee," (7.2), Lane has an unequivocally negative opinion about sex. After waiting for nearly two years, Lane and Zack decide that their first time should be on the beach, in the vein of *From Here to Eternity*, but things do not go well and the experience turns Lane off of sex entirely:

> LANE: So, now I know.
>
> RORY: Know what?
>
> LANE: That it's bad. It's terrible. (*off Rory's confused look*) Sex.
>
> RORY: Oh. No. Sex was bad?
>
> LANE: You can drop the act, Rory. It's okay. I've known the real deal about Santa Claus for years. And now I know about sex.
>
> RORY: Lane . . .
>
> LANE: You know what's funny? I really thought my mother was being an insane prude when she said that sex was horrible for women. But now I can see that, in fact, my mother was the only woman who wasn't willing to maintain this ridiculous, pervasive, media-supported charade.
>
> RORY: What ridiculous, pervasive, media-supported charade?
>
> LANE: That sex is normal. That sex is a wonderful part of life. That sex is sexy. I

> mean, can we just not admit it? Sex is not sexy. Sex is horrible.
>
> RORY: Sex doesn't have to be horrible.
>
> LANE: In a way, I'm impressed with the depth of the conspiracy. If you think about it, it says something about the potential power of women that the entire gender could collude in creating the "sex is sexy" myth.
>
> RORY (*sympathetically*): So sex with Zach was bad?
>
> LANE: Unbelievably bad.
>
> RORY: Every time?
>
> LANE [c*huckling*]: Yeah, right. Every time. (*shudders*)
>
> RORY: You only did it once.
>
> LANE: That's right, and I'm out. ("That's What You Get, Folks, For Makin' Whoopee," 7.2)

Lane apparently had gone into her marriage disbelieving the outdated notions about sex her mother tried to teach her, but her first experience is painful (helped along by the cold, the sand, and the crabs that were surrounding them—which "freaked" Zack out) and traumatic—as she nonchalantly notes in the scene, a voyeur appears to observe her and Zack at one point. The writers choose to further complicate this experience by giving Zack and Lane what appears to be an intense stomach illness brought on by drinking the water in Mexico; however, Lane's illness continues and turns out to be pregnancy—her first sexual encounter results in her becoming a mother. If that were not enough, she later finds out that she is pregnant with twins. At twenty-one, Lane is a struggling musician with a sweet but ultimately fairly dim-witted husband who has only been married for a couple of weeks—and now a baby. Her reaction is quite strong:

> RORY: You're going to be a mother.
>
> LANE: When the doctor told me, I just started throwing up.
>
> RORY: Well, you had morning sickness.
>
> LANE: This was a different kind of throwing up. This was the kind of throwing up that you do when you're going to have to do something that you can't do.
>
> RORY: You're going to be a great mother.
>
> LANE: Maybe someday, but not now . . . When I'm a mom, I'll be calm and wise and have my act together. I am not calm and not wise, and I really, really don't have my act together . . . They have to know all sorts of things. They have to know what to do when your baby is crying and how to change a diaper and how to use your wrist to test if the bottle is too hot. Why the wrist? I don't know. I have no idea.
>
> RORY: Um, I think because it's handy, no pun intended, and, um, it's sensitive. Wrists are sensitive.
>
> LANE: It's just one false move, one misstep, and I'll ruin it. I'm still making mistakes, Rory. Example "A"—I'm pregnant. I can't be making mistakes when I'm a mother. I'm not the person I need to be to be able to do this. I'm not perfect yet. I'm so not perfect. ("That's What You Get, Folks, For Makin' Whoopee," 7.2)

While Lane does grow to accept and love her babies, it is clear that she views this outcome as traumatic; she has a difficult pregnancy that keeps her from playing the drums and eventually forces her to endure bed rest. All in all, sex has done nothing good for her, though the narrative insinuates she does try again and enjoys it. Still, like Rory

and Paris, she will not look back on her first time with fond memories, though her children did come from it. Lane's case is particularly interesting; while Rory and Paris are free to walk away from their bad experience, Lane is tied to both her partner and the outcome. (While separation is obviously an option, Lane and Zack are a stable couple, and it would make no sense narratively.) The implication seems to be that young girls should be very clear-headed about their sexual partners; the series' tying of first sex to trauma clearly asks their teen girl characters if they have thought their experiences through enough. Rory chooses a married man; Paris goes "off-track" for a bit and "loses" Harvard—though that feeling is corrected later; and Lane does not adequately inform herself about the mechanics of sex and how to prevent pregnancy—for example, she clearly does not know that condoms are not one hundred percent effective—which leads to the disruption of her entire life, not to mention putting her intimate life with her partner off on a poor footing. For a series with a supposed feminist message, the writers are certainly planting great fear in their teen female audience about sex.

Lane's new arc also calls to mind Lorelai's sudden transition to motherhood; while Lorelai was sixteen to Lane's twenty-one, the audience can imagine that the panic was similar. In fact, one must wonder if the similarities are deliberate on the part of the writers. Lane's pregnancy also recalls the series' origination as "the 'first advertiser advocated show' funded by the Family Friendly Programming Forum, a group consisting of major U.S. corporations, who offered up a million dollars to 'fund family-friendly script development at the WB'" (Keeler 19). While Lorelai's decision to keep her child is necessary—without it, there would be no show—there is never any question that the women who become pregnant in the series will do anything else. Lane, arguably the most

religious character on the series (though she does not practice, the tenets of her childhood faith are still part of her everyday life), would never consider aborting her children, and as such, the twins are born to two poor musicians who can barely support themselves. Mrs. Kim steps in to help them, and all is well. However, the audience knows that this resolution is not always the case. Sherman-Palladino does seem to be making a message show, after all.

A Year in the Life

On November 25, 2016, Netflix released *A Year in the Life* (sometimes stylized as *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*), the long-awaited *Gilmore Girls* revival. Since the series' cancellation in 2007, there were rumors of reunion specials of various sorts, fueled by fans' continued fervor for the show and certain critics—like *TVLine*'s Michael Ausiello—whose love for the series prompted them to ask the stars continued questions over the years. However, in recent years, those rumors began to have real weight, and star Lauren Graham found that her conversations with Amy Sherman-Palladino took on a decidedly different tone, and, eventually, a clear trajectory: "[i]nspired by the British series *Sherlock*, which has no yearly set number of episodes but instead does anywhere from one to four specials, she envisioned four mini-movies that would run about ninety minutes each" (Graham 166-67). Once Netflix joined the conversation, things really began to move. Still, Graham maintains that the deal was in the works nearly until shooting began. In the miniseries, Sherman-Palladino would be able to end the series as she originally envisioned; she and her husband Daniel Palladino stepped down at the end

of Season Six over contract disputes, and writer David Rosenthal stepped in as showrunner and executive producer.

While *A Year in the Life* is an amusing watch, it highlights serious concerns with the original series, as discussed earlier in this chapter—namely, that *Gilmore Girls* works within a white liberal feminist ideology wherein Rory, especially, presents herself as a feminist who believes in eschewing undue advantage in favor of working for what one wants, particularly through education. However, Rory's series-long story arc reveals her to be more susceptible to the privilege her grandmother's world offers. This tendency is often blamed on her relationship with Logan Huntzberger, the playboy heir to a publishing fortune,[10] but Rory's first real introduction to Hartford society, her debut in "Presenting Lorelai Gilmore" (2.6), shows that she has more facility in this world than her mother ever did. Where Lorelai reverts to the behavior she and Christopher exhibited at similar parties as teenagers, drinking and making jokes, Rory is graceful, if a bit shy, and proves what Emily has said all along—she will do quite well in society.

Throughout the original series and especially during her time at Yale, Rory grows comfortable in Richard and Emily's world, switching easily between Stars Hollow and Hartford/New Haven and aided considerably by her relationship with Logan Huntzberger, who introduces her to the life she would have lived had Lorelai followed Richard and Emily's plans for her and stayed in Hartford, preferably with Christopher.

---

[10] Logan's family is based on the Sulzberger family, who publishes the *New York Times*. A member of the family has controlled the paper since 1896, and the family owns the majority of the voting stock. The young members of the family are encouraged to train in careers that will benefit the paper; the current generation works in initiatives like podcasts and virtual reality (Ingram).

Audiences may note a certain similarity to Rory's father, Christopher, which is no accident:

> . . . when it came time for the show to introduce Rory's college boyfriend in season 5, creator Amy Sherman-Palladino and executive producer Daniel Palladino had a very specific idea for what kind of guy they wanted Rory to date. "We wanted Rory to date her father," Sherman-Palladino says. "Every girl has a father issue, and Logan was Christopher. Logan was charming, smart, and not quite the dependable soul that you need. Or, at that time, was not the great dependable soul." Alexis Bledel adds: "It's a relationship like the one Lorelai and Christohper [*sp*] had in their youth. They do reckless things together. It's fun but on this lavish scale." (Highfill para. 2-3)

"Lavish scale" is absolutely right. Logan is a member of the Life and Death Brigade, a secret society at Yale that plans elaborate events, like a dangerous base jump, that are performed in formal wear; the Brigade's members generally live a hedonistic lifestyle supported by their families' great wealth, and Logan is no exception. He pulls Rory into this life and she comes willingly—eventually dropping out of school and joining the DAR with Emily—though she worries about the dangerous aspects of it. Ultimately, Rory finds her way back to Yale and a self that is more in line with the Rory presented in the first few seasons. She graduates from Yale and breaks up with Logan—who has also matured, but wants to marry Rory and move with her across the country, where a job waits for him—and embarks on a cross-country tour as a roving reporter with Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

However, by the time of the events of *A Year in the Life*, Rory is thirty-two years old, and she has regressed; if viewers of the Netflix series were not members of the original audience, they might be surprised to know that Rory professed strong feminist views at one time. She has turned into everything Lorelai was running from and hoping to keep Rory from learning: she is spoiled, she is entitled, and she is aimless. She has become everything that the media insists is wrong with the Millennial generation—she assumes her Yale education should open doors for her, and a closer look at her behavior in the revival reveals that she also believes her status as a Gilmore and a few bylines should guarantee a prestigious position. The series seems to nod to this by giving Rory a foil in Stars Hollow's "Thirtysomething Gang"—as Babette explains to Rory, "They've been to college, then out in the real world, and it spit 'em out like a stale piece of gum. Now they're all back in their old rooms, like you" ("Summer,"[11] 1.3)—but Rory holds open disdain for them, refusing to acknowledge that she is just like them. She simply lacks the self-awareness to see that the only real difference between them and her is that she does not travel in a pack—and she has the remainder of a trust fund.[12] She embodies Millennial stereotypes, too. Rory lives with her mother and Luke in her old bedroom while she looks for a job; for the majority of a year, she is unsuccessful in this.

---

[11] The episodes of *A Year in the Life* are named for a line in Carole King's "You've Got a Friend," as well as put in their specific order because of it: "Winter, spring, summer, or fall, all you've got to do is call . . . " (Graham 190).

[12] Her grandmother, Trix, leaves Rory $250,000, to be accessed when she is twenty-five. Her father, Christopher, takes over paying for Yale when he inherits his grandfather's estate in Season Six ("He's Slippin' 'Em Bread . . . Dig?" 6.10), so she only owes her grandparents the balance of two years' worth of tuition and board. However, one could assume, based on their treatment of her throughout the series, that Richard and Emily might have forgiven Rory the debt as a graduation gift—or simply because.

Alexis Bledel says that the reboot opens with Rory "scrambling" (Nemetz para. 6); she cannot find a job or even her underwear—she has sent her belongings to various family and friends in Stars Hollow, but the hyper-organized Rory of the original series is long gone. So is the hardworking Rory; while this Rory is still pursuing journalism, it is without the dogged quality of college-aged Rory. Now, it seems Mitchum Huntzberger was psychic in his initial observation:

> MITCHUM: I've worked with a lot of young people over the years. Interns, new hires. I've got a pretty good gut sense for people's strengths and weaknesses. Whether they have that certain something to make it in journalism. It's a tough business. Lot of stress . . . And I have to tell you. You don't got it. Now, guts can be wrong. Mine's been wrong before. But not often . . . I just don't really think that you have the drive to put yourself out there, to be honest. To get a story. To dig. ("Blame Booze and Melville," 5.21)

Mitchum seems to have realized how Rory's upbringing and privilege would impact her in the journalism industry without a family pushing her to succeed behind her (like the Huntzbergers). While Rory's family is very proud of her, they simply want her to be successful in general; if she had chosen a degree in a less competitive field that equally showcased her intelligence, the Gilmores would have been happy with that, as well. For them, the appearance is more important than the product, implying that adulthood is more about the package than what is inside. Rory's pursuit of a journalism career reflects this message; she aims for big name where she will not receive a solid offer of employment rather than lesser-known entities that will give her steady work. Throughout the revival,

the message given to young adults (and expressed by characters in this age group) is that hard work is not what distinguishes one today; accolades and the ability to impress others are.

Rory has internalized this message; she expects that her intelligence and natural ability is all that matters in the job market of 2016. Her privilege and connections are constantly referenced in *A Year in the Life*; from her secret relationship with Logan to the way she treats her only real prospect for a job at an emerging website, *Sandee Says*, Rory is living her life with the carelessness seen in Season Six. She has opportunities that she seems to expect should simply come to her but that viewers without her advantages will not see mirrored in their own lives. Rory has been freelancing for the last ten years, without a clear plan for her career or consistent bylines on her résumé, though the ones she has are impressive—*The Atlantic*, *Slate*, and, most recently, *The New Yorker*. Somehow, though, she is taking meetings with important publication groups like Condé Nast; one must assume that a bit of personal connections with the Huntzbergers helped with that—in fact, in "Winter," Mitchum runs into Logan and Rory having lunch, and he offers to speed up said meeting. The Rory of *Gilmore Girls*' Season Seven repudiated the Huntzberger influence in her life, but her protestations here are merely formal. Her relieved acceptance of Mitchum's interference reflects the new Rory—the upper class Rory, no matter whether she is living in her old bedroom in Stars Hollow or not.

Rory's elitism and entitlement come through most clearly in the scenes in which she is shown in a journalism environment. Though Rory is still working in her field, she does not seem to be especially invested in it. In "Spring," she finally gets her Condé Nast

meeting, where she seems unfocused and shy. The editors also tell her that they have been trying to get someone to do a piece on the group psychology of people who wait in lines in New York, noting that if David Foster Wallace were still with us, he "would've nailed it, but so far we haven't" ("Spring," 1.2). Later, trying to prove her worth, Rory offers to take the piece on spec. In her first interview with a man standing in line for the Cro-dough-cake, a new breakfast pastry craze, she listens to his story for only a minute before falling asleep. In the same day, she gets tipsy and has sex with another source, a Wookie from one of the lines she is researching—an absolutely wrong choice for a journalist, no matter what popular culture may present. In fact, Rory makes so many bad career choices, both big and small, that journalists have written pieces about it.[13] Perhaps most importantly, she shows up to her interview with *Sandee Says*, a digital magazine that has been assiduously courting her but she feels is beneath her, completely unprepared.

> SANDEE: Well, first things first. If I take a chance on Rory Gilmore, what am I getting? . . . If I hire you, tell me what Rory Gilmore would write about for *SandeeSays*.
>
> RORY: Oh. If I worked here?
>
> SANDEE: Sell me. . . .
>
> RORY: Oh, right. Um, sorry. I just didn't have a pitch prepared.
>
> SANDEE: That's a little weird. Thought you'd bring some ideas.
>
> RORY: Don't get me wrong. I . . . have ideas.

---

[13] See Megan Garber's "Turns Out, Rory Gilmore Is Not a Good Journalist" in *The Atlantic* and Jen Chaney's "Rory Gilmore and Why We Need Better Fictional Journalism" in *Vulture*.

SANDEE: Like?

RORY: Um, stuff about the world, uh . . . culture.

SANDEE: Pretty generic. You got anything specific?

RORY: You want specifics.

SANDEE: I'd love some.

RORY: Well, let's see. There could be something in, um, girls who go to Comic-Con type things and sleep with characters.

SANDEE: Character-loving girls. That sounds obscure. Very made-up.

RORY: Yes, it does.

SANDEE: So you're talking about loser girls. Like, they get drunk and they do something stupid. We've done that story a bunch of times. Different takes on it. I thought you knew our site.

RORY: Oh, I do. And you're right. I wouldn't want to repeat that. ("Spring," 1.2)

Rory assumes Sandee will want her on her name and previous accomplishments alone, and because she feels she is too good for the position, she is frustrated when Sandee passes on her. While Sandee is likely supposed to represent the increasing numbers of Millennials who find themselves in CEO positions without training for the responsibility as their innovations skyrocket in popularity, Rory's infantile reaction to losing the job is inappropriate as well. As Kathryn Watson argues, Rory's problem is a lack of humility and a continued adolescent attitude ("Feminism")—she cannot see any possibilities of a world where she does not get something that she feels she deserves.

Instead of giving Rory some space to grow after losing the job at *Sandee Says*, perhaps to learn from her mistakes, the narrative makes a crucial error. Rory simply falls into another job; when she returns home at the end of "Spring," she feels aimless, but in "Summer," she learns that the *Stars Hollow Gazette* is shutting down after eighty-nine years because it is losing its editor. Rory is upset to hear this and confronts Taylor about it, offering her services as editor. Her "interview" consists of the following exchange:

> TAYLOR: May I ask what your qualifications are?
>
> RORY: I'm . . . here.
>
> TAYLOR: Well, that's a good start.
>
> RORY: I have a degree in journalism from Yale University. How's that?
>
> TAYLOR: Not bad, but this job will take you away from the Thirtysomething Gang. Have you thought about that?
>
> RORY: I will adjust.
>
> TAYLOR: Should we discuss salary?
>
> RORY: I assume it pays nothing?
>
> TAYLOR: You got the job. Come, let's go introduce you to the staff. ("Summer," 1.3)

Instead of having Rory rally the town to save the *Gazette*—a typical *Gilmore Girls* move—the narrative rewards Rory's petulance with a vertical move, again sending the message that hard work is not only unnecessary to secure positions beyond entry-level, but that if one simply waits long enough, everything just works out. Rory's work with the *Gazette* is not easy; the paper has not updated their technology since the mid-1990s and

their staff consists of two very elderly employees, but she still walks into a position as Editor-in-Chief, no matter where the paper is. Still, Rory quickly tires of it. It must be noted that if Rory decides to give up on journalism, she has another position waiting in the wings; Headmaster Charleston at Chilton Academy offers her a job in "Spring" teaching whatever subject she would like as soon as she gets her Master's degree—only because that is required from a legal standpoint. She sees it as him seeing the "failure" on her ("Summer," 1.3). Instead, Rory decides, after speaking with Jess—who now runs an independent press—that her real passion is to write her mother's story, which Lorelai does not want publicly told. (She writes it anyway, and the two fight over her choice.) Ultimately, Lorelai acquiesces, leading to Rory's final manuscript, *Gilmore Girls*. In this narrative progression, the audience can see that Rory has learned nothing; she has not grown from her experiences trying and failing in the workforce. Her time in New York even included some powerful, moving dialogue with Lorelai wherein Rory seemed to be moving forward—realizing she needed to make some changes in her life. However, Rory is still childish, frustrated with the *Gazette*, unable to see the great gift she has been given. In her pursuit of the *Gilmore Girls* manuscript, she continues to show her immaturity.

Rory's decision to write her mother's story without her permission is indicative of the type of person she has become in the past ten years. Ignoring her mother's pleas to find another story—as she explains, there is far too much in there that Emily can twist to hurt Lorelai—Rory's response is, "Please, give me this" ("Summer," 1.3). The revival completely ignores the Rory who had emerged from her selfish, regressive ways by the end of Season Seven. That version of Rory was about to begin a position as a reporter on

the road with Barack Obama's first presidential campaign. In light of the outcome of that campaign, one would assume that Rory would come out with a more nuanced understanding of intersectional feminism.[14] However, all the audience gets in the way of feminist thought is Naomi Shropshire, a supposed feminist icon who is only presented as boozy, absent-minded, and difficult to manage—a legendary problem in her field, any time Rory tells someone in the publishing industry that she is writing a book with Shropshire, she is met with sympathy. Shropshire's character is particularly problematic in a series who holds up feminists in their fifties to seventies as models for its young female characters; she seems to function as a way to present these trailblazers as women who may have brilliant minds but whose pursuit of excellence have left them emotionally stunted and unable to properly function in society. (Parallels to Paris can be made here; Shropshire could be meant as what she could become.) In particular, Logan feels for Rory; he is the first person she tells on screen about her meeting with Naomi because he is the person she stays with while she is in London—not "Deedee," the made-up friend she tells Lorelai she spends her time with in London. During "Winter" and "Spring," Rory spends a great deal of her time jetting back and forth to London to see Logan; they clearly have a sexual relationship, but until Rory starts to look for something in his closet, the audience is not quite sure of the parameters of it. We know Rory has a boyfriend, Paul, of two years—there is a running gag that she forgets she is dating him—which means at least one of them is cheating. Rory sees it differently: "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas . . . And when we leave Vegas, we forget about Vegas until we're back in

[14] Frankly, one would expect that as an English major at Yale, Rory would have already had this understanding. However, she does not exhibit it in the series outside mere gestures.

Vegas . . . ” (“Summer,” 1.3). However, it is soon revealed that Logan is in a relationship, as well—he has a French fiancée, Odette. Both characters have regressed—Logan to the Season Five version of himself, and Rory to her late Season Four self.

Any discussion of *A Year in the Life*—and Logan, because the Wookie is not a legitimate proposition—cannot ignore the baby elephant in the room. Amy Sherman-Palladino has long been known for her mysterious “four words” with which she always planned on ending *Gilmore Girls*, but with her abrupt departure at the end of Season Six, she never told anyone what they were. In speaking with Lauren Graham about the infamous last four words of the series—Graham insists that she was unaware that these four words were “a ‘thing’” (Graham 183)—Amy Sherman-Palladino simply smiled when Graham pointed out that they are a cliffhanger. *A Year in the Life* ends with the following exchange between Rory and Lorelai:

> RORY: Mom?
>
> LORELAI: Yeah?
>
> RORY: I’m pregnant. (“Fall,” 1.4)

Upon first watch—perhaps one that is hindered by great excitement for the return of one’s favorite series—these words are very shocking. However, Rory has been living a life of great carelessness for the past year, and even she has admitted that she has turned into someone she does not recognize. The “cliffhanger” aspect is split evenly between what Rory will do with the news and who the father is; I must contend that a careful viewing of the revival and consideration of *Gilmore Girls* itself offers only one candidate: Logan. Since Logan was meant to be Rory’s version of Christopher, it makes

sense in terms of narrative closure, especially considering Rory's visit to her father in "Fall" where she asks him if he feels Lorelai's choice of raising her alone was the right decision or not; also, simple odds make him more likely. Critics have asked Sherman-Palladino about Rory's future—does this mean she will be Lorelai? Will the baby help her find some direction? Her answer seems to give audiences more questions: "By the way, Rory doesn't have to keep the baby . . . There are choices here that she can make. It's just the left turn. It's that curveball that life throws you" (Bradley, "All Your Burning Questions . . . "). Sherman-Palladino appears to have selective memory about her own series here. Her trademark evasiveness is frustrating; she again refuses to truly engage in a real conversation about her series and the ideology she established when she was showrunner. Rory will keep her baby; every significant female character of childbearing age on this series has gotten pregnant—including Paris, as *A Year in the Life* has proven—and not only followed through with the pregnancy, but kept the baby, regardless of whether or not they were in a position to do so, or even wanted to be pregnant. The best example of this involves a real-life pregnancy, that of actress Melissa McCarthy, who portrays Sookie St. James. After her second child with husband Jackson, Sookie asks him to get a vasectomy—she thinks their son and daughter are plenty (and by this point, she is the co-owner and chef of a busy new inn). Jackson does not do this because he is scared of the procedure—and more cynical viewers may remember his wish for a large family, which could be in the back of his mind; he does not even discuss it with Sookie. The series writers decide to hide McCarthy's pregnancy not in the usual sitcom manner (which would have been possible, particularly in her kitchen), but narratively—Sookie is pregnant again because Jackson has not disclosed his lie. The series never deals with the

marital trespass this represents; it is a grave transgression and violation of Sookie's trust. However, in the show's hidden ideology, women are always prepared for children, even if they do not believe it; they have support all around them when they feel overwhelmed. Parenting is not a one- (or two-) person job. These characters have nothing to fear.

Ultimately, the feminism of *Gilmore Girls* is not what it initially presents itself as; *A Year in the Life* simply highlights this deficiency. This would initially seem to be a great sea change in the way the series is perceived. However, for some reason, critics seem to have forgotten who Amy Sherman-Palladino is—she has always been quite clear that she has no intention of embedding any kind of ideology in her work: "I don't do message shows. I don't give a shit who you learn your life from" (Ng para. 6). In fact, she avoids any talk of her series' lack of diversity or engagement of sociocultural issues at all unless pressed. However, these issues come up whether Sherman-Palladino likes it or not. For example, eagle-eyed viewers would have noticed that Lorelai and Luke get married on November 5, 2016. The Gilmore girls would have been Hillary Clinton supporters—the series establishes Rory's admiration of Clinton early on, and it is clear that Lorelai has read *It Takes a Village*—and one has to wonder: if Netflix is able to produce another season of *A Year in the Life*, will the audience see a more sober Rory and Lorelai? Will the election results have brought their privilege home? While many of the rest of the audience who pay attention to these things had been spending the campaign more closely examining our own privilege as a result of the horrific things said during it, it seems Lorelai and Rory noticed not at all—they continue to be privileged white women who are caught up in their own world and forget about others outside of their own bubble. *A Year in the Life* only brings into sharp relief the issues a close reading of *Gilmore Girls* raises,

namely that Lorelai and Rory operate within a liberal white feminism that does not acknowledge intersectionalism, ignores their own privilege, and puts too much emphasis on merit and connection as a way to engage with society. The idea of a fifth Gilmore girl[15] being born into this diegesis makes one hope that Lorelai and Rory, especially, will start to reconsider how they interact with the world.

[15] One must include Trix, after all, and it seems unlikely that Amy Sherman-Palladino would have this baby be a boy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINAL GIRLS: *PRETTY LITTLE LIARS* AS SLASHER TEEN SOAP

Currently, Freeform broadcasts not only one of teen drama's biggest hits, but one of its gamechangers—*Pretty Little Liars* (2010-present). The series, which according to the network "holds the six most-tweeted scripted telecasts in TV history," (Goldberg, "It's Official," para. 7) has 24 million social media fans and utilizes popular platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to engage with fans and keep them invested in the narrative as it finishes its seventh and final season. While teen drama as a whole has a long history with connecting with its fan base through paratexts, particularly internet sites, *Pretty Little Liars* takes the idea to an entirely different level as series creator and executive producer I. Marlene King herself talks to fans on Twitter, especially, responding to their theories about the identity of the shadowy "A" figure who torments the core four female friends: Aria Montgomery, Hanna Marin, Spencer Hastings, and Emily Fields. King also offers clues leading up to important episodes, particularly during sweeps and before finales. Because the series works in traditional ABC Family/Freeform fashion, with an A and B season—one season is cut into two, with a summer/winter finale or winter/spring finale, leading to a need to label the current season 7A and 7B, for example—King has near-constant contact with her series' fans.

While many different and fruitful approaches to this series could be taken, television scholars have largely ignored it thus far, likely because of the series' great popularity with its teenage fans—often, the greater fervor with which teens approach a

cultural artifact leads scholars of its contemporary age to disregard its importance.[1] However, I submit that one of the series' most interesting aspects is the way in which it deconstructs genre expectations; while it is a teen soap, it works against one of the most expected aspects of that genre—constant dissolution and reformation of female friendships due to infighting, generally over male attention—and creates a series that sends a clear message of the importance of true female friendship and the valuation of those bonds above all else. In doing so, the series utilizes what may initially appear to be an odd instance of filmic borrowing: in its creation of the mysterious A figure and the girls' attempt to unmask it/them,[2] *Pretty Little Liars* works within the slasher film tradition, making the Liars into Final Girls and revealing A to be a killer born of their own transgressions. In doing so, it reinforces the idea that young women should focus on their own strength and creating strong, healthy bonds with other girls in their peer groups; this is the only way to grow into a mature, emotionally healthy woman.

Pretty Little Liars *as Teen Soap*

Pretty Little Liars is clearly a teen soap; the series has the most important signifiers of the subgenre. The series stars four beautiful young women playing sixteen-year-old girls when the narrative opens; Aria Montgomery (Lucy Hale), Hanna Marin

---

[1] See Todd Van Der Werff's review of the pilot for *The AV Club* for a typical dismissal of the series; for a scholarly perspective, see Dana Och's "All Laura Palmer's Children: *Twin Peaks* and Gendering the Discourse of Influence," which alleges that the series "helps popular criticism to refine and justify the masculinizing discourse" of quality television and auteurism in television because of its roots in "a female fandom, youth, melodrama, and consumerism as part of Alloy Entertainment" (136).

[2] Over the course of the series, A is revealed multiple times; initially, A is female and works alone. However, in future iterations, A is a team (including male and female participants) with a guiding force, Big A, and eventually becomes a puppeteer figure, manipulating several people who work independently and then together. The Liars term this A "Über A." Additionally, the A team is susceptible to espionage—the Liars' group infiltrate them at different points. As such, the proper pronoun is often difficult to establish.

(Ashley Benson), Spencer Hastings (Troian Bellisario), and Emily Fields (Shay Mitchell) are the remaining members of Rosewood High School's power clique, once led by the powerful, beautiful, and greatly feared Alison DiLaurentis (Sasha Pieterse), who, at the start of the pilot episode, has been missing for a year.[3] The narrative slowly explains that Alison curated this group—the girls did not come together on their own. Each Liar (as they are termed by critics and in the parlance of the series' paratexts) has her own personal strengths that enhance Alison's social capital; they would be popular on their own, but with Alison behind them, the Liars become social queens. Aria is confident and talented; the narrative focuses on her literary aspirations, but she is also shown painting, something she picked up from her mother, who is an artist and runs an art gallery. Her effortless cool also comes through in her clothing, which always reflects an artistic/punk spin on what everyone else is wearing. Hanna is funny and gregarious, a natural leader; Alison's emotional abuse of her while she is overweight only increases her binge eating and keeps her from utilizing her talents to shine bright. (Alison is aware of Hanna's real potential and keeps it in check with passive-aggressive comments.) By the beginning of the series, Hanna has emerged as the school's new Queen Bee. Spencer is incredibly intelligent and driven—the series shows her as the force behind nearly every school event, as well as working as class president and playing on the school's field hockey team. Her family is also "extremely wealthy" ("I Must Confess," 2.11[4]) compared to her friends, something that is significant in this upper-middle class enclave. Emily is athletic,

---

[3] Interestingly, Alison is portrayed by someone even younger than her character; Pieterse was fourteen when she was cast in the role. This adds another layer of discomfort when watching what the character goes through—on both levels, a child is the object of voyeurism and psychological torture.
[4] Taken from the girls' therapist's notes.

a champion swimmer for Rosewood—which offsets her naturally reserved personality—who also works hard to make sure her grades are high so that she can be guaranteed a scholarship. As I suggested in my analysis of clothing iconography in the series in Chapter Two, the Liars present different "identities" for their audience to engage with and even model in their own lives. With four distinct types, *Pretty Little Liars* offers its viewers a variety of teens and seems to set the stage for typical high school girl infighting about boyfriends or being homecoming queen. However, as I will argue, the series quickly undermines this genre expectation.

A quick channel flip past the Freeform channel would support *Pretty Little Liars*' teen soap claims: these series cast attractive men of varying physicalities to play love interests for the heterosexual female central cast members, which is another hallmark of these series. However, unlike most teen soaps, these male characters are often fairly disposable in the *Pretty Little Liars* universe, and when they do prove worthy of sticking around, it is not because they are necessarily someone their romantic partner should trust. (In other words, audiences should not expect that their personal 'ship—no matter how obvious it seems—is in the cards for long.) For example, while Jason DiLaurentis (Drew Van Acker) was not originally cast for romantic purposes, the role was recast after his appearance in Season One so that he could offer an obstacle for Aria's relationship with Ezra Fitz (Ian Harding) since the original actor portraying Jason did not have a great deal of chemistry with Lucy Hale. "Ezria," as the couple is popularly referred to within the fandom, is a major mainstay of the series; Aria met Ezra the day before reenrolling at Rosewood after a year abroad with her family—her father, an English professor, took a sabbatical in an outward attempt to help Aria deal with the grief of losing her friend

Alison.[5] Ezra offers an interesting point of study for the subgenre; there are growing numbers of romantic subplots with the teenage main characters and adults, often in positions of authority like teachers or police officers. This same thread can be seen in series like *Riverdale*, where Archie has an affair with his music teacher, Ms. Grundy—who ultimately turns out to be an imposter—and *East Los High*, in which Vanessa contracts HIV from a sexual encounter with a TV host. The pairing of underage principal characters with adult romantic partners is becoming increasingly common in the teen soap, and it must be noted that in these relationships, while the power dynamic is presented as more equal because the younger partner is more "mature" than their peers, the real emotional fallout after the relationship falls on the younger partner, perhaps the series' attempt to recognize their character's relative inexperience in these matters. Though Aria and Ezra technically begin their relationship before she realizes he is her English teacher at Rosewood, the Season Four revelation that he came to Rosewood to write a true crime novel about Alison's disappearance—an interest born of his own interactions with Alison that same summer—show that Aria and Ezra's "fortuitous" meeting was actually preplanned, and he knew her actual age the entire time, making Aria's earlier claim that Ezra was "the one guy who never lied to [her]" a sad scene to reflect upon ("For Whom the Bell Tolls," 1.22). For Aria—and other characters like her in this subgenre—romantic relationships with adults are full of pain, yet the teen soap continues to go back to them.

[5] In reality, Aria had caught him having an affair with a student not too much earlier; this was his way of fixing things for himself.

Potential paramours are not the only adults in the series; the Liars' parents do make appearances. However, in keeping with the tenets of the teen soap subgenre, their internal lives are not privileged—the teen soap features partial to complete parental erasure. If the audience is given a look into their minds or hearts, it is to drive the teens' narrative, not to create dual parent/child narratives. In this way, *Pretty Little Liars* adheres to genre expectations; if the Liars' parents were constantly around or were effective at rooting out their children's problems, the narrative would not work. For example, Aria's parents have marital troubles that begin with her father's infidelity. Aria's father asks her to keep his secret, leading to a great deal of turmoil in her life and a fissure in their relationship. Initially, the infidelity is revealed because Aria is not yet adept enough at A's game; A sends her mother a letter detailing everything Aria knows about the situation and has not told her. The Montgomery home is fractured for the majority of the first season—leading in to the second season, as well—after Ella moves out, and the eventual divorce produces a great deal of instability for Aria and Mike, her younger brother. Mike even acts out by breaking into homes around the neighborhood and stealing whatever catches his eye, making the Liars think that he—or whoever is committing these crimes—might be A, due to the survivalist gear that is among the stolen property. While these events are shown to cause Byron and Ella a great deal of pain, this aspect is secondary to the overall plot. Thus, Aria's parents' marital troubles simply tie into the A mystery.

Also in keeping with parental erasure typical of the subgenre, the girls' parents are also shown to be largely unnecessary when it comes to solving their children's real problems. In the second season, Emily sends her mother, Pam, off to Texas to stay with

her father, Wayne, who is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Pennsylvania National Guard and currently stationed in Texas after a long assignment in Afghanistan. While Emily misses her father a great deal, it is Pam who can barely function without her husband. Emily knows that it is only because of her that Pam is not in Texas—A's machinations have kept her in Rosewood, but Emily did not want to leave anyway—so Emily advises her to move and leave her behind, noting, "You and Dad need each other" ("Never Letting Go," 2.6). Interestingly, Emily never says anything about her mother needing her, or vice versa. Emily and her father are much closer than Emily and her mother, but he has taught her to be independent. Emily has apparently decided that she can do things on her own. Still, her mother feels that she should at least have a mother figure around; Emily moves in with Hanna, whose mother, Ashley, is more like a protective roommate.[6] Even when Ashley tries to focus on Hanna, she is shown to be far behind the action, much like Ella. In Season Two, after Hanna has already been run over by A's car and the entire group been held as persons of interest in a murder investigation, Ashley and Ella only notice that things are not what they should be when A's malice is made extremely public, via a fashion show tribute to Alison:

> ELLA: What do you think that was?
>
> ASHLEY: Well, you know about mean girls. They had them when we were in school.

[6] Like many parents on this and other teen dramas in the twenty-first century, Ashley reads intertextually: she is played by Laura Leighton, who also portrayed Sydney Andrews on FOX's *Melrose Place* (1992-99) as well as its revival (2009-10, the CW). The character residue from Sydney Andrews leads viewers to expect similar behavior from Ashley; however, while Ashley occasionally schemes to protect Hanna, she is nowhere near what audiences saw from Sydney.

> ELLA: Not like this, we didn't.
>
> ASHLEY: No . . . not like this.
>
> ELLA: And I don't think this just started. I think it's been going on for a while, and we're just now noticing it.
>
> ASHLEY: I think you're right.
>
> ELLA: You do?
>
> ASHLEY: Alison, Hanna being hit by that car, Ian in the bell tower, everything else. It—it's easy to get paranoid and start seeing connections where there aren't any connections. ("Surface Tension," 2.7)

One has to wonder about the Liars' parents—Hanna is run over by a car, Spencer is nearly killed by Ian Thomas, and their daughters have all spent the better part of a year being stalked and emotionally terrorized by a shadowy presence. However, the girls' parents serve their function in this world. They show up primarily as antagonists—both as roadblocks for the girls' lives in a generic, nonthreatening sense and in a more malicious way that leads the audience to wonder if one of the Liars' parents may have killed Alison, for example—and to lend the series an air of reality. These teenage girls cannot live in a world without parents, after all, at least not in a way that allows them to thrive. However, the Liars can have ineffectual parents whose problematic parenting styles shape how the girls engage with this dangerous world.

The complicated world of *Pretty Little Liars* owes its construction to an important aspect of the teen soap—the subgenre is highly sensational and borrows from the sensation novel tradition. Kathleen Tillotson calls sensation novels "novels with a secret"

(qtd. in Brantlinger 1) because the narrative structure is deliberately designed to keep audiences hanging on by "withholding information" (qtd. in Brantlinger 2). Teen soaps are also structured in this manner—information is doled out in small doses, enough to keep audiences coming back each week, desperate to know the rest of the story. This differs from other subgenres like the family drama, where the narrative may move more slowly and not necessarily feature enthralling, watercooler material in each installment. Often in the teen soap, a particularly juicy facet of the tale is given without a great deal of context, practically guaranteeing a returning audience. *Pretty Little Liars* is quite good at this technique because the executive producers, especially, utilize social media to connect with audiences, giving out clues there as well. In Season Six, the identity of "Big A"—as the A figure is known from Season Three until Season 6A—was teased on a website that promoted the midseason finale, giving clues like "A is not a parent" and "A has had direct interaction with Ali and all four Liars" ("Face to Face") The cliffhanger is utilized most often during sweeps or when the series will be off the air for a significant period of time—like for a winter break or for the series finale. No matter when it happens, the writers make sure that the audience is left gasping for some piece of information to make the time apart bearable.

Pretty Little Liars also spends a great deal of time working with another element of sensation novels—their plots are about putting "extreme evil behind fair appearances" (Brantlinger 11). These Victorian novels present lovely, respectable families, ones who could be good examples for the community, and show the ugliness within—these families include murderers, adulterers, bigamists, and sometimes vampires, depending on the author. In the series, this influence is clear from the very first episode, and becomes

even more apparent as the series progresses. In the House of Hastings, as the teens flippantly refer to Spencer's family, six and a half seasons reveal that Peter, Spencer's father, has fathered one child out of wedlock—Jason DiLaurentis—and has no problem covering up any illegal activities that his family members may have committed; Melissa buried Bethany Young—the girl believed to be Alison when she was found buried in her backyard—alive, thinking Spencer had killed her, and participated in the A team; and Spencer has no end of secrets herself, the most outrageous of which might be the Season Seven homicide cover-up she instigated to save her friend Hanna, who accidentally ran over and killed Archer Dunhill, a local psychiatrist who had illegally married Alison and who was stalking the group in collaboration with the new A, Über A, also known as A.D.[7] These are only a few examples; the audience learns so many secrets about these young women and their families—as well as the other teens they come into contact with—that it is hard to look at the picturesque town of Rosewood the same way. What else might be hiding behind these other beautiful, expensive doors? No matter how much is revealed, the Liars' parents constantly emphasize the need to put up a good front for the neighbors, especially when the girls are younger; the impression is that their parents are trying to instill a lesson that the girls will carry with them into adulthood. Ashley's reaction to Hanna's shoplifting in the pilot is indicative of this attitude:

> ASHLEY: Really? In a small town like this, what people think about you matters.
>
> HANNA: I know.

[7] Currently, most fans seem to think the D stands for Drake (as in Mary Drake, Jessica DiLaurentis's sister and Charlotte's mother), not Dunhill (or DiLaurentis), matching the general train of thought of the characters.

ASHLEY: Then why would you risk it all to steal a pair of sunglasses? Hanna, I buy you everything you need to be popular.

HANNA: That's not why I do it . . . I made a mistake.

ASHLEY: In Rosewood, you don't have room to make a mistake. ("Pilot," 1.1)

Ashley makes a small gesture in the scene toward Hanna reacting to her father's leaving, but really, she is concerned with how the town will see Hanna's actions. She wants Hanna to have social capital—she "buys her everything she needs to be popular"—and knows that one false move will destroy that. Similarly, when Spencer is brought up as a person of interest in Alison's death, her mother, Veronica, asks her to stop seeing her new boyfriend, Toby Cavanaugh (Keegan Allen), because he is still the town pariah after only recently being cleared of the same charges himself. Veronica, a well-known and extremely talented lawyer, wants Spencer to watch her actions in public because the town is full of potential jurors. The Liars' parents will tolerate all manner of ugliness—to varying degrees—as long as the neighbors are unaware.

Deconstructing and Subverting Genre Expectations

Still, while *Pretty Little Liars* works within the teen soap tradition—it must, to gain an initial audience who will use their own cultural capital to help them choose among the offerings on their televisions—it deconstructs and subverts genre expectations, making this series more than just a fun, soapy way to pass time. First and most importantly, the Liars are not the victims that teen soaps usually require their heroines to be. Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily do have moments of weakness—and with what they go through at the hands of each A figure, particularly at their age and for how long the

mental and emotional (sometimes physical) anguish goes on, these moments are understandable. However, Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily actively resist being victimized. When A appears, the Liars take a moment to be privately confused but then come together to work to uncover A's identity and stop her once and for all. These four friends—later, five and then six—are the fighters in this series. They take point from the beginning; at sixteen years old, they organize themselves in an active attempt to discover what happened to their friend Alison and to unmask A. Even when the game escalates and they are taken hostage, their courage does not flag; in fact, the Liars emerge even angrier and more determined to win. Unlike their counterparts in other teen soaps, Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily prove their mental toughness over and over as they are pushed to the limit for seven seasons.

Additionally, the boys/men in their lives play supporting roles in these pursuits; in fact, the Liars' romantic lives are secondary to their goal of unmasking A and getting back to their regular lives. As a result, when their boyfriends show up, their presence is more likely to signal trouble or the need to dissemble than it is to prefigure a romantic interlude. The Liars protect Ezra, Caleb, and Toby (the three most consistent love interests for Aria, Hanna, and Spencer—Emily's romantic partners come in and out of her life, likely because Alison is her endgame) from A's game for the first two seasons as much as possible. Near the end of the second season, the girls only bring Caleb in because of his hacking skills; after a physical tussle with A, the Liars recover A's phone and ask Caleb to hack into it. However, Hanna refuses to let him know any details of their situation, even though he is growing more and more curious: " . . . Caleb is still asking about everything. And it's not safe for him to know the answers" ("The Blonde

Leading the Blind," 2.17). Caleb finally stands up for himself, saying he wants to help but he needs to protect Hanna, too—and to do that, he needs answers. Where on a typical teen soap, this would garner Caleb a great deal of sympathy and a monologue wherein one of the girls asks for his help with A, Spencer and Emily only give him the bare minimum when telling him the whole story would likely be much easier. When Hanna offers her own explanation, she only tells the part of the story that concerns herself and her mother, again subverting expectations that she will cry on her boyfriend's shoulder and let him handle this mounting issue in her life. Caleb remains sidelined and Hanna is still the primary agent in her own life. After Mona is exposed and a new A arises, Hanna remains reluctant to tell Caleb what is going on because of A's threats against his mother's life, even when he breaks up with her over her reticence. Ezra, too, is left in the dark, which is curious; as a trusted adult, he might have some resources for them, and he has been on the scene since A appeared. Still, he does not learn about A until Mona is unmasked—the audience can assume, because in the Season Three opener, he assures Aria that she is "still safe" and that "[t]here's no more A" ("It Happened 'That Night'," 3.1), whereas he and Aria had had no conversations about A previously. For a couple who have a number of heartfelt conversations—the series highlights their chemistry in this way, to reflect their mental and emotional compatibility—this lack of discussion is curious. The audience would rightly expect to see Aria and Ezra dissect A's presence in their lives. However, this strategy of keeping their paramours away from full knowledge runs through the series, especially in earlier seasons; the Liars see the weightier and potentially dangerous pieces of evidence—and often anything A has done in its initial stages—as "strictly 'need to know'" ("Stolen Kisses," 3.8).

This reluctance to bring Ezra, Caleb, and Toby in on their secrets seems strange on the surface, especially since the girls trust them with their deepest personal concerns. However, the dynamics of romantic relationships on this series are quickly established—the Liars are the emotional caretakers and problem-solvers while their partners are the ones who are supported. This tension recalls Jason Mittell's discussion of genre in *Genre and Television*, wherein he explains that "[g]enres are cultural products, constituted by media practices and subject to ongoing change and redefinition" (1). While the concept of caretaking is seen as a traditionally female occupation in America and relates to everyday tasks, in male/female relations in the teen soap, caretaking is primarily emotional in nature—though it may have a physical component, it comes from the idea of protecting someone's psyche. Both problem-solving and caretaking usually fall to male romantic partners; they are his contribution to the relationship, while the female partner "softens" him if he is the bad boy, serves as his entrée to society if he is an outsider, or simply makes him more interesting—shows him the world, usually—if he is the series' good boy.

However, *Pretty Little Liars* subverts this paradigm by having Aria, Hanna, and Spencer act as problem solvers and emotional caretakers. In Hanna and Caleb's case, their initial meeting seems meant to establish Caleb as a wisecracking bad boy for Hanna to spar with and spark off of—he is a foster kid whose presence at Rosewood High is never really explained. However, his storyline shifts when he and Hanna truly hit it off and fall in love; she takes it upon herself to start solving his problems. When Hanna learns that his foster mother simply takes the checks she is given for his care without doing anything for him—Caleb initially lives in the school, then with Hanna and her

mother, and then with Lucas, Hanna's friend on the yearbook staff—she threatens Janet with legal action unless Janet signs the checks over to Caleb. In Spencer and Toby's case, she steps in for him with more obvious things, like buying his truck and tools for a carpentry job when his inability to afford them will prevent him from taking the position. More importantly, however, she acts as his advocate when he is being victimized by his stepsister, Jenna. A major mystery plot point of the first two seasons revolves around the N.A.T. Club, a group of young Rosewood men—including Ian Thomas—who enjoyed making voyeuristic videos of young girls around their neighborhood. Much like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the series takes on those young men who use their technological abilities to harass and oppress young women. However, unlike Buffy, the Liars must rely only on their wits to outmaneuver the N.A.T Club.

The N.A.T. Club does not exist in the books; in the series it serves as yet another bit of evidence for the series' preoccupation with pedophilia. Alison, unlike her friends, seems to be hyperaware of surveillance before her disappearance; possibly, she knows of the club her brother founded and then abandoned. One of Alison's power plays before her "death" is finding a thumb drive of the videos the club made and using them as leverage over Ian Thomas, who is later charged in her death. Alison clearly understands from an early age that the men in her town are invested in not only watching her in private moments, but keeping that transgression among themselves. Instead of projecting a victim mentality—knowing that will give these men even more power over her—she works to turn the power dynamics in her favor. The Liars learn from Alison as they uncover her schemes, though they try to use her knowledge of power shifts for the good of others as well as themselves. For example, in working to take and keep the videos out

of rotation, Spencer does not just hold evidence over Ian's head; she eliminates the further possibility of Toby's victimization, not only by Jenna but by the adult men who have been watching Toby have sex with Jenna.

Pretty Little Liars works to subvert the teen soap tradition of focusing on these romantic subplots, as well. While teen soaps usually foreground female characters' love lives, this series uses their romantic relationships to help further the larger narrative concern—A's manipulation of the Liars' lives and A's enjoyment of their mental anguish at his/her hands. If the Liars have nothing important to them in their personal lives, A has nothing with which to threaten them, after all. Still, keeping the conflict between A and the Liars at the forefront of the narrative means that the Liars' relationship amongst themselves is ultimately what is most important: what they share with and keep from each other helps move the narrative along, rather than how or if they interact with their romantic partners. Additionally, keeping romantic relationships secondary allows the A narrative to impact multiple aspects of the Liars' lives. For example, when Aria and Ezra are still hiding their relationship from the world—they only meet at his apartment and make an effort to not acknowledge each other outside of school—A dangles the possibility of exposure not only to Aria's parents but also to school and other local authorities. A ups the game when Jackie Molina, Ezra's ex-fiancé, returns to Rosewood to teach at Hollis College. A uses Aria's jealousy of Jackie—which is legitimate, as Jackie desires to reunite with Ezra at any cost, even at the expense of his teaching career—to force her to intimidate Jackie into staying away from Ezra by using the evidence of Jackie's recent plagiarized article. However, this plan backfires; Jackie comes back more determined than ever, and Aria is frustrated that she let A manipulate

her. For Aria, the problem with Jackie is less about Ezra now and more about the continued game between herself and A.

As an extension of this idea, *Pretty Little Liars* overturns another typical aspect of the teen soap: teen girl infighting. Audiences expect to see these central female characters in constant conflict, most often due to proprietary feelings over male romantic partners or disagreements about choices regarding those partners, which can last entire seasons. Instead, while the series does show some fighting among the Liars because of romantic partners, these conflicts do not last very long—often being resolved within an episode or two—and these friends offer genuine apologies for their behavior. The issues are forgotten, creating a space for real feminist work. Like the Liars' foremothers in earlier teen dramas, Buffy Summers and Rory Gilmore, the Liars value their female friendships highly, and the series constantly reinforces the importance of maintaining them even as competing distractions—boys, the social whirl—enter their lives. However, the teen soap makes the audience suspicious of the apologies offered; viewers expect backstabbing and fake apologies made to pave the way for boyfriend-stealing later. This is not the case in *Pretty Little Liars*. These friends have learned their lesson from being Alison's friends; backstabbing and lying to her friends was Alison's way, not the foursome's. In fact, the original Alison could easily fit in any usual teen soap as the requisite mean girl.

In her first incarnation, Alison is much more in line with traditional genre expectations of a popular teen girl; she is pretty, vivacious, and rules her clique with an iron fist. Ali sees friendship as a barter system—she makes Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily feel good about themselves and gives them the social capital they need, and she

gets their secrets, which she holds onto until she can trade them for what she needs. Hanna addresses the toxic atmosphere Alison nurtured in their friend group when the Liars are required to go see a therapist, Dr. Sullivan, in Season Two:

> HANNA: Our friendship was work. Like, you had to impress her to make her like you, and that meant doing things that maybe you didn't feel so good about doing. Sometimes bad things. . . . She could make you feel special, and that seemed worth it then.
>
> DR. SULLIVAN: And now? What would you like to say to Alison? …
>
> HANNA: Alison, you were the best friend I ever had, and that meant a lot to me. You meant a lot to me. But you were also the worst enemy I ever had, and I can't believe it took me this long to realize that. . . .
>
> ALISON (*visualized by Hanna*): . . . I'll always be with you. I'm the only one that can make you happy, the only one that'll tell you the truth. I'm the only one that you can count on.
>
> HANNA: Then I'd rather be alone.
>
> ALISON: You won't last a week.
>
> HANNA: At least I'll be alive. You can't reach into my life anymore, not unless I let you. You're gone and I am so over missing you. ("Blind Dates," 2.4)

Alison's manipulations and emotional blackmail cast a long shadow over the Liars, who still have not recovered from her version of friendship when the series begins. However, when they re-form (and reform) their group, Hanna and her friends make a clear decision that things will be different now. While the girls do not always agree, their disagreements

are used to show character growth, not create drama for drama's sake. The series reinforces the idea that young women need healthy bonds with other girls in their peer groups; this is the only way to grow into a mature, emotionally healthy woman. While other teen soaps may outwardly preach the idea of "girl power" and "sisterhood," their constant reliance on teen girl infighting over boys and hallmarks of popularity as narrative devices show those ideas to be merely buzzwords and not aspects of true devotion for those series. *Pretty Little Liars* consistently shows that there is a way to balance the stereotypical, but still real, cares of being a teenage girl—no matter the gender of one's choice of romantic partner—while striving for goals like college or potential careers, all the while managing the frustrations that come with this age. Too many teen soaps would indicate that at least one of the Liars would break down under all of this pressure; she would turn into the victimized character (see Kelly Taylor of *Beverly Hills, 90210* for the original model). Instead, while the Liars occasionally falter—showing a dash of reality in this soap world—overall, they remain steadfast in their mission.

Rosewood as Slasher Setting

While the series' presentation of primary characters is initially easier to deconstruct, Rosewood itself is a bit more complicated. In its use of setting, *Pretty Little Liars* makes its ties to primetime soap clear. In these series, characters primarily come from upper-middle class to upper-class families; the access to disposable income makes their adventures possible, and their lack of care regarding real-world problems that viewers may face—paying for college, making rent—allows for the creation of an

aspirational aspect to the series. While *Pretty Little Liars* does critique this initial setup, as I will examine later in this chapter, the audience's overall access to Rosewood remains firmly situated in the soap tradition. The Liars are not only beautiful and talented; they are well-funded. The source material for the series, the *Pretty Little Liars* book series from Alloy, sets the story at Rosewood Day School, a private prep school. While it is never explicitly dealt with, it can be inferred that the Rosewood of the series is also a private school of some sort, though likely not a prep school, which would have more rigorous rules, particularly in terms of dress code. In Season One, Spencer dates Alex Santiago, who works at her family's country club. When he meets her sister, Melissa, in "There's No Place Like Homecoming" (1.6), Melissa asks him if he is on the homecoming committee with Spencer. Trying to hurry Melissa away from her new boyfriend—rightly assuming that Melissa will attempt to poison Alex against her—Spencer gives the audience a bit of information that is not really dealt with again in the series:

> SPENCER: Alex doesn't go here. He goes to school across town.
>
> MELISSA: Where do you go?
>
> ALEX: P.S. 187 on Elmhurst.
>
> SPENCER: You wouldn't have heard of it, Melissa. It's not in the same zip code as the Prada outlet. ("There's No Place Like Homecoming," 1.6)

The designation "P.S.", for public school, lets the audience know that Rosewood is set apart from the other schools in the area. It could be a neighborhood school; a careful viewing of the series shows that the Liars (along with Alison) grew up along the same

street—Emily and Alison lived across the street from each other with Spencer living next door to Alison. Aria and Hanna live near each other as well, a little farther away. While the series is not always careful with its geography—unlike *Gilmore Girls*, for example, which shot on the same lot—the audience can see that its protagonists live in an affluent bubble, which is further reinforced by the leisure time habits of the Liars and their friends. In the pilot, Hanna and her new best friend, Mona Vanderwaal (Janel Parrish), go shopping at the local mall. This mall does not feature bargain fashions; no, Hanna is perusing designer sunglasses. Because Hanna is currently playing at shoplifting in her spare time, she steals the Prada sunglasses she tried on last, but the brand namedropping Hanna does throughout the series makes it clear that this is the level of merchandise she and her friends are used to buying.[8] Casual mentions are also made of "family money," which fuels storylines such as Jason DiLaurentis's buying back the family home and moving in during Season Two; his secretive activities at the house are dismissed by his mother because she is not the one funding them.

However, the series undermines genre expectations by putting the Liars in distinctively horrific settings more often than not—their search for A takes place in the woods surrounding Rosewood, abandoned houses and outbuildings, and creepy motels on the outskirts of town. In fact, a viewer with merely a cursory knowledge of horror movies—particularly slasher films—would recognize the tropes. For example, in Season Two, the Lost Woods Resort is introduced; it remains a fixture throughout the series. While Rosewood is shown to have a motel—it is utilized in various early storylines—the

[8] Prada's women's sunglasses generally retail for between three and four hundred dollars each.

Lost Woods directly hearkens to *Psycho* with its isolated location and socially awkward manager, Harold Crane. If Crane's name were not enough to recall Hitchcock's film, which is often cited as a major influence on the slasher genre, the innkeeper allows A to build her lair in one of the rooms, encouraging her alternate personality through his hands-off managing style. By Season Six, the Lost Woods is Mary Drake's home base, throwing its every appearance into suspicion. Season Two's "The First Secret" (2.13), the series' first Halloween episode, recalls *Halloween* with Alison's frame narrative of a young child who kills her sister with a butcher knife (restructured to fit the *Pretty Little Liars* diegesis to become a set of twin girls rather than a young boy and his teenaged sister). The episode is rife with references to the film, featuring a dark, creepy house—much like the Myers family's, which is more prominently featured in later entries in the *Halloween* franchise—that the Liars must navigate in order to find Alison, who tells a tale of a man with a knife who locked her in a closet. By placing this episode further into the narrative, the series highlights the Liars' inherent abilities; when A engages them and they must come together to protect themselves and discover who murdered Alison—and later, who is threatening them all—the Liars are already primed for slasher-style antics in Rosewood.

Even the Liars' homes recall the ambiance of settings in slasher films: when their families are gone, the girls constantly feel as if they are being watched. Doors creak, windows rattle, and shadows shift along the floor. *Pretty Little Liars* reinforces the same idea given by slasher films in the 1970s and 1980s: while you may believe your community is safe—you may have worked very hard to make it so—no home is truly protected from the Other. These films also had an underlying message that parents should

watch their children more closely; after all, it is the absence of parents and general authority figures that makes so much of the action possible. In the same way, the Liars are largely alone for the majority of the narrative—their parents are either busy or disconnected from their lives, allowing them to stay alone in suspect settings that set the scene for terrifying showdowns with potential A figures and any number of revealed Rosewood rogues.

Ultimately, *Pretty Little Liars* is a series about female bonding, but the Liars reform their group to find Alison's killer and deal with their mysterious tormentor. In order to facilitate the girls' endeavors, I. Marlene King and her writers create a diegesis in which the conventions of a slasher film can be used to comment on the nature of high school female friendship today. By placing the Liars in a high-stress environment enhanced by these slasher elements, the series sends a clear message: young girls live in constant fear of being "eliminated" not only by a patriarchal culture but also by their female peers. Only the most mentally and emotionally strong will survive, much like in a slasher film.[9]

Before moving on to explain how Rosewood functions as a slasher setting, a brief review of the slasher movie will be helpful. Broadly defined, a slasher movie centers around "the same basic idea: a killer terrorizes a young community in an isolated place

[9] Early in the genre, the Final Girl was a virgin—the implication is that her virtue is one of the things that saved her. However, as Carol Clover has noted, it is not the only quality that allows her to best the monster—her watchfulness is also important. Also, as the genre evolves, virginity is no longer a requirement (see *Scream* for a self-referential example). It should be noted that all of the Liars begin the series as virgins, however, in keeping with the older tradition—but in another subversion, each of them loses their virginity in high school, before their face-off with Charlotte.

and in the end, a person, usually female, survives" (Petridis 77).[10] While scholars disagree as to the beginning of the genre—some, like Vera Dika, see it as emerging with the premiere of *Halloween* in 1978, while others like Sotiris Petridis claim 1974's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Black Christmas* actually "set some basic rules for the subgenre's formula" (76). I must discount *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; though slasher films are important in teen culture and the film has its own place within it, primarily because of its success in drive-ins, the slasher movie has a few central requirements to begin the narrative, one of which is that there is a community of which the teens are a part: see *Friday the 13th*'s (1980) campers; *Nightmare on Elm Street*'s (1984) small town of Springwood, Ohio; and *The House on Sorority Row*'s (1983) sorority. The killer, who was once part of the community or was expelled from it as part of what Dika calls a "wrongful action" (59), comes back into the community and wreaks havoc. While these films sometimes start with taking the community on the road, such as in more recent films like *Hatchet* (2006), connections to the killer are still revealed. The teens of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* simply take a terribly wrong turn.

Slasher films are decidedly postmodern in their outlook; in their worlds, "traditional (dichotomous) categories break down, boundaries blur, institutions fall into question … and the master status of the universal (*read* male, white, monied, heterosexual) subject deteriorates" (Pinedo 86). Isabel Cristina Pinedo's study of postmodern horror film is helpful in understanding the world of *Pretty Little Liars*.

---

[10] The genre is also termed differently by various scholars; Carol J. Clover calls it the "slasher" (1992); Vera Dika prefers the "stalker film" (1981); and John McCarty has labeled it the "splatter film" (1984). Critics have leveled worse epithets at the genre: "teenie kills," "dead teenager movies," and "slice-'em-ups" are among the more descriptive.

According to Pinedo, postmodern horror, those films released since 1968, has four main traits in common that can be found within the text: "[h]orror constitutes a violent disruption of the everyday world; [h]orror transgresses and violates boundaries; [h]orror throws into question the validity of rationality; [and p]ostmodern horror repudiates narrative closure" (90-91). Pinedo is clear to note that classical horror utilizes some of these patterns as well, but in postmodern horror, they operate differently. Regardless, these paradigms are clearly at work in the series.

The world of *Pretty Little Liars* is violently disrupted from the very beginning with the discovery of Alison's body. Interestingly, in the original script, Alison is thirteen when she is killed, not fifteen; that original version of the pilot opens three years later when the Liars are sixteen, rather than a year later, as in the final version. The horrific thought of someone murdering a child is intensified by lowering Alison's age; one can infer that the network felt the material King had planned for Alison later—such as dating Ian Thomas, who was six years her senior, and blackmailing Spencer's father—would be better received if she were fifteen at the time. Regardless of the version, it is important to note that Alison is legally a child when these events occur. Either way, opening a series by having the denizens of a picturesque small town discover the body of their high school's Queen Bee epitomizes Pinedo's assertions that "[h]orror is produced by the violation of what are tellingly called natural laws—by the disruption of our presuppositions about the integrity and predictable character of objects, places, animals, and people. Violence disrupts the world of everyday life; it explodes our assumptions about normality" (91). For the Liars, the discovery of Alison's body changes their whole lives—excluding their problems with A, they feel driven to get to the bottom of what

happened to her, which leads to uncovering secrets about their own families, some of which are connected to Alison and some of which are not. Spencer, especially, learns that her family is far from what she believed; as the series progresses, Spencer learns that her father has an illegitimate son (Alison's brother, Jason), and her sister, Melissa, has faked a pregnancy and was bullying Alison before her death. Also, Spencer herself may not even be a Hastings. The Season 7A finale reveals that Spencer's real mother is Mary Drake, making her the half-sister of Charlotte DiLaurentis, also known as Big A—the series' second A figure and, for Spencer, her true tormentor. Her biological father remains in question. It is clear that while solving Alison's murder and reason for disappearing is important to the Liars, pulling out the various skeletons in their families' closets remains high on the list as well.

In her discussion of these violent disruptions in the postmodern horror film, Pinedo notes that these films revel in gore. Classical horror narrative tells about the violence perpetrated upon its victims, she asserts, while the postmodern narrative is obsessed with showing it—body horror is a perfect example, such as the films of David Cronenberg. However, on a practical level, *Pretty Little Liars* cannot show too much gore due to the Standards and Practices Department at ABC Family/Freeform. Likely as an outgrowth of this limitation, physical violence is used sparingly on this series, primarily to shock viewers. The real trick here is mental violence; psychological torture is A's stock in trade. Upon consideration, it is not that difficult to see why. For A, violence is too easy, too rough and crude. Frankly, violence is for men—and this is a mental game between women. Even Noel Kahn acknowledges the dynamic in a trust exercise designed by the school: "Bad boys got nothing on mean girls. Guys have a fight, there's a punch,

it's over. Girls don't fight fair. They gang up, they keep secrets, they plot. They can cut you down with a look" ("The Naked Truth," 2.19). Noel's summation could be seen as typical posturing and generalization by a popular male student, but when taken with audience knowledge that he is potentially in league with A—and upon a second viewing of the series, much more dangerous than he appears and definitely on the A team—his words carry different weight. He has insider information, and his analysis is accurate. In Rosewood, female warfare is rarely physical; A has worked very hard to accumulate as much information on the Liars as possible before revealing herself. In retaliation for A's crimes, the girls act in a similar fashion, gathering intelligence for multiple episodes before making a move. Spencer, especially, is invested in winning; this game challenges her considerable intellect in a way that few things do. Thus far in the series, both revealed primary A figures have been women: Mona Vanderwaal and Charlotte DiLaurentis, and it is no coincidence that both of them have genius-level IQs. A works a long game. Violence is only used as a last resort, and for the most part, it is the kind that—if it is not meant to kill—is lingering, like broken legs and fire-related injuries. The series sends a clear message about the type of war that occurs in female peer groups.

Pinedo also argues that "violence . . . must be situated in the context of monstrosity, culturally defined as an unnatural force" (93). In the postmodern horror film, these monstrosities violate boundaries, primarily those associated with binaries: " . . . animate/inanimate, human/nonhuman, life/death" (93). The monster is abject. In *Pretty Little Liars*, each major monstrous figure—even outside of A—the Liars confront is unnatural and transgressive. An early set of antagonists, Ian Thomas and Garrett Reynolds, enter the playing field because they spent time in their late teens and early

twenties filming young girls through their bedroom windows; when Alison finds the evidence of their misdeeds and attempts to blackmail Ian with the videos, the pair scramble to try to silence her, their struggle continuing after her death. Strangely, the pedophilic bent of these characters is not greatly dealt with in the show—Ian tries to seduce not only Alison but Spencer when the two are fifteen and he is twenty-one, Garrett dates sixteen-year-old Jenna when he is twenty-two, and both men spend years of their time watching young girls in increasingly intimate situations. In establishing Ian and Garrett as members of the N.A.T. Club—and not older members of the community—the series sets a clear understanding for viewers that young girls are subject to patriarchal surveillance from even those they consider peers. While audience members may see Ian and Garrett as significantly older, in a small town like Rosewood, popular cliques often include wide age ranges; it is not outside reality for Alison and her friends to spend time with those six years older than them if they meet whatever qualifications the gatekeepers have set up. Essentially, as the Liars have come of age, they are immediately targets for this surveillance; when Alison's body is found, the police move into this position, violating personal boundaries—Detective Wilden uses his intimate relationship with Hanna's mother to be in her home, physically intimidating her with his body, which represents the institutional power she fears. Big A herself offers another interesting reading for this aspect of the horror film—Charlotte is a transgender woman, and as such, transgresses boundaries; born male but having transitioned to female, the audience becomes aware of her history in the DiLaurentis family as both Charles and Charlotte, and both aspects are important to her becoming A. Flashbacks reveal that for Kenneth DiLaurentis, Charlotte's identity threatened the social order; he refused the idea of having

a daughter instead of the son who was brought into his home, and as a result, Charlotte's mental state began to unravel, setting the stage for the creation of A.

The postmodern horror film also questions "the validity of rationality" (Pinedo 94). Characters who insist that everything must be explained in ways that make logical sense or require a clear, rational timeline of events do not fare well. This rejection of rationality is also the law of *Pretty Little Liars*, where the central characters often must wait half a season (or even six whole seasons) for any complete picture of what is going on. Currently, the Liars are twenty-four years old, and the mystery surrounding the DiLaurentis family is still feeling rather opaque. However, these friends are patient; they understand that if they simply continue to work toward a resolution, more answers will be made known to them—that has been the way since they were sixteen years old. Pinedo also notes that the postmodern horror film privileges female ways of knowing; it "compels its heroes, many of whom are women, to both exercise instrumental rationality and to rely on intuition" (96). The monster does not generally respond well to requests to sit down and talk; the monster is there to kill. In the series, the A figures do very little talking, period—it is only when they are unmasked that the audience gets to hear their side, and the series typically uses monologues with a distinctive psychotic tinge. However, the Liars often work on very little evidence other than their gut instinct—early in the series, Spencer knows that something is "wrong" with Ian Thomas, and in Season Seven, Hanna can feel that Noel Kahn is a danger to the Liars. Granted, Hanna believes Noel is Über A, and he is not; however, his decision to team up with Jenna Marshall to kill the group of friends makes him quite dangerous. While the Liars occasionally question each other's hunches, they do so from a place of genuine concern; for example,

Hanna's fear of Noel is linked to her post traumatic stress disorder from weeks of torture at the hands of Charlotte DiLaurentis years earlier, memories of which have resurfaced after a recent parallel experience with Über A. The series validates women's intuition and allows it to free them from threatening figures.

Pinedo also identifies one final aspect of postmodern horror that can be found exclusively within the text: these films typically boast open-ended narratives. *Pretty Little Liars* seems to glory in the fact that the story never ends; these characters' lives are so inherently dramatic that they merit following indefinitely. There are other genres that are linked to *types* of characters whose stories can continue on—investigators, lawyers, surgeons—but as has been proven, the characters on these series are interchangeable. Cote de Pablo wants to leave CBS procedural *NCIS*, or Isaiah Washington is asked to leave *Grey's Anatomy*? These shows will go on—and have. They remain ratings juggernauts because series based around characters who have exciting lives because they *chose* them can rotate characters in and out of the narrative as long as the storylines remain fresh. However, series like *Pretty Little Liars*—which are based on extraordinary things happening to people who never asked for them—work in a different way. Take the main characters out of the narrative, and you lose the point of the series altogether. However, because the idea behind *Pretty Little Liars* and series like it call for its characters to live in a heightened state of reality, the narrative could theoretically go on forever. As long as the Liars continue to transgress and live among people who believe they should be punished for their misdeeds, A figures could potentially pop up on a loop,

but these figures must share A's general purpose.[11] An initial consideration of this model would attribute the series' constant continuation to its soap roots—it is a serial, after all. However, though some scholars still assert that soap operas never truly end, the argument that soaps are resistant to closure by their very nature has been successfully undermined by scholars such as Laura Stempel Mumford, who explains that

> [b]ecause soap operas are marked by overlapping and intertwined plots, their complex entanglement can sometimes make it difficult to separate the resolution of one storyline from the development of another, but many—perhaps most—storylines are resolved in some way. And while such closure may lay the groundwork for a later reopening, such "reopening" is precisely that: the opening of something previously closed, not the continuation of something that never closed to begin with. (69)

Pretty Little Liars sometimes reopens storylines—for example, the idea that Alison is dead when she is in fact simply on the run—but overwhelmingly, the narrative remains open. After Mona is revealed to be A at the end of Season Two, the plot seems to be resolved; however, at the end of the episode, after being committed to Radley Sanitarium for her crimes, Mona looks up at an unknown visitor in a red coat and simply says, "I did everything you asked me to" (unmAsked," 2.25). With this shift, the audience is set up for the rest of the series; A could be anyone—and has been. Even one of the Liars has been on the A team, working as an undercover agent. To make things more confusing, the

[11] This does not mean the series would continue to be of the same quality—just that it could continue to exist.

writers are great fans of red herrings; they spent a good portion of Season Four setting Ezra up to be A. Though this panned out in a different yet still emotionally devastating way for Aria, it also threw his entire storyline into question. In Rosewood, the story is never really over.

The Liars as Slasher Heroines

While the writers of *Pretty Little Liars* create a slasher diegesis for their characters, they also work to establish the Liars as forward-thinking, feminist slasher heroines early on, setting the audience up for the later, more difficult seasons in which A is less of a techno-mean girl and more of a deeply menacing presence who truly threatens their lives. As Valerie Wee explains, "[t]he slasher film has always maintained a complicated relationship with issues of gender. As is widely noted, the genre is predicated on the torture and victimization of teenage girls" ("The *Scream* Trilogy" 54). While this point is certainly accurate, the slasher film is also known for its traditional heroine, the Final Girl. Coined by critic Carol J. Clover in her seminal 1992 study *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, the term "Final Girl" refers to the lone female survivor at the end of the slasher film:

> [s]he is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. If her friends knew they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes

> or hours. She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued . . . or kill him herself . . . (35).

While the Final Girl is often co-opted to show how slasher films in their infancy were actually feminist endeavors, this is not Clover's purpose; even if the Final Girl survives, she is often saved by a male figure. Clover includes Sally from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in her analysis; as she points out, Sally escapes from Leatherface's house of horrors but does not defeat him—she is picked up by a man in a passing pickup truck and driven away while Leatherface is left in the road alone, waving his chainsaw around maniacally. Instead, Clover claims that the female victim is actually standing in for the male audience; the Final Girl becomes male themselves by the time they come to the last act, allowing the male audience members to take pleasure in the final confrontation with the killer, which involves phallic weapons. The Final Girl becomes the hero, not the heroine (58-59).

The slasher film genre has evolved a great deal since Clover's initial analysis, however. We have moved beyond *Halloween*'s Laurie Strode, who cringes in a closet, uses Michael Myers' own weapon against him because she has not thought ahead and brought another, and must ultimately be saved by Dr. Loomis and his gun. It must be noted that Clover seems to have ignored that there were feminist developments in the genre using the Final Girl figure; she maintains that this is not possible. In fact, she addresses the critics who hail *Alien*'s Ripley as a feminist figure explicitly in the text, calling their assessments "particularly grotesque expression[s] of wishful thinking" (53). Kyle Christensen argues that there is a stronger model of feminism in the *Nightmare on*

Elm Street franchise, particularly in Nancy's character, who infuses feminist sensibilities into the Final Girl that we see played out in the genre afterward. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, she "is not afraid of men . . . but she is also not so smitten with them that she loses her selfhood" (31). Also, she "uses the powers of her alert, paranoid mind and will (not violence) to defeat Freddy and transcend his domineering masculinity" (31). The Liars may have grown up in the millennium, but their approach to dealing with A reflects a writers' room that grew up on the revamped slasher films and the strong women who triumphed in them.[12]

Each Liar can be seen as one of these new versions of the Final Girl. They are young women who first look to themselves for the solution to their problems; their male companions are secondary options. They do not expect men to be their saviors; in fact, the Liars are more likely to text "SOS" to each other rather than a boyfriend—or in Emily's case, a close male friend—in moments of fear. This individuality and self-containedness occasionally causes problems for the Liars in their relationships, particularly for Hanna and Spencer, whose partners are more actively involved in the A game—Caleb is a hacker whose skills are utilized more frequently as the series goes on, and Toby first deliberately places himself on the A team as a double agent to find out what A has planned in Season Three. Later, Toby becomes a police officer so that the

[12] In industry parlance, "the writers' room" is where a series' writers convene with the executive producer/showrunner to plan (or "break") the season, character arcs, and individual episodes that will support the season's overall theme. Depending on the genre, each writers' room works differently—and some creators have begun to shun them, like *True Detective*'s Nic Pizzolatto, who notoriously wrote the entire first season himself. In comedy, for example, writers are assigned individual episodes, but the entire team punches them up together; the goal is to get the best jokes possible. In drama, it is more common for the showrunner to take the final pass over each individual episode so that they resonate with the series' overall ethos.

Liars will have a person on the inside; at this point, A has become a figure who tries to hurt the girls on an adult level by consistently framing them for crimes, like Mona's murder. However, each attempt Caleb and Toby make to help, while generally welcomed, are mere footnotes in the Liars' overall plan; they do not rely on what men can do for them.

Pretty Little Liars features female friends who use their minds to defeat the phantom attempting to ruin their lives through manipulation and intimidation. They must have better plans and be one step ahead. Most importantly, they need to figure out who A is before he/she can pull the final trigger—and by the revelation of the existence of Big A, that trigger is no longer metaphorical; their lives are in real danger. The Liars embody what Carol Clover has identified as what might be the Final Girl's biggest strength: she is "watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers. Above all, she is intelligent and resourceful in a pinch" (39). The Liars eventually become the girls who cried wolf in Rosewood—no one believes them when they visit the police station. The citizens of Rosewood, much like those in the towns featured in slasher trilogies and lengthier series, simply cannot believe that yet another person is after the friends, nor that the DiLaurentis case has grown even more complicated. It does not help that the police officers of Rosewood are largely incompetent or corrupt. As Jonathan Markovitz has noted, "[p]aranoia is at the heart of the critique that horror films pose to patriarchal forms of power. To the extent that these films encourage us to see female paranoia as a reasonable response to a world that is hostile to women, they can offer important critiques of existing power relationships" (219). The Liars learn that they have no institutional support in Rosewood; eventually,

they have to create their own when Toby joins the police force. Still, his innate sense of justice and goodness make using his position there difficult, and they ultimately remain anchorless, reluctant to corrupt Toby any more than necessary. Early on, Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily establish problematic relationships with the Rosewood police department, primarily because the girls have waited so long to bring evidence forward that anything they submit makes them look guilty—just as A has planned. Like the Liars, A understands that the police force will instinctively disbelieve anything four teenage girls bring to them; nothing the Liars have to say will be credible, simply because they are "hysterical" over Alison's death or "jealous" of Alison—one can take their pick of any number of disparaging comments made about the dynamics of female friendship. In particular, the knowledge that nothing she does will make any difference unmoors Spencer, whose deep intelligence makes any disrespect impossible to bear. By not only making the Liars the real investigators in Rosewood but stressing the deep ambivalence the town's patriarchal institutions have toward female intuition and intelligence gathering, the series highlights real problems viewers may be encountering in their own lives.

The Liars primarily deal with Rosewood's patriarchal infrastructure in the guise of Detective Darren Wilden. Wilden begins his time on the series by dropping Hanna's shoplifting charges in order to fulfill a long-held wish to begin an affair with Ashley Marin and ends it exposed as a member of the A team. A former party boy and member of Rosewood High's popular crowd, he revels in the addition of institutional power to what he was born with as an attractive, white, upper-middle class man. Wilden stalks the Liars, particularly Hanna; it is clear that his focus on Hanna stems from an attraction to

her. He takes pleasure in flustering her and making her uncomfortable, particularly when he is in a relationship with her mother and spending the night at her home. Wilden's need to find Hanna at home highlights a trope of the series: male villains take great pleasure in violating the girls' private spaces, such as when Ian Thomas marries Spencer's sister Melissa, yet rarely stays in their home on the Hastings property, choosing instead to pop in and startle Spencer. Archer Dunhill even goes so far as to marry Alison, taking over not only her home but her finances, ultimately leaving her with nothing. Wilden often accosts the girls in their homes or schools, questioning them without their parents present. While Spencer—and sometimes Hanna, following Spencer's lead—notes the illegality of this, Wilden is not dissuaded; he puts the Liars front and center as the police department's suspects in a variety of crimes connected to Alison's murder, some as heinous as grave robbing. Wilden fears no one; he even makes sure Ashley knows about his vendetta against Hanna and her friends, using his power as a police officer to harass her into passing on a message:

> WILDEN: Please step out of the car.
>
> ASHLEY: Where are you going with this?
>
> WILDEN: Are you refusing an order from an officer of the law? Step out of the car, please. (*Ashley steps out*.) . . . We need to talk about Hanna. Can you keep Hanna quiet or not?
>
> ASHLEY: If you wanna continue this discussion, call my lawyer.
>
> WILDEN: I'm not the only one with secrets. You talk, I talk, and you could lose a lot more than your boyfriend.
>
> ASHLEY: Don't threaten me . . .

WILDEN: Hey!

ASHLEY (*as Wilden grabs her arm*): Let go of me!

WILDEN: This is nothing compared to what I'll do if Hanna talks.

ASHLEY: I wonder how your lieutenant will respond when he hears you're threatening a child.

WILDEN: He's not going to. Think this through, Ashley.

ASHLEY: How do you live with yourself? (*breaks away*)

WILDEN: . . . Either you shut Hanna up, or I will! ("Hot Water," 3.20)

Wilden trusts that he will be able to bury his transgressions—he is confident that his lieutenant will never hear of how is treating the Liars. He knows that his position as a white male in Rosewood protects him from many things, but his position as a police officer will protect him from everything if he is able to cover up what he does effectively enough. Eventually, his own ties to A are exposed and his motives become clear, but his specter remains in the Liars' lives; his face is used to psychologically torture Alison when she is committed to a sanitarium in Season Six. However, throughout Wilden's time on the series, the Liars refuse to be cowed by him or by A, at least not for more than a few minutes while they process their threats: as Emily puts it, "we did not go through all of that to crawl under somebody else's thumb. I am way more angry than I am scared now" ("Kingdom of the Blind," 3.3). The Liars are truly contemporary Final Girls—their anger gives them power.

So, Where is the Slasher in This Slasher Teen Soap?

At this point, one may ask: this series may have slasher heroines, but where is the slasher? I contend that A is a slasher figure. The series includes actual physical violence, as A not only threatens to hurt and kill people, but follows through on those threats; this violence only increases as the series goes on. For example, the Liars are imprisoned for over three weeks in Big A's Dollhouse, an underground lair where they undergo mental and emotional torture, such as Charlotte convincing them that their choices determine which of their three friends get food, water, or an electrical shock. (They were given five seconds to choose, or everyone would be shocked.) Mona has been there for months with Charlotte forcing her to play the role of Alison; when she refuses or otherwise steps out of line, she is left in a deep hole for days without food or water. Other punishments include blaring a fire alarm at ear-piercing levels and drugging the Liars and letting them wake up in a morgue, naked under sheets. The Dollhouse brings to mind Clover's idea of the "Terrible Place . . . in which the killer lives or lurks and whence he stages his most terrifying attacks" (48). The experience in the Dollhouse is devastating for the Liars, particularly for Hanna; its effects are palpable in her life. She is unable to return to her childhood bedroom—the Liars' cells in the Dollhouse was decorated exactly as their bedrooms at home—and even into adulthood, she finds it difficult to wait with her friends to amass clues as to the identity of Über A, worried that they will find themselves in a similar situation, only to die this time. Slasher films have always been preoccupied with putting their female victims through mental anguish: see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* for a classic example, where Sally is forced to "eat dinner" with the family before they attempt to kill her (while I personally challenge the inclusion of this film in the slasher

genre, I do acknowledge its importance in creating and shaping it); and *Halloween*, in which Michael Myers stalks Laurie, making sure she can see him at times. While the contemporary slasher does show a great deal more violence and body horror, it is increasingly concerned with mental torture (Lizardi 120). Similarly, *Pretty Little Liars* is preoccupied with the psychological aspects of horrific experiences.

This emphasis on mental torture suggests the slasher film's beginnings in the 1970s and the contemporary perspective that killers are not born but made. The slasher formula often reveals the killer's origins. Early in the genre, it is clear that killers come out of our communities because of poor choices that we make; essentially, the young members of the community commit what Vera Dika terms a "wrongful action" in her book *Games of Terror:* Halloween, Friday the 13th, *and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (1990):

> years earlier . . . the killer is either driven to madness or is already mad because of an extreme trauma. This trauma is caused by his viewing of, his knowledge of, or his participation in a wrongful action perpetrated by one or more members of a young community. Because of this event, the killer experiences a loss. The killer responds with rage, sometimes expressed immediately in an act of vengeance or sometimes withheld until the second segment of the film. In this second, or modern-day, second, the killer returns to take vengeance on the guilty parties or their symbolic substitutes. (59)

That loss the killer experiences varies; it may be a physical loss, like that of a home or person they love—even their own life, if we look back at a killer like Jason Voorhees or

Freddy Krueger—or something less tangible, like a loss of innocence or security. Often, it is a combination of the above. Regardless, it fundamentally changes the killer for the worse, and the young community does not take responsibility for the "wrong"; generally, it is covered up and not spoken of again, except perhaps as a local legend.

Pretty Little Liars turns on such a "wrongful action," one that still causes ripples throughout Rosewood, though it is not immediately obvious to the Liars or the audience. In fact, the action leads to other wrongful actions. Charlotte, initially introduced as Alison's older party girl friend CeCe Drake, is first revealed to be the hidden sibling of Jason and Alison DiLaurentis, put away in the Radley Sanitarium by their father, Kenneth, at an early age. When Charlotte, born male and named Charles, puts baby Ali in the bath to soothe her, it is misunderstood as attempted murder by their father. Kenneth advises his wife, Jessica, that Charles needs professional help. However, as Charlotte tells Ali, she began to identify as female from a young age, so her father used this opportunity to lock her away in Radley and forced his family to pretend she never existed at all. This part of Charlotte's story aligns with Dika's theory; Dika writes that "the monster formation can be seen as a product of fission: opposing aspects are split off, creating a killer who is [seen as] 'sick' or 'perverted' and a heroine who is 'healthy' or 'normal'" (25). Kenneth DiLaurentis follows this pattern in the way he deals with Charlotte in comparison to Alison, his little princess. Charlotte starts to view herself through her father's lens, as well, holding up Alison as an ideal and making efforts to be her twin whenever possible. When the Liars first meet CeCe, they marvel at how like Ali she is:

> ARIA: Okay, that's not just me, right? That chick is freakishly like Ali.
>
> SPENCER: Or was Ali freakishly like her? I mean, one hip out, the head tilt.
>
> EMILY: Looking straight through you, like she knew all your secrets. ("Crazy," 3.7)

Charlotte is desperate to be accepted by her family, and she feels that becoming like Alison, their golden child, is the way to do it. However, she often fails and keeps falling into problematic behavior that keeps her at Radley. Eventually, Jason and Alison forget about her existence entirely; Jason even casually dates her when she reappears after escaping Radley.

Charlotte identifies her "wrongful action" as multi-parted, beginning with her separation from Alison for something she did not even do—a recurring theme in her life. Her rage at being expelled from her family and denied her right to express her identity leads to the events of the narrative. She stalks Alison, explaining in their eventual showdown, "They never understood how much I loved you. From the moment Mom brought you home, I never left your side. You were like my very own living doll" ("Game Over, Charles," 6.10). A careful reading of the text reveals Charlotte's obsession here. She goes on to say that she was kept from Alison, from continuing to strengthen the bonds that had begun when Ali was a baby. When confronted about her murderous and terrorizing acts, Charlotte tries to justify it all by asserting that she was protecting Ali from people who were not really her friends, and that "the game" was addictive and kept her close to Alison in the only way available to her. Charlotte is both sympathetic and psychotic, and her high intelligence only intensifies the layers of meaning in her words.

She completely understands her family's intentions; she also realizes that Alison's position as favored child took away any grace that might have been given to her. However, the expectation that their bond might have allowed Charlotte a position in the family remains long into her stay at Radley, even after she has escaped multiple times into the world and actually met Alison. Unfortunately, because of strictures placed on her by her mother, Charlotte is not allowed to reveal her true identity to Alison, which fractures her already fragile psyche even more.

In keeping with the idea of "making" a killer, *Pretty Little Liars* suggests that Charlotte learns at least some of her behavior from her family. For instance, Charlotte also explains that the person who taught her to lie was her mother; Jessica paid off a police officer to rule a fellow patient's death a suicide so that Charlotte was not blamed. She did not commit the crime, but since she was living as a boy but wearing a dress at that moment, Jessica feared the worst. As Charlotte continues to tell her story, the sweetness in her former self fades a bit to be replaced by manipulation; her natural intelligence comes out and actual mental illness begins to show as well, likely as a result of her confinement. As Aria says as she and the other Liars watch from another location, "Now we know who taught A how to treat people like dolls" ("Game Over, Charles," 6.10). Ultimately, though we get a clear psychological picture, which some feel might be more in tune with postmodern takes on the slasher, which is increasingly obsessed with the pathology of the killer. Putting the clear blame for the creation of A on the shoulders of her parents and Bethany Young—and, really, the Radley psychiatrists—places Charlotte squarely in the classic slasher category.

Stylistically, the series also works in slasher style. Its use of what Carol Clover calls "the I-camera" (45) or the subjective camera, when A is present and watching the Liars, mirrors that used in slasher films when the killer stalks his or her victims.[13] In slasher films, this camera style adds to the sense of claustrophobia and fear—the killer could be anywhere and anyone, and the characters are under constant surveillance. However, there is another function behind the I-camera, as observed by Vera Dika. In the slasher film,

> the spectator is implicated by a number of conventionalized formal strategies, ones that encourage a play within the film itself, rather than ones that merely allow the events to unfold for the spectator's observation. Moreover the central question asked by the stalker film game is no[t] so much Will he win? but Where is the killer? and When will he strike? . . . These techniques create the film's suspense but, also, the film's game. The fact that these cues are not always truthful or "effective" (i.e., the killer may be in the victim's space but choose not to attack) gives the viewer the opportunity to "warn" the victims, while it also encourages a play within the film's authorial system. (22)

While the Liars are concerned with discovering who A is, what A wants, and what A's next move might be, the audience is equally invested in these things. Seeing Rosewood through A's eyes allows the viewer to feel as if he or she knows a bit more than the Liars. The majority of episodes end with an "A tag," or around a minute of A's perspective.

---

[13] While many critics use "his" to describe the slasher killer, it is important to note that some slashers are female, including the killer in one of the most well-known slasher movies of all time, *Friday the 13th*—in the original film, Mrs. Voorhees is the killer, not Jason. Other female slashers include *Happy Birthday to Me* (1981), *Urban Legend* (1998), and *Scream 4* (2011).

Sometimes the details are fairly innocuous—if metaphorical—such as in "What Lies Beneath" (3.10), where A changes out of her hoodie and switches from the news to *Wheel of Fortune*; others are more indicative of the slasher genre, like at the end of "Don't Look Now" (6.4), where Big A is tracking each Liar's movements around Rosewood.[14] Some episodes merge A's perspective with the A tag to reveal how unhinged and dangerous A is, like the end of "Taking This One to the Grave" (5.12). The main events of the episode end with A opening a car trunk, revealing what appears to be Mona's dead body, after which she puts a stolen baby Jesus doll from a Nativity scene on top of her body. In the tag, she calmly cuts out a picture of the Liars to fit in a snow globe before placing it at the bottom of her Christmas tree. Often, these A tags offer a bit of information that, when the series is rewatched, act as clues to the overall mystery of A's identity; the tag for "Single Fright Female" (3.11) shows A handing the key to her lair over to another A figure, confirming the Liars' suspicions of an A team, but also cementing those of viewers who have wondered how A could have accomplished some of her current feats without help. This narrative thread is brought back at the end of the following episode, "The Lady Killer" (3.12), which reveals that Toby is working with A. The I-camera has come full circle—when it turns around to reveal Toby, a deeply trusted character, viewers are shocked. Now the audience must wonder at the level of A's surveillance of the Liars; is Toby part of that? Every move he makes become suspect, and the game intensifies for the spectator. The A tag and I-camera make the series distinctly

[14] Charlotte is able to do this with tracking devices she implanted while the Liars were drugged in the Dollhouse.

pleasurable to watch and increase viewers' engagement in the Liars' attempt to unmask A.

While on the surface *Pretty Little Liars* may appear to be an innocuous teen soap, the series actually does some fairly complicated work. In its concern with gender roles, the narrative positions Aria, Hanna, Spencer, and Emily as independent young women who rely on themselves and each other in their campaign against A, an increasingly dangerous techno-presence whose purpose is initially mean-girlesque, but soon evolves into slasher-style mayhem, mental torture, and murder. The town of Rosewood sees such calamity at the hands of A that the Liars' positions function as Final Girls in a slasher setting; the Liars' use of gut instinct and paranoia allow them to rise to meet A's significant advantages over them. They also show themselves to be modern Final Girls in their ability and preference to work alone, only calling in their romantic partners when their talents prove helpful. Instead, the Liars protect their partners instead of the other way around. Additionally, the series uses a classic slasher formula in the build-up and revelation of Big A, Charlotte DiLaurentis, who turns to her life as A as a result of a wrongful action enacted on her by her family—and she feels, by Rosewood at large. *Pretty Little Liars* can often feel complicated and viewers may wonder why its writers layer so many small mysteries in with its overarching A plot; however, revealing the underlying structure of the series can help to expose thematic concerns that will lead to fruitful discussions of the show. Currently, teen drama scholars largely overlook the series, which is surprising and disappointing considering the popularity and influence of the show in teen culture. I hope that this chapter will serve as a beginning step for future discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE: "YOU COULD NEVER HOPE TO GRASP THE SOURCE OF OUR POWER": *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, COMMUNAL ACTION, AND DISRUPTING THE PATRIARCHY

In March 1997, the WB premiered a mid-season replacement series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, based on a 1992 comedy film of the same name about a teenage girl in Southern California who discovered she was the latest in a long line of Vampire Slayers, chosen to—what else?—hunt and slay vampires. In pre-production and on set, great liberties were taken with Joss Whedon's fairly serious script, and while there are some references to the film in the series, it does not reflect the tone of the seven-season project broadcast on the WB and UPN from 1997 to 2003. In the series, Buffy Summers has moved to Sunnydale from Los Angeles, where she was kicked out of her high school over aftereffects of slaying vampires who were former classmates—namely, burning down the school gym—and she is attempting to start over in a vampire-free, slaying-optional situation. As a young adult fantasy drama, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is first-rate; it exemplifies the interests of the subgenre with its emphasis on metaphors for the anxieties of adolescence. By positioning Buffy and many of her friends—not simply the titular character—as supernatural beings, the series is able to explore questions of power and difference, a central issue in the young adult fantasy drama. In doing so, the show positions itself as a frontrunner in the evolution of the subgenre; looking back, we can see that it is a cornerstone series. In the teen drama as a whole, the series establishes a number of precedents for the genre, particularly in its place on the WB—it featured a wide variety of teen subjectivities for viewers, both male and female; it complicated the "teen queen" character through both Buffy Summers and Cordelia Chase; it featured a

lesbian teen character, Willow Rosenberg, years before this was common; and it made being a "nerd" cool by placing Xander Harris at the center of the narrative. It even made research look interesting. Most importantly, it showed that teenagers not only would flock to a series with smart and witty writing, they craved characters who were multifaceted and engaging. Without *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s popularity, the WB would have been less likely to take a chance on *Gilmore Girls* a few years later—and without Willow Rosenberg and Tara Maclay's relationship (and everything Joss Whedon went through to make it happen), Emily Fields' sexuality would not be nearly as accepted in the diegesis of *Pretty Little Liars*.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer opens with Buffy and her newly divorced mother, Joyce, moving to Sunnydale, hoping for a fresh start—Buffy's work as the Slayer in Los Angeles has led to her expulsion from school, and the strain from months of Buffy's lying and sneaking around has been the final straw in an already weak marriage for Hank and Joyce Summers. Both Buffy and Joyce feel Sunnydale will offer them a bright future—for different reasons, of course. Little does Buffy know, Sunnydale is situated on top of a Hellmouth, and the town is a magnet for demonic activity. As Rupert Giles, her new Watcher—the Slayer's guardian and trainer of sorts—explains, Sunnydale is "a center of mystical energy" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1.1) that draws vampires and other forces of darkness to it. As a result, the town is much more dangerous than the average suburb. In fact, students are so likely to die before graduation that Buffy's class's low mortality rate is something to celebrate ("The Prom," 3.20). However clearly supernatural Sunnydale might be, its adult citizens ignore the strange situations; the teenagers seem to repress the things they have seen until events are too much to bear, and

then conversations occur in which they reference the strange things they have encountered growing up. Still, like their counterparts in teen drama's other subgenres, these teens cannot count on the adults in their lives to protect them; either adults are willfully ignorant or they are part of the problem. That is where Buffy and her friends come in. In its representation of a group of friends who work to solve their town's supernatural threats via communal action, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* sends a decidedly feminist message, something that scholars and television critics alike have praised since its beginnings.

Some critics of *Buffy* argue that it is not as feminist in its execution as its academic enthusiasts would like to claim. This charge is also leveled at *Gilmore Girls*, whose detractors see the series, particularly in its execution of Rory's character, as problematic for feminists. Specifically, these critics are concerned about the series' representation of power—mostly Buffy's—as it relates to traditional patriarchal power structures. For example, Arwen Spicer asserts that "From its inception, *Buffy*'s relationship to patriarchal structures of hierarchy has been ambivalent" ("Brilliant," para. 2). She notes that the series does endorse arrangements in which all individuals' perspectives are valued and hierarchies are rejected but feels that, with the exception of Season Seven, the series also simply inverts the patriarchal hierarchy, putting the most powerful person—who happens to be a woman—at the top ("Brilliant," para. 3). Still, though she gives credit to Season Seven for attempting to do more, Spicer feels Season Seven ultimately fails because Buffy does not allow open communication. In this season, the series' final, Buffy must act as leader and trainer for many Potential Slayers who come to her seeking protection from the First Evil, who is attempting to end the Slayer

line forever by eliminating all possible claimants to Buffy's power before coming after Buffy herself. The overwhelming responsibility and fear lead to Buffy's acting as a general rather than an egalitarian point person. Another objection is raised by Agnes B. Curry and Josef Velazquez, who agree that the series puts Buffy at the top of "a reversed patriarchy" (151); however, they go one step further and assert that the series is attempting to establish Buffy's organization as a matriarchy and fails, particularly when taking Season Seven into consideration:

> whereas patriarchy said 'man on top,' this sort of matriarchy responds 'woman on top'—and then forgets that the real issue might be to question the whole issue of top and bottom. To put it less metaphorically, there are instances where the show seems not so much to deconstruct the structures of patriarchal power as to simply redistribute them. (151)

Curry and Velazquez attempt a nuanced reading of the series but almost immediately abandon a historical view of how *Buffy* handles patriarchal power within the Scoobies for a close reading of Season Seven, which undermines their claim. The group repudiates attempts by any one member to be undisputed head of the group; the issue comes up throughout the series, particularly with Xander and his fear of being rendered unnecessary as high school no longer binds the friends together. Granted, it would be difficult to imagine anyone arguing with their contentions about Season Seven—particularly Buffy's part in it—but even this part of the narrative is purposeful.

In this chapter, I will argue that a careful reading of the series uncovers a clear endorsement of what Zoë-Jane Playdon terms a "contingent, contextualized, functional

form of participative management" (138). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* works to deconstruct the top-down system of patriarchal hierarchies in which all power is held at the top and no concern is given to the well-being of those workers underneath. Rather than simply dismissing this model outright, the series examines the ways in which one may disrupt these organizations and replace them with a scheme that, while acknowledging that some are naturally more powerful than others, also redefines what can be construed as power and draws from all team members' talents to work toward the greater good. Through the series' emphasis on communal action and rejection of traditional patriarchal authority, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* privileges feminine power and ways of interacting with the world. In this model, we can see that the series works from a general third-wave feminist viewpoint—rather than, for example, the liberal white feminism of *Gilmore Girls*, where promises are made and go unfulfilled, and the clear fourth-wave ideology of *Pretty Little Liars*, which utilizes technology and overturns gender norms. *Buffy* does draw from late-twentieth-century mainstream ideas of feminism—which leads some scholars like Lorna Jowett to term it "postfeminist"—but as Patricia Pender has pointed out in *I'm Buffy and You're History:* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and Contemporary Feminism*, the ways in which the series uses female anger at patriarchal norms and authority tie it directly to the third wave (51-54).

Buffy *and Communal Action: The Scooby Gang*

First, it will be helpful to show how Buffy comes to understand the usefulness of the communal action model. In the early years of the series, the show opens with a

voiceover which includes the line, "She *alone*[1] will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness: she is the Slayer" ("The Puppet Show," 1.9). However, this is a lie, or at the very least, misdirection on the part of Joss Whedon, the series' creator. While the Slayer mythology states that there can be only one Slayer at a time—in another patriarchal nod the series addresses in Season Seven, the power is not shared, but hoarded in one body—Buffy's death (lasting a mere minute or two) in the first season finale activates a new Slayer, Kendra—and her death in the second season finale brings Faith—so until the events of the series finale, the majority of the series boasts two Slayers. Most importantly for the ideology behind *Buffy*, Buffy never stands alone. Critics seized on this aspect of the series and praised it. For instance, Ananya Mukherjea writes, "it was *Buffy*'s presentation of a new kind of anti-solitary, emotionally engaged, and socially attached hero that was one of its primary contributions to contemporary culture" ("When," para. 38). Instead of Buffy running off into the fray to save the day and then celebrating with her friends at the Bronze afterward, the Scoobies are there with her each step of the way, exemplifying what Rhonda Wilcox has termed "communal action" ("Who Died" 4).[2]

Buffy's team scheme does not immediately present itself. Once her secret is out, in "The Harvest" (1.2), and Xander and Willow have been pulled into the hunt for

---

[1] Emphasis mine.
[2] "The Scooby Gang" is a series and fandom term for Buffy's friends and allies—Willow, Xander, and Giles are the core three, while others come in as they join the series or the good side in the narrative: Angel, Cordelia, Oz, Anya, Dawn, and Spike.

vampires because their friend Jesse is a prisoner of the Master, the Big Bad of the first season, Xander expects to help Buffy go find him. Buffy does not see things this way.[3]

> XANDER: So what's the plan? We saddle up, right?
>
> BUFFY: There's no "we," okay? I'm the Slayer, and you're not.

Buffy's thoughts on slaying seem to be from her previous life—keep things as secret as possible and protect everyone. To do that, she must make sure her friends are far away from the fray. Her attitude is paternalistic and the group quickly shows her that in Sunnydale, she will need help. As Rhonda Wilcox has asserted, in the series, "the choice to fight alone, while heroic, is also presented as wrong" ("Who Died" 7). Buffy's friends do not expect to be thrown on the front lines—no one here has a death wish—but they do expect her to utilize their skills because they know that this arrangement is not only more equitable, it will ultimately give Buffy more support in the long run and allow her a real chance at winning the war, not just the individual battle.

By the end of this episode, we see the beginnings of community action. Rather than assuming she can do this alone, Buffy takes Xander, Willow, and Giles along with her to face Luke and the Master's minions. Beforehand, the gang had a research meeting in which Giles gave them all the information he had available about Luke (the Master's vessel) and the Master's identity and plans to emerge from his underground bubble. This briefing allows each team member to make informed decisions rather than constantly confer with a group leader. In this meeting, Xander contributed his knowledge of where

---

[3] Joss Whedon used the term "Big Bad" to denote the villain that threatened the group for the season arc. The term has been picked up in television writing, particularly in teen drama.

Jesse was most likely to be, and by extension, where the vampires would go to find young blood for the Master. At the Bronze—the requisite teen drama hangout—Xander, Willow, and Giles work to get people out and to safety. Xander takes on his friend Jesse and while attempting to talk things out, he inadvertently stakes Jesse by holding a stake out and forgetting about the mad dash of hostages—Jesse is pushed onto the stake. Giles is ambushed by Darla—a centuries-old vampire who appears throughout the Buffy/Angelverse—but is saved by Willow, who throws holy water on Darla. Because the gang is taking care of everything else, Buffy is able to take Luke on one-on-one and the Master stays in the bubble. The Master's rising has been treated as a foregone conclusion by the vampires, including Angel, and Buffy herself terms it an "apocalypse" ("The Harvest," 1.2) However, the seriousness of the events of this episode is likely played down because of the seriousness of everything Buffy faces later and because of the team dynamics into which the group so easily switches.

Season Two's "School Hard" (2.3) is a perfect example of this arrangement: Buffy and her friends have been working as a team in the first season, but in this episode, they meet a villain that is less out of central horror casting and more insidious and postmodern. Spike is a loose cannon, and Buffy will not be able to find his next move in Giles's books. Everyone central in Buffy's life at this point helps her defeat Spike—even Joyce, who is not aware of her daughter's secret identity yet. Willow, Xander, and Giles research Spike and his history, learning that he "has fought two Slayers in the last century, and . . . killed them both." In the beginning, when Buffy has first met Spike, Angel offers the group some context on just how dangerous Spike is, though he does not yet explain how he knows this. Later, he and Xander work together to attempt to fool

Spike so that Buffy may clear the school of parents and students when Spike and his minions invade Sunnydale High's Parent-Teacher Night. Buffy provides her most obvious contribution by fighting Spike, but even Joyce helps there—she sneaks up on him when she sees someone attacking her daughter and hits him over the head with an axe, inducing him to flee. When Spike returns to his lover and sire,[4] the vampire Drusilla, he is clearly perplexed at this turn of events: "A Slayer with family and friends. That sure as hell wasn't in the brochure" ("School Hard," 2.3). The episode ends with Spike, who also rejects traditional, top-down management—he loves chaos too much to follow anyone's orders—killing Collin, known to the vampires as The Anointed One and whom Spike has termed "The Annoying One." The Anointed One is a relic from the reign of The Master, who epitomized patriarchal rule with his emphasis on order (and orders). As Spike throws Collin into a cage that he wheels upward toward the sun, he gleefully informs them, "From now on, we're going to have a little less ritual and a little more fun around here" ("School Hard," 2.3).

Season Three's "The Wish" (3.9) reinforces the series' message of communal action in a different way. The episode's most obvious thematic concern is that heartache is necessary in life; it leads to personal growth and one never knows how certain personal relationships will impact us. However, the underlying message is that Buffy's style of organization is preferable, a point demonstrated through the depiction of an alternate universe, one in which Buffy never comes to Sunnydale—in fact, she lives in Cleveland,

[4] The series uses the word sire quite loosely; in this episode, Spike refers to Angel as his sire, as well. Clearly, vampires feel the word is appropriate when speaking to/of someone in their sire line: Drusilla made Spike a vampire, and Angel made Drusilla one. Spike may also be speaking of the fact that Angel helped teach him *how* to be a vampire; there are homosocial bonding elements at work here.

where there is also a Hellmouth, apparently. Without Giles and her friends, Buffy would have died at the hands of the Master, as was prophesied. And without Buffy, her closest friends, Willow and Xander, would be vampires. Specifically, they would be in the places of honor once occupied by Darla and Angel, likely being groomed for similar eternal lives of unchecked destruction. When Giles summons Anyanka, the demon who created the alternate universe, she mocks him for wanting to end it: "You trusting fool! How do you know the other world is any better than this?" Giles knows that this world is wrong, telling her, "Because it has to be" ("The Wish," 3.9). Much like other young adult fantasy dramas, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows the diegesis it has established to be the preferable one for its characters—for example, *Roswell* has another set of alien children from Antar on Earth, but they are not as noble as Max, Isabel, and Michael, and the implication is that their leadership will lead to great catastrophes for both Earth and the aliens' home planet. There is a definite "bloom where you're planted" strand in the subgenre—intended, perhaps, to reach viewers who, like these characters, do not quite conform to their surroundings and wonder how they might make an impact in an environment that seems determined to keep them down.

Fight the Power: Sunnydale as Haven for the Patriarchy

Sunnydale is home to a number of supernatural—and human—elements that Buffy must fight to protect its citizens and the rest of the world from their evil intentions. Upon a close reading of the series, it becomes clear that the one thing her true antagonists have in common is a preference for patriarchal authority and structure within their orders. Zoë-Jane Playdon has commented on this phenomenon, noting that "[t]he Scoobies'

contingent, contextualised, functional form of participatory management is in strong contrast to the enforced, patriarchal, hierarchal structures which typify the series' evil leaders" (138). Beginning with their encounters with the educational and civil authorities of Sunnydale—represented by Principal Snyder and Mayor Richard Wilkins, respectively—and ending with their fight with the United States military in the form of the Initiative, Buffy and her friends wage war against traditional hierarchies. First, however, they must come to the understanding that patriarchal power structures are not only enforced on the human level; those involved in the supernatural world may prefer them as well. It will be helpful to begin with the entities closest to Buffy and then work our way outward, as that is how she encounters them herself: the Watchers' Council is with her daily as the counterpart to herself as Slayer and whenever she meets with Giles; she must fight demons daily, some of which are quite power-hungry and misogynistic; and Sunnydale itself has a patriarchal system of authority in general, which manifests itself in its schools—both secondary and post-secondary—and its government. Finally, the series asks Buffy to take a closer look at why patriarchal power structures are an inferior choice by briefly embracing them herself.

The Watchers' Council

From the beginning of her time at Sunnydale, Buffy must contend with the Watchers' Council in the form of Rupert Giles, her Watcher. Giles, as he is known to the group, is—at least at the beginning of the series—seemingly representative of his kind: book-oriented; quite knowledgeable in general but particularly about the supernatural; fond of tweed and tea; a bit uptight; and very, very British. However, once Kendra—the

Slayer called upon Buffy's quickly reversed death—arrives in "What's My Line? Part 1" (2.9), the audience gets a better understanding of the Council and its training methods for the Slayer. Giles is actually a very liberal incarnation of a Watcher; he did not even give Buffy the handbook, something he felt would not be helpful in her case. In contrast, Kendra has been trained with military precision and follows orders with blind obedience. As J.P. Williams explains, she is the "practically perfect Slayer: solemn, respectful, and efficient" (63)—at least as far as the Council is concerned. Council Head Quentin Travers, introduced in "Helpless," (3.12) makes it very clear what he expects from a Slayer: silence and obedience. Buffy throws him for a loop.

The Council reinforces their power institutionally, always going back to the fact that this is how things have always been done, insinuating that they are an unchanging protective force. However, though this account is their party line, it is just not so. In the beginning, there were the Shadow Men of Africa, who chained a young woman, Sineya, to the floor of a cave and forcibly imbued her with demonic energy to give her the strength and skill necessary to battle vampires. The parallels with sexual assault are clear, and I am not the first to comment on it; see, for example, Gwyn Symonds, who terms it "mystical rape" (para. 3) This gendered violence is indicative of the disrespect the Council has for the Slayers; they are merely tools in the Council's war. Interestingly, while the First Slayer and the Shadow Men are African—where in Africa they are from is never mentioned—and Slayers eventually come from all races, the Council is white, overwhelmingly male, and upper-middle to upper class.[5] Because they are British, in the

[5] The Slayer line is exclusively female in the television series; in the comic series, where magic is eliminated for a time, the rules regarding vampires are affected. In Season Nine, the First Slayer reacts

face of the Slayer mythology, we can only assume that the Watcher's Council is a result of colonialism. Now it becomes clear that, as Ananya Mukherjea has observed, with their connection to the Shadow Men, the Council's origin

> makes sense with respect to the dominant theory that human life stems from the African continent . . . it inevitably also relates to modern, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European and North American depictions of Africans as wild, barely human, and constituting a single homogenous people, with the continued conflation of the primitive, the savage, the subhuman, and the racial Other. ("It's Like," 66)

The Shadow Men, at some point, have been subsumed by the Council, a white patriarchy which constantly attempts to strengthen their importance and primacy in the world by dominating those who answer to them. Though the First Slayer gained her powers through assault, she was ultimately left alone to do her job with little governance: as Giles remembers when she attacks him in his dream sequence in "Restless" (4.22), she "never had a Watcher." However, as the Shadow Men become the Watchers' Council, many rituals develop in which patriarchal authority over these women is held dear while the Slayers' mental and emotional health is sacrificed on the battlefield.

When Buffy meets Quentin Travers in "Helpless," he has come over to Sunnydale from London to oversee her Cruciamentum, the trial each Slayer undergoes if she reaches

---

accordingly, granting the Slayer's precognitive abilities to Billy Lane, who becomes an ally for the Slayer army. Much later in the future, as explained in *Fray*, a Slayer is called who happens to be a fraternal twin, Melaka Fray. Her brother, Harth, inherits the precognitive abilities while she takes on the Slayer's strength and speed.

her eighteenth birthday. The Slayer is stripped of her powers and imprisoned with a hungry vampire, forced to use only her wits to defeat the vampire and survive. The Council has chosen Zachary Kralik as Buffy's foe, who, before he became a vampire, tortured and killed women and was committed to an insane asylum. In the course of his time with Buffy's mother, whom he kidnaps to entice Buffy to enter the playing field, he admits that he has "a problem with mothers," as his own castrated him—so he "killed and ate her" ("Helpless," 3.12).

This episode illustrates the disrespect the Council has for its operatives. Choosing a vampire like Kralik when there are numerous others who are dangerous in their own way is telling; he has a deep hatred for women, so Buffy's experience will be harrowing, Kralik's protestations that he will not kill her but merely turn her notwithstanding. (He must realize that for a Slayer, this is the worst possible outcome.) Additionally, the entire experience of the Cruciamentum can be seen as an assault, as the person Buffy trusts most in the world immobilizes her and then takes the very essence from her—by this point, her Slayerness has become something that she identifies as part of her core, not just something she can do, and she is shaken when the serum that strips her of her powers makes her believe that "[her] calling may be a wrong number" ("Helpless," 3.12). When confronted with the deeply problematic nature of their trial, the Council—as represented by Travers—is unrepentant. He patronizingly informs Buffy of her passing the test; she is unmoved. Travers' "I understand that you're upset" is met with "You understand *nothing*" ("Helpless," 3.12). Travers simply moves on. Buffy, it is implied, should fall in line. In her analysis of the episode, Holly Barbaccia observes that "[i]nstead of a possible metaphor for the evils of teen drug use (Fury's concept), Whedon transforms the episode

into an unnerving allegory of a newly adult woman who discovers that patriarchy exists, that it authorizes her own power, and that female normalcy within that system equals helplessness" (para. 4). I would argue that Buffy has already seen the patriarchy at work in Sunnydale, but this is her first understanding that her power is in any way connected to it. However, every appearance of the Council makes it clear that they feel superior to the Slayer; as Giles points out, they do not seem to understand that they "are waging a war. She's fighting it. There's a difference" ("Helpless," 3.12). Still, they continue to make sure the Slayer knows her place; Travers never even really takes the time to learn Buffy's name.

The Watchers' Council takes this hard line with every Slayer under their purview. J.P Williams has argued that The Council "represents a male-dominated hierarchy caring less about any particular girl who happens to be the Slayer than about exercising control over the power she represents" (62). In Faith, they find a perfect woman to show the full extent of their power. Even before Faith turns to the dark side, she finds that her natural personality means she is automatically problematic in the Council's eyes. Her free spirit makes it difficult for her to get in line, while her upbringing renders her less prepared to make emotional connections, a must in Buffy's alternative organizational structure (Wilcox, "Who Died," 8). As a result, Faith finds herself adrift and chooses the Mayor's office, where patriarchy reigns—but one that encourages her to break the rules in his service: as Paul Hawkins has noted, "[w]hilst Kendra's reliance on following rules to the letter leads to her demise, Faith is undermined by a refusal to follow the rules at all. Emotionally detached and convinced her powers render her above the law, Faith turns to crime and winds up in prison" (189).

When Faith goes rogue—the Council is made aware of this by Wesley Wyndham-Pryce, her Watcher, since the Council is not is omniscient, no matter how much they pretend to be—the Council unloads on her. She is watched throughout her time in a coma so that the Council might apprehend her the moment she wakes up, though they fail in that. They send their Special Ops Team—Collins, Weatherby, and Smith[6]—to capture her so that she can face the Council's judgment in England. Though these three men say their goal is to bring Faith back to England, their rough treatment of her,[7] referring to her as "it" and "the package" ("Who Are You?" 4.16), suggests they have been given as much leeway as they would like. They crash an armored truck into the police car, taking her into custody and drag her from the shattered window and into their truck. While doing so, one of the team begins a speech explaining what is going on, reminiscent of the Miranda rights, but his team leader cuts him off. Clearly, Faith has no rights in his mind. Conversely, when given the news, Buffy and her friends—minus Willow, who has "sharing my people" issues with Faith ("Consequences" 3.15)—discuss rehabilitation and containment options for the other Slayer. This possibility is not an option for the Council, who merely want to punish Faith; when passage to England cannot be secured, punishment becomes execution. Again, these women are tools of war, not people.

---

[6] The Team is explicitly named in *Angel* 1.19, "Sanctuary," which continues this storyline.

[7] It must be noted that Faith has recently woken up from a coma lasting a little over nine months—she wakes up on February 25 of the following year—and is getting belated punishment; she has also almost immediately used a spell that the Mayor left her to switch bodies with Buffy, so the Special Ops Team is inflicting this punishment on her body but Buffy's consciousness.

The Master and Angelus

As a whole, the Forces of Darkness are not patriarchally structured, or even patriarchal in thought as a whole. In fact, they represent an important strand of feminist thought within the series—binaries are problematic. The ideas of us vs. them and good vs. evil break down upon close examination or experience in the field, and Buffy would be the first to explain this; she actually gets a chance when she temporarily joins The Initiative, a paramilitary operation through which the government attempts to do Buffy's job for her—albeit without really knowing who or what the Slayer is (in fact, they think she is a myth). The demonic element in the series likes strong women: for example, Darla and Drusilla easily take over in their times, and vampires, especially, have a more modern concept of gender relations. However, there are those on the side of evil who are more patriarchal, not because evil equals an affinity for this type of thought, but because the series equates patriarchal power structures with selfish ambition and deliberate ignorance of others' needs—and that is often found among demons who lack humanity. For a good understanding of how this works in Sunnydale, we must first turn to the Master, who opens the text and establishes what audiences might expect from vampires.

When Buffy first comes to Sunnydale, its demonic element is ruled by the Master, a centuries-old vampire who is currently stuck in a mystical bubble of sorts as a result of the intersection of a failed ritual to open the Hellmouth and an earthquake sixty years earlier. However impotent this imprisonment may make him, his followers still greatly fear and respect him; Darla (a member of the Order of Aurelius, of which the Master is head) is at the Master's right hand though subsequent appearances in the series (and

expanded universe) and she makes it clear she could have established her own court elsewhere. In her human life, Darla was a successful madam; she transferred her abilities to survive and thrive over to her life as a vampire. Darla is never without a plan; also, where other, lesser vampires rely on physical pain to get their point across, Darla works in mental and emotional manipulation, something she likely learned from The Master. Her hold over Angel reaches through *Buffy* into his own series. Still, Darla chooses to spend her time in Sunnydale not playing with Angel's mind—as knowledge of Darla's character would lead one to expect—but staying at the Master's side to do his bidding. The Master's patriarchal inclinations are clear from his first appearance in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.1). He is entrapped in a fairly small space; it is walkable—and he does quite a bit of pacing around—but allows little room for furniture. What he does choose is a throne, leaving his underlings little room for doubt as to their place in this system. However, he constantly terms them a family rather than workers or, more accurately, followers. To him, this characterization is correct; as Kristina Busse has pointed out,

> with few exceptions, all the principal vampiric characters on both shows are descendants of the Master, a relationship further emphasized by the use of the term 'siring' to describe the act of creating a vampire. Even though vampires are mostly amoral, murderous fiends, they do watch out for their own and are attached to their immediate relations . . . Family, the most basic human unit, is thus mimicked in the vampire clan. (209)

The Master does love his children in his own way; however, he demands absolute obedience. When his commands are not carried out, he expects penance to be offered,

and in the case of serious offenses, the offering up of their own lives: in "Angel," (1.7) he summons the Three, medieval vampire assassins, to kill Buffy as he has grown weary of her ruining his plans, and when they fail, he says nothing to them, but merely looks disappointed. He passes on their executions to Darla, as "their deaths will bring [him] little joy" ("Angel," 1.7)—though it is still important to him that they die, as it reinforces his position and power in the clan.

The Master's idea of family is infused with traditional patriarchal ideas of allegiance to the head of the household, but his demonic nature has twisted it into requirements for blind obedience without any concern for others. His protégé, the Anointed One[8]—recently an eight-year-old child named Collin and now a vampire, which adds to the levels of concern these lessons bring—receives daily impartments of "wisdom" about how to, essentially, be the best vampire leader he can be. The Anointed One is special to the Master as he is prophesied to play an important role in his release from his mystical prison, but the Master apparently has great plans for him afterward.

One major aspect of family headship the Master models is ignoring any emotional pain his children might be in in service to his ambitions. "Angel" is an early entry into Darla's story, but a complete knowledge of the larger universe gives her actions in the episode more weight. When she proposes her plan to the Master, it is not a whim or an attempt to please the Master, but her greatest desire.

[8] Holly Chandler has pointed out that "'Anointed One' is a literal translation of messiah; Colin [*sp*] is, then, a sort of Antichrist consistent with Bram Stoker's presentation of Dracula" (footnote).

> DARLA: Don't think I'm not grateful, you letting me kill the Three.
>
> THE MASTER: How can my children learn if I do everything for them?
>
> DARLA: But you've gotta let me take care of the Slayer.
>
> THE MASTER: Oh! You're giving me orders now!
>
> DARLA (*walking away)*: Okay, then, we'll just do nothing while she takes us out one by one.
>
> THE MASTER: Do I sense a plan, Darla? (*she turns to face him*) Share…
>
> DARLA (*walking back*): Angel kills her and comes back to the fold.
>
> THE MASTER: Angel! He was the most vicious creature I ever met. I miss him.
>
> DARLA: So do I.
>
> [. . .]
>
> THE MASTER: Hmm. (*to Collin*) You see how we all work together for the common good? That's how a family is supposed to function! ("Angel," 1.7)

In this scene, Darla's trademark overt sexiness is at work, implying she misses her playmate, but when combined with her conversation with Angel at his home and with Buffy before and during their fight, it becomes clear that a great deal of sadness underlies this proposition—Darla genuinely misses Angel because she still loves him. As she tells Buffy, " . . . the saddest thing in the world is . . . [t]o love someone who used to love you" ("Angel," 1.7) Darla is killed in this episode, staked by Angel, and the Master grieves. However, what he does not admit is his own part in this; he manipulated Darla's emotional needs to get what he wanted already. If the Master were a leader who put the well-being of those beneath him first, he would have taken the knowledge of two hundred years and put it to use, sending a vampire who was equally strong but less emotionally

invested in the outcome of events. However, he is representative of the patriarchal structure that characterizes so many of Sunnydale's evil antagonists; it is their very selfish nature that defeats them.

Angelus would find that his downfall comes from a similar issue, if he were the type to admit fault of any kind in himself. The demon half of Angel, Buffy's vampire boyfriend with a soul, Angelus is reawakened when Buffy and Angel's first sexual encounter activates the "true happiness" aspect of the Gypsy[9] curse placed on Angelus roughly one hundred years earlier. As a punishment for killing the favorite daughter of their clan, the Gypsies placed a curse on Angelus to restore his soul, which essentially returns his sense of right and wrong—so while he had always remembered the horrors he had visited upon humans, he suddenly cared. While his spin-off series, *Angel*, which is more adult in tone, goes into more detail about his immediate reaction to ensoulment, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* insinuates that it had a deep and traumatic psychic effect. The reversal, however, is not difficult; becoming Angelus again seems physically painful for a moment, but its aftereffects are joyous for Angelus—he is thrilled to be back on the outside.[10]

Where the Master ruled from a need for complete obedience born of respect for his position, Angelus thrives on menace and aggression. When Angelus goes to the

---

[9] The series generally goes with the term "Gypsy" rather than Romani or Rom as they are more accurately known; though some consider the term pejorative, I use it here to preserve the accuracy of the text, which likely chose it to reflect the mental time period of the vampires and reach their target audience—who, at the time, might not have known other terms.

[10] While one episode of *Buffy*, "The Dark Age" (2.8), has Angel mention that he has a demon inside of him, *Angel* makes it more explicitly clear that Angelus is trapped inside Angel's body while he is ensouled; unlike being a vampire, where your soul is simply elsewhere, ensouled vampires still have the demon within them, having to watch their old bodies work for good. Angelus, particularly, is disgusted by Angel.

factory after his change to find Spike and Drusilla, she gleefully exclaims, "We're family again! We'll feed. *Grr*. And we'll play" ("Innocence," 2.14), indicating that from Angelus's perspective—as their sire and the one who established their general customs—a vampire family comes together through mutual goals of destruction. Spike and Drusilla would agree; however, Angelus's execution of this ideology is what makes him more dangerous in the Buffyverse. He asserts his right to be in charge by being the most demonic in intent and action as well as patriarchal in his organizational structure. While at first he pretends that his goal is to simply rejoin Spike and Dru and "play," he quickly moves into his previous position as family patriarch, forcing Spike back into the underling role he held for roughly twenty years until Angel's appearance. Spike, currently sidelined with a broken back and being cared for and fed by Drusilla, is frustrated by his inability to hunt but otherwise shows no overt anger at this new development because he is still a valued member of the team. Angelus's arrival changes all of this.

Angelus ignores the fact that Spike has been head of the family for nearly one hundred years—and doing things quite differently—and takes a great deal of pleasure in frequent reminders of his new position over Spike, which Arwen Spicer describes as "a dominance-submission paradigm in which Spike is coded as submissive female" because of the likelihood of the duo having a sexual history ("Love's" para. 16). His misogynistic personality immediately takes to using Dru as an object to needle Spike, taking the opportunity to remind him that he has taken Spike's place in her bed—something Angelus knows will deeply hurt Spike more than it will bruise his ego, as Spike's love for Drusilla is legendary and one of the things that makes him singular among vampires—

and as her partner in hunting and general demonic scheming, something Spike had previously done. Additionally, he uses Drusilla's psychic powers for his own ends, having her explain her splintered visions as best she can so that he can get a march on Buffy or asking her to interrogate a captured Giles in the form of his murdered girlfriend, Jenny. In general, he keeps Dru around to slake his own desires and stroke his ego; he does not see her as his equal; while they must work together to fulfill what he sees as his destiny—awakening Acathla, a dimension-swallowing demon—he ignores how integral her contributions are to the various steps of the plan. Without Drusilla, Angelus would be missing crucial information, but he sees her as a beautiful and amusing foot soldier, not an equal.

Angelus also recalls patriarchal norms about female sexuality; he is introduced at the beginning of "Innocence" (2.14), though the audience is not aware of his name or even what is going on. After making love with Buffy, Angel wakes up in great pain and stumbles out into the rainy alley behind his home. Seemingly in tune with his change, the rain stops as Angel rises from the ground, now the soulless Angelus. Encountering a prostitute, he quickly turns and feeds on her, exhaling the smoke he has taken in from her throat. It is significant that he does not encounter a police officer or someone walking home from the hospital—Angelus leaves Buffy's bed and immediately feeds off another woman. Later in the episode, Angelus calls to mind Western society's suspicions of female sexuality, particularly American culture's censure of teen girls' sexual activity, in his callous treatment of Buffy after their night together (Chandler para. 38):

> ANGELUS: You got a lot to learn about men, kiddo. Although I guess you proved that last night.
>
> BUFFY: What are you saying?
>
> ANGELUS: Let's not make an issue out of it, okay? (*goes for his coat*) In fact, let's not talk about it at all. (*pulls it on*) It happened.
>
> BUFFY: I don't understand. Was it m-me? (*meekly*) Was I not . . . good?
>
> ANGELUS (*laughing*): You were great. Really. I thought you were a pro. (“Innocence,” 2.14)

In this exchange, Angelus recalls the virgin/whore dichotomy, even though he would be privy to Angel and Buffy’s sexual activity—and in keeping with Angel’s personality, some mention of Buffy’s lack of previous sexual experience would be likely—and any of their private conversations about it (Chandler para. 38). Subsequently, he decides to focus his campaign against Buffy on emotional destruction, using hurtful, misogynistic language centered around their sexual encounter. Angelus is careful to make it public; when he kills Enyos, the Gypsy elder, he paints, “Was it good for you too?” on the wall in Enyos’s blood—as he is familiar with Buffy’s communal action strategy, he can be fairly sure that at least one of her friends will happen upon this message with her. Finally, he takes this campaign to her home, waiting outside the house until Joyce comes home and he can confront her with the knowledge that Buffy has become sexually active. Playing the overly attached and needy boyfriend, Angelus suddenly switches into every parent’s nightmare: “You don’t understand, Joyce. I’ll die without Buffy. She’ll die without me” (“Passion,” 2.17). After Angelus reveals that he has slept with Buffy, which takes Joyce aback, Buffy reclaims her home, using magic to revoke Angel’s invitation

(which carries over to Angelus). This is the beginning of her campaign against Angelus's disrespect for powerful women.

Sunnydale Authority Figures

Angelus is right at home in Sunnydale, whose human leaders are not particularly happy Buffy has taken up residence in their town. Her first exposure to this resistance is at her high school in the form of Principal Snyder. Initially, the series shows Sunnydale High's principal to be a fairly benign figure; Principal Flutie does not seem to understand the supernatural forces at work in his school, and his only real concerns are engendering school spirit and student self-esteem and discouraging bullying. In this capacity, he reads as any number of principals who were under the sway of self-help and New Age parenting and education books in the mid-to-late 1990s, when the series is set. However, he does represent traditional educational authorities who are out of touch with teenagers and their needs; in "The Harvest" (1.2), he keeps Buffy on campus by literally locking her inside a gate when she needs to leave on Slayer business. Unfortunately, Principal Flutie does not last long; he is killed and eaten by students who are possessed by the spirits of hyenas.

Principal Snyder is an entirely different breed. Arriving in "The Puppet Show" (1.9), he makes his feelings on students and administration quite clear:

> SNYDER: Kids today need discipline. That's an unpopular word these days, "discipline." I know Principal Flutie would have said, "Kids need understanding. Kids are human beings." That's the kind of woolly-headed, liberal thinking that leads to being eaten.

> GILES: I—I think perhaps it was a little more complex than, um . . .
>
> SNYDER: This place has quite a reputation. Suicide, missing persons, spontaneous cheerleader combustion . . . You can't put up with that. You've gotta keep an eye on the bad element. (*nodding toward the stage at Buffy, Willow, and Xander*) Like those three. Kids. I don't like them. From now on you're gonna see a very different Sunnydale High. Tight ship. Clean, orderly. (*faces Giles*) And quiet.

While this might be construed as hyperbole to humorously introduce a character, it is completely in line with who Snyder reveals himself to be—he absolutely hates children, teenagers especially. In "When She Was Bad" (2.1), he describes them as " . . . locusts. Crawling around, mindlessly bent on feeding and mating. Destroying everything in sight in their relentless, pointless desire to exist." While some teachers and administrators with this perspective might be content simply seething in quiet, Snyder spends his time actively working to oppress them.

Snyder is a result of patriarchy; he constantly tries to assert his "natural" position over Buffy and her fellow students by using various tricks to try to win rather than meeting them on equal terms, where he fears he will not win. Buffy often references Snyder's short stature and ties his behavior into potential issues he may need to work out; what we do know is that Snyder was once a deeply unpopular nerd ("Band Candy," 3.8) who has somehow risen to a position of great power in this small town. It is clear that he greatly enjoys exercising patriarchal control; whether that is related to the control he may not have felt in his own high school years is an interesting question to ponder at another

time. Nevertheless, he is often shown making sure Buffy is aware of her place in his school; in "School Hard" (2.3), he opens the episode by giving Buffy and Sheila, another student who outwardly looks like Buffy—they are fairly equal when it comes to skipping school and starting fights—an ultimatum: plan, execute, and host the school's Parent-Teacher Night flawlessly, or get expelled. Attempting to tower above them as they sit in his office, he smirks, "A lot of educators tell students, 'Think of your principal as your pal.' I say, 'Think of me as your judge, jury, and executioner.'" Buffy spends the episode in a highly anxious state, worried more about what will happen when Snyder meets her mother than the arrival of Spike in Sunnydale.

Buffy is right to worry about Snyder's time with her mother; when he uses it properly, he is able to encourage a complete disregard of students' rights. In "Gingerbread" (3.11), Snyder is gleeful when the parents in town—under the influence of a demon—organize under the banner M.O.O. (Mothers Opposed to the Occult) and ask him to search the school for supernatural artifacts. During a locker search, he smiles, saying, "This is a glorious day for principals everywhere. No pathetic whining about students' rights. Just a long row of lockers and a man with a key." Later, when the group comes in to confiscate Giles's library of mystical texts, he simply stands there smugly, drinking a cup of coffee—something we never see him do, so the coffee is merely for effect. This attitude is not because he believes in M.O.O.'s message; he is aware of Sunnydale's shadow world. Throughout his tenure as principal, he is shown creating cover-ups for demonic activity at the school; lest this be seen as good PR, he and the police also explicitly discuss not telling the public the truth. Snyder's Sunnydale High is a constant machine of disinformation and misdirection; these teenagers cannot trust their

educators, because they work for a shadowy evil power who (quite literally) wants to devour them.

As Buffy grows up, she increasingly realizes the necessity of wielding her abilities to fight those who amass institutional power to oppress others; in Sunnydale, those agents are almost exclusively male or represent male-dominated entities. While Snyder was an interesting appetizer of sorts, he was only a representative for the real power in town: Mayor Richard Wilkins III. The Mayor, like a number of *Buffy*'s Big Bads, is quirkily funny as well as representing a systemic problem Buffy and her friends need to defeat. Mayor Wilkins has been linked to "the patriarchy incarnate" with his corny language and 1950s values (Chandler para. 53). At the beginning of Season Three, the audience is finally introduced to the Mayor, though mentions of him and his connectedness to the demonic activity in Sunnydale reach back earlier. After Spike leaves Sunnydale with Drusilla and Angelus is sucked into Acathla's hell dimension, Mayor Wilkins moves quickly to bring the town's vampires into his organization; the upcoming year is crucial and everything must go according to plan. His first move is to attempt to use Snyder to keep Buffy out of school—and therefore less connected to the problems in town, and hopefully out of town entirely—but Snyder is unsuccessful in the face of Giles's intimidation.

The Mayor's top-down structure is hinted at in "Faith, Hope, & Trick" (3.3), the episode in which Buffy returns to school after a summer away and is reinstated at Sunnydale High—Snyder had expelled her in May, seizing on the opportunity after Drusilla killed Kendra in the school's library and Buffy was found next to her body. At

this point, he has proved himself to the Mayor; however, after Giles intimidates him into letting Buffy back into school in the previous episode, Snyder is met with a phone call from the Mayor's office. The look on his face tells the audience all they need to know: the Mayor is calling to chastise his underling. For Mayor Wilkins, his goals are quite clear-cut and obvious, and he has difficulty seeing why everyone else does not understand them. As a result, he spends a great deal of time patronizingly explaining his positions to people (and demons).

A good example of the Mayor's attitude can be seen in his dealings with Mr. Trick. When he meets Mr. Trick—a former associate of Kakistos, who has been slain—Trick is in the middle of combining commercial enterprise with attempted Slayer extinguishment. Instead of simply asking him to join his organization, or accepting another power structure in the town, the Mayor subjects him to this speech: "Do you have children? (*Trick just smiles.*) Children are the heart of a community. They need to be looked after. Controlled. The more rebellious element needs to be dealt with. The children are our future. We need them. *I* need them" ("Homecoming," 3.5). While on one level, the Mayor is speaking about the children—specifically the teenagers at Sunnydale High, including Buffy and her friends, whom Mr. Trick has just tried to kill—he is also including Trick in this speech, as the Mayor sees the demonic element in town as his children, too. They work for him, so they must fall in line. Because Trick is African-American, the ideas of control resonate on another level, particularly because he is one of

very few people of color on the series and the only one to really call explicit attention to his racial identity and how it affects how he has been treated in the past.[11]

The Mayor's double-speak is especially directed at women; he has a decidedly antiquated view of their place in his world. When Faith breaks with the Scooby Gang over the accidental death of the Deputy Mayor, Allan Finch—in which Faith, thinking Allan was a vampire, staked him—and her subsequent attempt to cover it up and forget about it, it is surprising that she would go work for the opposition. However, as many critics have noted, what Faith is really looking for is approval, and Mayor Wilkins is full of positivity and reinforcement, something Faith feels she never got from Buffy and her friends. What she does not seem to notice or care about is that she must take orders—and in the beginning, Mayor Wilkins often chastises her for not following those orders unquestioningly and as quickly as he would like. When they are holding Willow hostage, she and Faith get into an argument. As Faith is wont to do, she turns to violence to solve it, angering the Mayor. His response is typically paternalistic in nature: "Girls, I hope I don't have to separate you two. Faith, you can play with your new toy later. Something's come up. (*Faith continues to hold her knife against Willow's neck*.) Faith! You know I don't like repeating myself" ("Choices," 3.19). Faith drops her knife and moves to the

[11] For more on race in the series, see Kent A. Ono, "To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ('Other') Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV." *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*. Ed. Elyce Rae Helford. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. 163-186. Print.; Lynne Y. Edwards, "'The black chick always gets it first': Black Slayers in Sunnydale." *Joss Whedon and Race: Critical Essays*. Eds. Mary Ellen Iatropoulos and Lowery A. Woodall III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017. 37-50. Print; Lynne Y. Edwards, "Slaying in Black and White: Kendra as Tragic Mulatto in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. 85-97. Print.; and Ewan Kirkland, "The Caucasian Persuasion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Slayage* 5.1 (2005).

Mayor like a chastened child, but makes sure to finish her argument with Willow, letting her know that she has found someone.

However, Faith gives up the more free-spirited, natural part of her nature for what she considers the positive reinforcement she is due as a Slayer. As Rhonda Wilcox observes, Faith "has become part of the worst version of unquestioning service of the power structure for the sake of the approval, comfort, and support of the father. The Mayor feeds Faith, dresses her, and buys her toys (a PlayStation; an especially vicious knife)" ("Who Died" 14). All Faith sees are the outward trappings of finally having a father figure; in his gifting her a beautiful apartment with the "toys" inside, she does not see the refusal to let her choose her own living space, nor does she acknowledge his summarily taking over her sexual life. As the Mayor explains, "No Slayer of *mine* is gonna live in a fleabag hotel. That place has a very unsavory reputation. There are immoral liaisons going on there," to which Faith responds—not one for a more expanded vocabulary—"Yeah, plus all the screwing" ("Dopplegängland," 3.16). She has only joined his side in the previous episode; now, she is his. Faith ignores the gendered hierarchy of her new organization, assuming that her position as enforcer gives her any rights or voice at all. While the Mayor does love Faith in his own way, he is never shown to respect her. Along with Season Six villains The Trio, The Mayor holds an interesting place in *Buffy* lore—he is human, though he is a sorcerer and achieves demonic ascension. Unlike demons, who seem to have one clear goal and—once research is done—at least one clear way of dying, as Holly Chandler argues, "humans in the series are potentially more frightening than vampires because there is no clear-cut way of eliminating the threat they pose. Vampires can be killed, but the problems of gender

relations in America cannot be dealt with so easily. Ultimately, sexist human mind-sets are a real problem, whereas vampires don't exist" (para. 54). The Mayor sets up Season Four, in which Buffy is confronted with systemic prejudice on a much larger scale: the Initiative, a secret paramilitary force designed to study and handle supernatural activity in America.

The Initiative

When Buffy enrolls at UC Sunnydale, she soon encounters shadowy figures on campus. Dressed like the live action role playing version of G.I. Joe—Buffy calls them her "late-night storm trooper pal[s]" ("The Initiative," 4.7)—they cross Buffy's path while she is patrolling at night. After the events of "Hush" (4.10), wherein all of Sunnydale mysteriously loses their voices, Buffy learns that her new quasi-boyfriend, Riley, is also a "commando"—Special Agent Riley Finn—though the audience has been aware of this since "The Initiative" (4.7). In this episode, Spike wakes up in a sterile, all-white environment after having been captured by the commandos in a previous episode. In a discussion with another captive, he learns that he is in a secret facility where supernatural creatures are taken and experimented on. Being Spike, he finds a way to escape, but this triggers a "Code Red" in the secret government facility underneath the college, The Initiative, whose purpose is to detect, study, and neutralize the supernatural element—what they have termed hostile subterrestrials, or HSTs—in the country (and whose efforts are focused on Sunnydale and the Hellmouth). The existence of the Initiative is foreshadowed in Season One's "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1.11); when student Marcie turns literally invisible after years of social invisibility makes her feel that

way, the FBI comes in to take her away. The agents take Marcie away to a special school with others like her—as Buffy correctly discerns, "This isn't the first time this has happened . . . It's happened at other schools"—where her education will now consist of subjects like "infiltration techniques." David Kociemba has pointed out the similarities of setting between the FBI location and the Initiative: its classrooms are "glass-enclosed . . . like the Initiative's cells" (32). It is clear that Whedon always intended to come back to a more deeply oppressive and structural patriarchal system.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer uses the Initiative to explore the possibilities of military structure, as upon being given clearance to come into the Initiative as an ally, Buffy is awed by all that a little funding can accomplish. However, Buffy's preferred organizational structure of communal action is not welcome in the military, which she quickly learns; this is constantly framed in terms of male/female—the Initiative prefers an us/them binary system. As Holly Chandler explains, "their belief that all demons are bad is portrayed as narrow-minded, and the link between binary thinking and patriarchal values is reinforced" (para. 57). Buffy and the Scooby Gang do not work within this concept; with the introduction of Angel, Whedon makes it clear that the demon world is not quite as clear cut as the Initiative would like it to be, and further vampiric and demonic antagonists show human qualities that belie the idea of a straight good/evil binary. Also, lest one make the argument that Buffy constantly fighting and killing demons endorses the us/them binary, critics like Rhonda Wilcox have illustrated the series' use of monsters as emblematic of social problems, particularly the issues related to teen life ("There").

Buffy's idea of coming into the Initiative and working in her normal way is immediately seen by Professor Maggie Walsh as a hostile act. Walsh is frightening in many ways—for a teen viewer, she simply represents the fears of unfeeling, alienating professors. She is coded as masculine in her appearance in American culture with her short hair and little makeup (she only wears enough for television purposes; it could be inferred that she is intended to look like she wears none). While Walsh teaches psychology, one of the social sciences, in her military work she does biological research; the first mention of her work as the head of the Institute is the chip she implanted in Spike's brain which emits "intense neurological pain" any time he attempts to harm a human being ("The Initiative," 4.7). All of this codes her as a masculine figure—and she is the only woman in the Initiative—but what makes her a patriarchal figure is the lack of checks and balances on her authority.

Walsh expects absolute, unquestioning obedience from her "boys," and Buffy is frustrating. Initially, she is impressed to meet the Slayer, who the government believed was a myth, and feels her strength will be an asset. When Walsh tells Buffy, "Welcome to the team," ("The 'I' in Team," 4.13), Buffy assumes that she means team as Buffy uses it: the idea of group deliberation and contribution, after which Buffy goes to fight, supported by those who would be helpful. However, on Walsh's team, she talks—or those speaking on her behalf in a research capacity, like Dr. Angleman—and everyone else listens. She sends those who she decides have earned the right to exercise their talents—and further merit her favor. When Buffy is called into her first Initiative deployment meeting, the contrast is striking: the agents are all dressed in their maneuver uniforms while Buffy is still wearing her bright orange halter and multiple necklaces

from their time at the Bronze. They sit quietly to listen while Buffy wiggles impatiently, asking question after question: "Why exactly can't we damage this polka thing's arms? . . . What do they want? . . . Why are they here? Sacrifices, treasure, or they just get rampagy?" ("The 'I' in Team," 4.13). Buffy is finally told to be quiet; she does not understand the military's protocol, and it shows. Walsh's reactions to Buffy's inquisitiveness and assumptions that everyone will work together make it clear that Buffy's introduction into her "team" is not what she had planned. She expected a new and improved foot soldier; with the addition of the Slayer, she can get the supernatural strength of the demons she is fighting on her side for once. The military could potentially win this war. However, Walsh is working from a patriarchal viewpoint and expects that Buffy is, as well; she assumes that with all that power, Buffy will naturally acquiesce to their top-down hierarchal model. She is quite wrong. Her surveillance of Riley's room reveals that Buffy is asking even more questions—specifically about the type of research they are doing at the Initiative and what is going on in room 314—and she sends her into a mission orchestrated to have her killed. Frances Early notes that Buffy's time with the Initiative means that she "must face squarely—at a personal level—the destructive potential of militarized authority systems" (para. 27).

Additionally, the Initiative reinforces traditional values that engender retroactive and problematic gender dynamics as well as these patriarchal power structures. Riley's "commando buddies are shown to be insensitive misogynists, suggesting that such values run deep in military institutions" (Early para. 25). Forrest, one of his best friends, is a perfect example. His first appearance, in "The Initiative," establishes him as a foil for Riley, who, though part of the Initiative and subject to its ideology, is a sensitive soul.

Sitting in the cafeteria Buffy and her friends frequent, Riley attempts to grade papers in his cover role as Maggie Walsh's teaching assistant while Forrest tries to distract him:

> FORREST: How are you gonna learn anything if you keep doing schoolwork? Oh . . . Check her out. (*Gesturing to Buffy at the soda fountain*.) Is she hot, or is she hot?
>
> [. . .]
>
> RILEY: I haven't really thought about what I think of her.
>
> FORREST: A girl that cute in the face, and you form no opinion?
>
> RILEY: No, I mean, she's all right, I guess. She's just kind of . . . I don't know. Peculiar. (*Buffy begins to battle with the frozen yogurt machine. Her superstrength kicks in, and she breaks off its handle*.)
>
> FORREST: Peculiar? Hi. Hey, Graham, what do you think of the blonde chick? Mattressable, *n'est pas*? Riley's not down. Doesn't like her.
>
> RILEY: I don't dislike her. She just—she never feels like she's really there when you talk to her. I like girls I can get a grip on.
>
> FORREST: I bet you do. ("The Initiative," 4.7)

While Forrest later attempts to reframe this conversation as an attempt to show Riley his true feelings for Buffy, the rhetoric here reveals his sexist, objectifying perspective toward women. He is also unable to recognize that women, specifically Buffy, may have talents to bring to the table. To him they only threaten the male-dominated spaces he has created for himself: as Sara Buttsworth has observed, "[a] 'girl'—no matter how powerful—is a threat rather than an asset to this code, and while Riley is initially immune

to the threat Buffy poses to his masculinity, other members of his 'team' are not" (193). While other male characters have had this characteristic, they have been villainous or two-dimensional in some way—Forrest is supposed to not only be a good guy, he is Riley's best friend. In establishing him early on as possessing misogynistic tendencies, *Buffy* gives its viewers a clue that all may not be well in Riley's world. When in "The 'I' in Team" Riley chooses to let Forrest run his own small unit rather than have him in his own as usual—instead, putting Buffy in that position—Forrest scoffs, saying, "Three guesses on what that boy is thinking with." He is unmoved by Graham's suggestion that this may be a promotion of sorts; instead, as is typical of Forrest's interactions with Buffy, he insists that any time Riley seems to be impressed by Buffy's fighting skills or knowledge of the demonic world, it must be Buffy's feminine wiles working on him. Forrest's prejudices run so deeply because he has been trained to think this way; it is significant that no one other than Graham disagrees with him.

The Initiative is only defeated because Buffy and the Scooby Gang take their ideas of communal action to the ultimate degree. At the end of the fourth season, the governmental agency is out of control, taken over by Adam, Walsh's pet project. Adam is a human-demon hybrid—he describes himself as a "biomechanical demonoid"—that is the goal of Project 314 (and the contents of the room of the same number). While Walsh believes she is creating a super-soldier, in reality, she builds a super-demon, using a human body—one of her former agents—and grafting parts onto it from the demons the Initiative captures. When Adam finally awakens, he recognizes her, calling her "Mommy," and immediately kills her ("The 'I' in "Team," 4.13). Adam is fascinated by the world and wants to learn everything about it; his interactions with humans recall

Frankenstein and its various interpretations, which is natural considering his character's inspirations.[12] However, Adam soon determines that both humans and demons have their problems; his new race is the future. As he tells Riley, who is also part of the plan:

> ADAM: Demons cling to old ways and ancient feuds. And they're hopeless with technology. Unworthy. . . . Disappointed by demonkind, we turn to humans. Smart, adaptive, but emotional and weak. Blind. There is imperfection everywhere. Something must be done. Who will deliver us? . . . Mother. She creates me—demon strength, human will, high-grade titanium. Evolution through technology. I am the new standard for all living beings and our mother knew that. She saw our future, yours and mine. ("Primeval," 4.21)

Buffy and the gang work to defeat Adam, but they have recently been driven apart by Spike's machinations; in exchange for this service and getting Buffy into the Initiative for the final fight, Adam says he will remove his chip.

After making up (and realizing Spike was behind their fight in the first place), the Scoobies try to figure out how they can fight Adam, whose powers are ultimately greater than Buffy's. At the point of extreme frustration, Xander's quip proves fruitful: "All we need is combo Buffy: her with slayer strength, Giles's multi-lingual know-how, and Willow's witchy power" ("Primeval," 4.21). The four friends combine themselves through an enjoining spell, overcoming Adam through a blending of Buffy's Slayer powers, Giles's knowledge of ancient languages, Willow's magic, and Xander's

---

[12] See Anita Rose's "Of Creatures and Creators: *Buffy* Does *Frankenstein*" in *Fighting the Forces* for a considered study of this connection.

emotional strength. As the "über-Buffy" tells Adam, "You could never hope to grasp the source of our power." This is clear; Adam is the creation and representation of the patriarchal military-industrial complex. Conversely, Buffy "understands that the most effective weapon to retain humanity and encourage creativity is the force of community . . . Without the combined efforts of the full community, it is impossible to defeat demons, both those made manifest and those that lie within" (Rose 141-42). The military council closes the project; in their summation of events, they do acknowledge "the irony" of Buffy and the Scooby Gang saving their soldiers—however, they term Riley "a deserter" and Buffy and her friends "a group of civilian insurrectionists." The idea of their organizational structure being the problem is not an option; to them, "the demons cannot be harnessed, cannot be controlled," and that is the real issue at hand—their inability to add another set of soldiers to their organization ("Primeval," 4.21).[13]

The Patriarchy Is Insidious: Buffy's Flirtation with Top-Down Hierarchy

In Season Seven, Buffy herself falls prey to the pervasive line of patriarchal thinking that infests Sunnydale and moves toward a top-down, hierarchal system with little care for the rest of the Scoobies' perspectives when she must take on the First Evil, a non-corporeal entity that has appeared once in the series already. This feeling that no one could truly understand her position leads Buffy to transition into a dictatorial leader with a superiority complex—a type she has previously worked to overturn, as it does not

[13] Glory, the Big Bad of Season Five, acts as a patriarch as well. While she appears in female form on Earth, Glory is short for Glorificus, and she is a god from a hell dimension trapped on earth. While gods in the Buffyverse are treated with male/female pronouns, they seem to be genderless. Still, the use of a female actor and the concept of bringing Glory out in a female body though she was born trapped in a male one brings up interesting ideas, particularly considering that she requires abject worship and service from her followers. However, the scope of this chapter does not allow the nuanced analysis that she deserves.

fit with her preferred model of communal action. However, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* makes its heroine go through one last trial before she can fully understand why the feminist paradigm of collective responsibility works best; in doing so, it suggests that one cannot really see why something does not work until you are inside the belly of the beast.

As Rhonda Wilcox has argued, *Buffy* makes it clear that "[t]here is always the danger that you will reflect what you oppose, that you will become the thing you fight" (*Why* 77). While other series in this subgenre borrow this theme, *Buffy* does something with it that few others do; it asks its heroine to understand her opposition. I do not mean to suggest that Buffy is intended to sympathize with patriarchy—far from it. However, throughout the series, Buffy is asked to come to understand that the world is not black and white, and neither are the forces of darkness. There is a reason, for example, that Buffy was introduced to the Initiative by having her boyfriend be a part of it; not everyone in the military-industrial complex is completely evil. We are all subject to the ideology that shapes our country; it is our responsibility to be educated citizens who sift through everything that comes our way and get rid of what is problematic and oppressive. However, there are times in our lives when those problematic and oppressive ideologies are seductive for various reasons. In Buffy's case, the patriarchal, top-down, hierarchal system—particularly the one she saw modeled in the military—comes to her mind when she is forced to fight the First Evil and feels that no one understands the pressure on her shoulders.

Buffy has begun to internalize the patriarchal standards she has been fighting since she was sixteen years old because as this point in her life, they are seductive—they

seem like a natural way to order her life. When the Potentials start arriving and Buffy finds herself training a growing army, ideas of a top-down power structure really start to appeal to her. Potentials are mainly fifteen-year-olds, though some are as old as eighteen, and for the most part, were completely unaware of their position in the Slayer line until they met Giles—or even of the supernatural world as a whole. As more and more of these young women fill her home, Buffy is frustrated by the chaos, and the calm persona radiated at the end of Season Six—the one who was at peace with her life as much as possible—is gone. She is almost jaded and brittle in her dealings with others, setting herself apart and showing her internal viewpoint externally: the Slayer is ultimately alone.

Buffy's loneliness as the Slayer has no real outlet. Her Watcher is back in England, her fellow Slayer is in prison, and at the beginning of Season Seven, the only other character who has some understanding of a Slayer's power—Spike—has been driven insane by a combination of his new soul and the First's incessant mental torture. In her mind, her new perspective on leadership is the only real option. Soon, Faith breaks out of prison after Caleb, the First's agent, hires one of her fellow inmates to kill her using one of the Harbingers'—the First's priests and soldiers—jeweled knives. Suddenly, Buffy is faced with a multiplicity of voices in the most stressful time of her life, and she does not handle it particularly well; instead of expanding the communal action model—perhaps appointing her friends as heads over multiple talking groups to give her feedback that she can work with in a more manageable fashion—she treats everyone as foot soldiers with herself as general. Buffy's actions have begun to reflect previous Sunnydale villains; now, it matters less and less how others react to her and more and more that

people simply do what they are told. However, the series immediately shows that her actions have repercussions. As Susan Payne-Mulliken and Valerie Renegar have observed:

> . . . Buffy, Xander, Willow, Giles, and everyone else in Sunnydale are at times selfish, arrogant, and thoughtless. Yet in the *Buffy*verse these behaviors have consequences that ultimately remind the characters that sharing power with friends and family, as well as in intimate sexual relationships [,] is healthier than amassing power and privileging oneself above others. In essence, feminist communities are stronger and more nourishing than ones rooted in patriarchal hierarchy. (69)

The Potentials push back, confused as to why their voices do not matter; the Scoobies are particularly hurt that Buffy is cutting them out of decision-making. When Caleb arrives on the scene, Buffy reacts first and thinks about it later, determined to put the full force of her power—including the largely untrained Potentials—behind an attack, but her friends try to point out the holes in her plan. Buffy refuses to listen, leading her friends and the Potentials into a trap, as Xander thought she might be. Some die, others are hurt, and Xander—who previously passionately defended Buffy to the wary Potentials even though he was concerned about the wisdom of her plan—is caught by Caleb while trying to save the rest of them. Caleb understands more about the Scoobies than they probably realize: "You're the one who sees everything, aren't you? (*rearing his hand back in front of Xander's face*) Well, let's see what we can't do about that. (*plunges his thumb into Xander's left eye and gouges it out*)" ("Dirty Girls," 7.18).

Buffy's shift in leadership style mirrors what she saw in Sunnydale villains like the Mayor and the Master; she cares little about her friends and the Potentials' emotional well-being as long as her plans are carried out. Xander's injury and the loss of the Potentials at rocks the group, and they vocalize their frustrations with Buffy's leadership style; however, she digs in even further, telling the group they must "fall in line" and that she is "still in charge" ("Empty Places," 7.19). Her rhetoric has greatly shifted from that of team leader devoted to communal action to that of the patriarchal military, a group she previously despised. The group rebels and kicks her out in "Touched" (7.20), installing Faith as team leader. Agnes Curry and Josef Velazquez argue that the series attempts to imply that sometimes patriarchal structures are necessary by having Faith fail and quickly revert to similar "follow me because I am the most powerful" rhetoric (152). However, Faith is ineffective for a reason; while she does encourage a multiplicity of voices, she is unable to manage them in a useful manner. Her discussion-based leadership style hearkens back to what she saw modeled during her time with the Scoobies in Season Three, but the chaotic nature of the talk shows that Faith does not realize that discussions require facilitators; everyone talks over each other and no real progress can be made.

Both Buffy and Faith pull back from their new militaristic perspective by the end of "Touched." Faith has to go through her first battle in the point position—and lose—but Buffy needs to spend the night alone and—as so often is the case after she comes back from the dead the second time—talk through her feelings with Spike:

> BUFFY: That's my problem. I say the word, some girl dies . . . every time.
>
> SPIKE: There's always casualties in war.

> BUFFY: Casualties. It just sounds so . . . casual. These are . . . girls that *I* got killed. I cut myself off from them . . . all of them. I knew I was gonna lose some of them and I didn't— You know what? I'm still making excuses. I've always cut myself off. I've always— (*sighs*) Being the Slayer made me different. But it's my fault I stayed that way. People are always trying to connect to me, and I just slip away. (*chuckles*) You should know. ("Touched," 7.20)

Buffy's new (or returned) outlook on the importance of communal action and personal connections draws the narrative back to its beginnings and reinforces the primacy of feminine power and ways of interacting with the world. She has tried on patriarchal power and seen how ineffective (and ultimately disempowering) it truly is; as a result, she has revisited the feminist paradigm she, Giles, Willow, and Xander originally established in the Sunnydale High library and realized that when people work together—when everyone lends their talents—much more progress is made.

This philosophy is strengthened by the introduction of the Scythe, the weapon Buffy finds in Caleb's lair at the vineyard. In her search for understanding of the Scythe's power—which she and Faith can feel coursing through its steel—and connection to the Slayers, Buffy finds the last Guardian, one of an ancient group of women devoted to helping and protecting the Slayer. In her conversation with this woman, the feminine strength of the Slayer line is underlined:

> GUARDIAN: We forged it in secrecy and kept it hidden from the Shadow Men, who—
>
> BUFFY: Yeah. Met those guys. Didn't really care too much for 'em.

> GUARDIAN: Ahh, yes. Then you know. And they became the Watchers. And the Watchers watched the Slayers. But we were watching them. ("End of Days," 7.21)

While the Scythe is a powerful weapon—according to Buffy, it "[k]ills strong bodies three ways" ("End of Days," 7.21)—it represents a major change in the Slayer game. Buffy has always known that there were men in charge, whether it be the Council or Giles as their representative—whether she listened to them was irrelevant—and later she learned that her power came from an ancient mystical assault on Sineya, the First Slayer. Now, through Willow's magical opening of the Scythe's power, the patriarchal succession of the line is disrupted as Buffy and Faith share their powers with Potentials across the globe.

Season Seven has gotten the credit for "a feminist deconstruction of patriarchal authority" (Spicer, "Brilliant," para. 1), particularly in its treatment of the democratic sharing of power engendered by the opening of the Scythe, but a careful reading of the series shows that the entire narrative has been working up to this grand declaration. From the series' beginnings, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has championed a strategy of communal action wherein each team member's strengths are valued and deployed at the proper time in order to effectively neutralize threats rather than utilizing a traditional, patriarchal power structure in which the most powerful person calls the shots simply because they have been gifted with the abilities to dominate others, generally through violence. Additionally, the series calls out these organizations for misogyny and emotional manipulation of its soldiers; instead, *Buffy* proves that it is possible that a team can be as

close as a family, supporting its members' emotional growth as well as their tactical abilities, and still succeed in its goals.

As *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reaches its twentieth anniversary, the series' contribution to the genre is clear: Joss Whedon not only proved that teenagers (and adults) would tune in weekly to see what used to be the first victim in a horror movie turn around on the monster and kill them, but they would also watch that former victim (sometimes) patiently explain to her audience why she had no time for patronizing male authority figures, or even just dismissive men in general. *Buffy* made a space for powerful heroines in teen dramas; for example, a series like *The Originals*—which boasts multiple matriarchal figures who continually fight the patriarch of their family for the right to rule and are outrageously powerful on their own—would not exist without it. Still, it is important to note that while *Buffy* does important cultural work, particularly of a feminist nature, the series tackles issues in a completely different way because of its subgeneric code. As discussed in earlier chapters, *Gilmore Girls* and *Pretty Little Liars* also have feminist concerns, but their execution of these ideas take place in entirely different worlds—and some of these executions are more successful than others. The family drama often struggles with balancing the goals of their creators with audience expectations; if a series' purpose is to represent the American family, it is helpful to be in touch with them. If these series include feminist ideas, the message may be muddled as the writers become absorbed in creating an ever-more distinct storyworld, as in the case of *Gilmore Girls*. Teen soaps must contend with audiences who expect high levels of sensationalism and female characters whose cattiness cannot be contained; here, the feminist project must begin with female/female relations. *Pretty Little Liars* has proven that the old paradigm

can be subverted successfully—and profitably. In the young adult fantasy drama, however, women are a little further ahead, bound together by their mutual mission, and while disagreements over boys and popularity concerns do occasionally arise, they do not dominate these narratives; as a result, twenty years after its premiere, *Buffy* continues to destroy the patriarchy with the aid of a magical scythe.

CONCLUSION

In 1995, *My So-Called Life* was cancelled at ABC after one season due to low ratings; as Stu Bloomberg, ABC's President of Entertainment, said in 1998, "it only got teenage girls" (qtd. in Murphy 165), so ABC considered the series a failure. When *My So-Called Life* originally aired, the teen demographic was not coveted like it is today; in 1996, Lindy DeKoven, NBC's executive vice-president for miniseries and television movies called teenagers "largely an ignored audience, at least by broadcasters" (qtd. in Mifflin para. 6)—and her network had arguably the most successful teen-centered block of programming with its Saturday morning teen sitcoms.

In today's market, not only would *My So-Called Life* be a hit, it would probably find a home on a different network—most likely Freeform, which has proven its appreciation of narratives featuring teens with troubled home lives. Upon putting the series on the fall schedule, Freeform would immediately begin marketing the series aggressively, sending the stars on grassroots campaigns to meet fans and setting them up with social media accounts to make connections with potential viewers. Unlike its previous incarnation, the series would likely star at least one actor who has some character residue—a previous role on a teen drama or in a film with a strong teen fan base—that would guarantee viewers for the pilot episode.

In 2017, a teen drama is a good bet for networks, as long as they can be reasonably sure it will reach viewers. Teenagers are more engaged with popular culture than ever before, and with the advent of streaming video, teens' busy lives no longer impact their television watching habits. Networks like the CW can schedule *The*

Originals and *Reign* for Friday nights and not worry about their market share—their viewers might watch the original showing, they could watch it the next morning, or they might binge watch multiple episodes later. No matter which method teens choose, the network's core viewers are there. As networks are well aware, viewership of teen dramas is not limited to their target audience. Shows like *Pretty Little Liars* have a strong adult fan base; the series even scored the number one spot among cable programs for adults 18-49 in 2016 (Kissell para. 2).

Like its audience, the teen drama has grown increasingly diverse since its inception almost thirty years ago. In *Genre and Television*, Jason Mittell writes that as genre scholars, "we should collect many discursive instances surrounding a given instance of generic process. By viewing the discourses of genre clusters, larger scale patterns and meanings will emerge . . . out of detailed research and specific cultural articulations of definition, interpretation, and evaluation" (25). The teen drama has nearly thirty years of definitive genre history—even longer if one counts its progenitors—and by stepping back and looking at the big picture, scholars can see that it deserves a proper examination. At the very least, we should stop allowing others to dismiss these series as simply "fun"—or the heavily gendered "soapy"—and recognize what they have added to the television canon.

For example, though *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* only received one major Emmy nomination throughout its seven season run—for Season Four's nearly entirely silent "Hush"—its influence on television, both within and outside its genre, is clear. The series introduced a new type of structure to the one hour drama, a type of deep serialization that

reaches back to the newspaper serials of the nineteenth century, wherein a main villain (termed in the series parlance as the Big Bad) is introduced in the early episodes of the season, and the entire season is devoted to defeating him, her, or them. While not every episode will feature the Big Bad, the narrative will deal with smaller parts of how the Scooby Gang will defeat them, giving the audience an idea of how Buffy's work as Slayer is constant—unlike other superhero stories they may have seen, she does not get days off from being the Slayer, nor do the people on her team. This structure ties into the series' feminist themes, as well; Buffy was the first teen feminist heroine of her kind, and *Buffy* presented the idea of heroism as a communal effort, something the young adult fantasy drama and soap continue to a large degree. Many series held up as "quality television" today feature this same kind of structure; *The Walking Dead*—another genre series—has a Big Bad each season, is based in an alternate reality, and features monsters who represent larger cultural concerns, yet it received a great deal of critical acclaim from the moment it premiered. One can only wonder how many of those critics have traced back its heritage to a teen drama. We do know that some of the most successful television writers and producers today have acknowledged their debt to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Shonda Rhimes binged the entire season in a week—along with another teen drama, *Felicity*—before she wrote what would become the pilot script for *Grey's Anatomy*, and Eric Kripke, in speaking with *Vulture* about his latest project, *Timeless*, says, "When I was coming up as a writer, the stuff that inspired me was stuff that's not so much on the air anymore, like *The X-Files* and *Buffy*. These are shows that, at least in their early seasons, were procedurals with dabs of mythology to keep moving the ball forward slowly every week. I think we're aspiring to a similar format on this one"

(McHenry para. 8). If content creators—ones whose series generate serious academic study—have no problem acknowledging the contributions teen dramas make to television as a whole, why do scholars continue to merely dabble in the study of them?

I submit that teen dramas are not given real academic attention the way other genres have been because they are connected to young women. Feminist scholars have made a case for the importance of the soap opera within television studies, but—as with most popular culture fields—many academics do not accept the genre as worthy of scholarly attention. However, those who do are often drawn there as Janice Radway and other researchers were to romance novels: how do we understand the entertainment habits of housewives? What do these pursuits do for them? Could they possibly be subversive in any way? Still, the common denominator in these studies is age—the women surveyed are usually middle-aged. We still struggle with the idea that teenagers have strong opinions about their entertainment choices, or that the material produced for them is in any way real art, designed with a message or complicated at all.

In *Loving with a Vengeance*, Tania Modleski explains that historically, female-directed popular culture has been considered "low art," both in reading and viewing culture and the academy. In fact, "the feminine text itself is often used as a standard by which other products are measured and found to be not wanting" (3). However, feminine texts are constantly reexamined and given their rightful place in the canon, even if things move slower than they should. As scholars, we have yet to truly pull the teen drama out of this dichotomy. Aside from the consideration of the combined age and gender of the intended audience, the mode in which these series operate is another likely reason they

are overlooked. In *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, Ien Ang explains that soap operas activate their viewers' melodramatic imaginations: "the expression of a refusal, or inability, to accept insignificant everyday life as banal and meaningless . . . born of a vague, inarticulate dissatisfaction with existence here and now" (79). Perhaps teen dramas' need to take their viewers into another place, one in which viewers' constant attention to characters' everyday life is needed to further the narrative, offends? After all, in "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy," Ang explains that soap operas, like melodrama, position "personal life [as] the core problematic of the narrative" (158). For the majority of teen dramas, the personal lives shown are those of teenage girls and young adult women—these are the subjectivities privileged in most subgenres, and American society has proven that we do not take them very seriously. We worry about them a great deal—sociologists across the country write book after book about them—but the idea of putting their ideas and concerns at the forefront? That may be a bit much.

As a result of my concern with what I have seen as relative dismissal of the teen drama's generic complexity, I have attempted to show that rather than being one large genre, the teen drama actually has several subgenres within it, all with their own generic codes. Thus, Chapter Two provides an overview of thematic concerns and iconographies associated with three popular subgenres. It is important to note that these subgenres encourage distinct creativity within them—after all, without fresh material, cancellation is imminent. As Barthes writes in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," "*art*, (in the Romantic sense of the term) is a matter of statements of detail, whereas *imagination* is mastery of the code" (123). We can see many failed types of teen drama

where there was little imagination but a great deal of mastering details.[1] Additionally, in Chapters Three through Five, I have shown that these subgenres do distinctive cultural work, particularly regarding feminist concerns. For example, as I suggest in Chapter Three, the white liberal feminism of *The Gilmore Girls* contributes to Rory's sense of privilege, an identity that emerges as highly problematic by the end of the series. The teen soap is known for female friendships that disintegrate over boys; my reading of *Pretty Little Liars* in Chapter Four reveals how the series uses slasher tropes to deconstruct the soap genre to promote, rather than undermine, female friendship. Grounded in third wave feminism, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as I argue in Chapter Five, undermines patriarchal forms of leadership. Further, teen dramas—of all subgenres—also invite their viewers to try on multiple subjectivities, allowing audience members in a vulnerable time in their lives to see many different types of young women so that they may discover what kind of person they would like to become.

The limits of this project have kept me from exploring all of teen drama's subgenres, but each of them deserve their own individual study. In particular, I find that two seem to be evolving in interesting directions: the multigenerational soap and the teen soap. Both subgenres push the teen drama in innovative directions, suggesting that these subgenres are a result of series within the teen drama genre responding to each other and to audience expectations; as Jason Mittell has noted in *Genre and Television*, "a *television genre* is a cultural category, constituted by the generic discourses that posit

[1] In this project, I attempted to showcase series that were successful and failures—but both were excellent examples of the form; the ones that were cancelled generally were victims of circumstance and poor marketing.

definitions, interpretations, and evaluations. Television genres function as cultural shorthand that link together a range of cultural assumptions to a shifting corpus of texts, or *genre television*" (19). As audiences grow savvier about television in general, teen series must respond. Because of the multigenerational soap's pure marketability, it seems a bit easier to bring to the table and therefore innovate as offerings appear; in contrast, the teen soap must differentiate itself from any number of teen-centered series vying for its target audience's attention, and the teen soap's internet presence is a key factor in their increasing popularity and generic evolution.

The multigenerational soap has its roots in series like *Dallas*, where the majority of adult characters rarely act maturely or in a way viewers should emulate in real life, though, in *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang notes that viewers give characters who appear to be "genuine," "lifelike," or "psychologically believable" some leeway in their behavior (33)—namely because to soap viewers, these narratives take place in a world that is constructed upon emotional realism; that is, its realism "is . . . produced by the construction of a *psychological* reality, and is not related to its (illusory) fit to an externally perceptible (social) reality" (47). In these soaps, viewers take no offense to outlandish storylines, like this one from *The O.C.*, a signature multigenerational soap: a billionaire's wife must pay hush money to her old boyfriend in order to keep him from distributing a pornographic movie she once starred in before she married into great wealth. The underlying emotional plot is one the viewer can recognize and perhaps identify with—being ashamed of one's roots and the need to leave where one came from, perhaps at any cost. Outside of fantasy, the multigenerational soap seems to be where networks are investing a great deal of their development efforts in the past ten years—

likely to court the largest audience share—and if one judged these series by a simple plotline review, it might be easy to dismiss them. However, some important cultural work is going on in this subgenre, particularly when it comes to the messages being sent to teenage girls about sexual feelings.

Reign (the CW, 2013-17) is a particularly interesting entry in this subgenre because of its setting—it takes place not simply in France, but in the sixteenth-century French court of Henry II and Catherine de' Medici. The series begins when fifteen-year-old Mary Stuart, more popularly known as Mary, Queen of Scots, is forced to take refuge there after an aborted assassination attempt at the convent where she has been living until her contracted marriage to the French Dauphin, Francis. This series offers historical elements that push subgeneric boundaries. A peculiar change has been made that will likely only irritate those very familiar with the period: Queen Mary's ladies were also all named Mary. Antonia Fraser, noted biographer of the queen, explains that "the Maries[2]," as they are also known, were simply a larger part of Mary's retinue and not the singular small circle of strength that the series depicts them as:

> The Maries . . . were considered "special", not only because they all bore the queen's Christian name, but because they came from four notably honourable houses. Thus Mary Fleming, Mary Seton, Mary Beaton and Mary Livingston are introduced into Mary Stuart's history . . . The word Marie has its etymological derivation in the Icelandic word *maer*, the official designation given to a virgin or

[2] Though Mary generally spoke in French at this time, having lived there for the majority of her life, the series presents everything in English: Henri II becomes Henry, François II becomes Francis. Strangely, however, Mary's mother—a native Frenchwoman but Scottish transplant—becomes Marie de Guise instead of Mary of Guise.

> maid; from there it had come to be used in Scots especially for the maids-of-honour attendant on the queen. (32)

Instead of "the Maries," *Reign* presents the audience with Kenna, Lola, Greer, and Aylee, young women of noble houses who have been friends with Mary since childhood—potentially implying that they were sent with her to France to be educated as children as history proves her ladies were. However, other than guards, with whom Mary will not mix, no one else arrives for her. Why is this? Would the men who came with her to court not provide sufficient romantic entanglements for Mary and her ladies? Quite simply, executive producer Laurie McCarthy sees no reason to adhere closely to historical truth: "In each episode we'll educate people on what element of history helps our story," she said at the 2013 TCA summer press tour (qtd. in de Moraes para. 2). Evidently, Mary's actual story—which includes plot points such as her second husband being murdered through a set explosion—is not sufficiently sensational to provide material for McCarthy's writing staff, even though Mary's reign is often cited as one full of intrigue due to Scotland's tenuous position in relation to England.

In addition to reinterpreting history to allow for more traditionally soaplike plotlines, the series features a vital aspect of the multigenerational soap: acceptance of sexual activity across all age groups, regardless of relationship status. Unlike the family drama, these characters view sex as largely recreational, though the final consummations of relationships are often used for larger narrative and emotional purposes. As a result, some scenes—particularly those featuring the teenagers—can be seen as shocking when taken out of context. In the pilot, Henry and Catherine's eldest daughter, Princess

Elizabeth, is married to Philip II of Spain; Mary and her ladies spy on the consummation along with the court officials and servants who are already present. The girls, all sexually excited by the display and Elizabeth's palpable enjoyment of what they have been taught to fear, are spooked a few minutes into the event and scatter so as to not be caught. Aylee is shocked by their transgression and simply runs. Kenna escapes to a deserted hall to masturbate, where she is suddenly assisted by a man who appears behind her—a man who turns out to be King Henry. For her part, Mary seeks out Francis and has a philosophical discussion about marriage between royalty and love's place in it.

This was not the first time the CW had aired a masturbation scene featuring a female teenager—interestingly, another multigenerational soap, *Gossip Girl*, took care of that a few years earlier. Many critics felt *Reign*'s scene was tasteless and there simply for shock value; as *Variety*'s Brian Steinberg wrote after the pilot aired, "there's pushing the envelope, and there's dunking that envelope in a sink full of bourbon and trying to light it on fire" ("CW Pushes," para. 9) However, what these critics seem to have ignored is the scene leading up to it as well as historical context. For young women of this social class, sexual activity is mysterious, yet it is clearly understood to be focused and purposeful—that is, it should take place within marriage and be for its consummation and the creation of children. Though the Protestant Reformation is sweeping the country, Scotland still remains Catholic—Mary's reign is tied up in attempting to keep it so—and these girls have been taught a great deal about the need for purity. The simple act of spying on Elizabeth and her new husband is a great transgression in itself. This is merely the first

example of many in the series; overwhelmingly, *Reign* is sex-positive in a number of ways and makes a concerted effort not to judge anyone's sexual choices.

The teen soap, like the multigenerational soap, is highly sensational, but it is more often attacked for this sensationalism. This difference is likely because the teen soap tends to focus its sensationalism on its characters' romantic relationships—primarily their sexual activity and the consequences of it. Teen characters are shown with multiple sex partners, struggling with the idea of having sex for the first time, becoming pregnant, getting STDs, considering abortions, and raising children alone or with partners. Some even get married in high school.[3] One series that draws viewers in this way is *East Los High*, but its purposes are multileveled.

East Los High is a multiplatform Hulu original series (2013-present) that has found great success among the Latinx community because, for once, their teenagers are the focus and the storylines—while falling within the confines of the subgenre—are not derogatory or patronizing. In fact, it is the number one series on Hulu Latino and one of the top series in Hulu's original programming overall (Ramasubramanian 335; Block para. 4). The series is set in East Los Angeles, a largely Hispanic area, and focuses on a dance squad at the titular high school and their social circle. *East Los High* is the first English-language series to boast an all-Latinx cast, and creator Carlos Portugal has been

[3] These are the storylines that keep Twitter abuzz and the clickbait coming today, but the idea of them is not new. MTV debuted an anthology series, *Undressed*, in the summer of 1999 that dealt with the relationships of young people in the Los Angeles area—all of which were sexual and some of which were romantic. The brainchild of European director Roland Joffé, the series ran as a late-night soap for MTV until 2002 and featured some future well-known actors in very early roles, like Christina Hendricks. It also starred Adam Brody, Chad Michael Murray, Autumn Reeser, Bryce Johnson, Teal Redmann, Geoff Stults, and Marc Blucas, who all went on to have roles in major teen dramas.

quoted as saying his writers had three rules: "no gardeners, no gang members, and no maids" (Salinas para. 15). While the series has pulled in some gang members in the most recent seasons, they are layered representations rather than the stereotypes audiences are used to; for example, Flaco, who is supposed to be the antagonist in Camila and Jesus's love story through his attempts at pulling Jesus back into gang life, is really a criminal informant who is being manipulated by a corrupt police officer because of his own personal goals to keep his family safe. Even Hernan—Jesse's father, the owner of the tacquería everyone frequents, and the only male adult figure most of these teens can count on—is hinted to have a less-than-legal past, though he is a good role model now. It could be inferred that these changes were added in for realism.

Changes like the appearance of gang members might have been felt necessary because *East Los High* is part of an entertainment-education initiative, only one of the reasons it is a unique offering in the teen soap genre. Its creators, Carlos Portugal and Kathleen Bedoya, collaborated with the Population Media Center, an international nongovernmental organization, with help from the California Family Health Council and other private investors to use the series to "promote sexual and reproductive health, especially among Latina adolescent girls and young women" (Wang and Singhal 1008). The series melds teen soap traditions with *telenovela*—particularly the teen *telenovela*, which simply focuses on teenagers, is highly marketed, and does not end in marriage, necessarily, but more often a satisfying resolution wherein the characters come back together[4]—which means that the storylines are highly sensational but have shorter arcs.

---

[4] For more on the teen *telenovela*, see Eva Lewkowicz, "Rebel Love: Transnational Teen TV vs. Mexican Telenovela Tradition." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 28.2 (2014): 265-80. *Project*

East Los High runs in twenty-one to twenty-four minute episodes, and while the first season did a traditional twenty-four episode season, the remaining three look more like *telenovelas* at twelve episodes each.

In her study, "Racial/Ethnic Identity, Community-Oriented Media Initiatives, and Transmedia Storytelling," Srividya Ramasubramanian notes that the series

> uses the Sabido Method of entertainment-education, inspired by Migual Sabido's use of telenovelas for social change in Mexico . . . Sabido adapted Albert Bandura's social learning theory to create role models in entertainment media for inducing social change . . . In effect, entertainment-education entails deliberate, purposeful placement of educational messages in entertaining programs. (335-36)

Primarily, *East Los High* works to educate Latinx teens on safe sexual behavior, but it is also a message series about the issues that these youths routinely encounter chiefly because of their socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. While sex and its consequences are a large part of the series, subjects like domestic violence and sexual abuse are also long-running topics that affect these teens.

East Los High challenges the prevailing social narrative that portrays Latina teenagers as part of a binary: either a virgin or a whore, this narrative says, Latina teens are kept purposefully un- and misinformed about sex and its consequences and refuse to learn about them even after they get pregnant or contract STIs. Instead, the series asserts

---

MUSE. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. A good overview on the Mexican *telenovela* is Adriana Estill's "The Mexican Telenovela and Its Foundational Fictions." *Latin American Literature and Mass Media*, Ed. Edmundo Paz-Soldan, and Debra A. Castillo. New York: Garland P, 2001. 169-189. Print.

that young Latinas are more informed than other Americans realize about sex and its consequences because they are surrounded by them. The series is populated by characters living with young parents who constantly remind their children not to get into similar situations; with the exception of Vanessa, whose father is well-off and sends child support money each month, these teens' families are barely making it. *East Los High*'s young Latinas make deliberate sexual choices, primarily based on desire—sometimes purely sexual and sometimes looking toward their futures.

What is particularly important about *East Los High* is that these female characters actively choose or deny sexual activity, displaying sexual agency, which disrupts the prevailing cultural narrative wherein Latinas are either helpless victims of the Latino sex drive or oversexed themselves and, therefore, willing participants. In fact, these young women think very carefully about their sexual activity; for a number of them, it is tied directly to their social status—and potentially, where they end up after high school. There is much discussion about "a good man" among these teen girls, something that does not take place much in other teen soaps. However, they also worry about the outcome of sexual activity:

> For the girls of East Los High, the stakes are particularly high. Social status is directly tied to the desirability of the guy you are dating, so being sexually active has serious social capital.

> But if you get pregnant, it's game over. You'll become just like your *mama sufrida*[5]—a high school dropout working multiple cleaning jobs just to pay the bills. (Salinas para. 12-13)

The series reinforces this fear through characters like Ceci, whose choices throughout the series—and her initial inability to stand up for herself—lead to pregnancy, homelessness, and domestic violence. However, the narrative not only endorses female agency, it asks its female teen characters to examine their lives and discover patterns of behavior that lead to problems; in Ceci's character, viewers see how depending on men can reduce one's belief in oneself. Her growth throughout the narrative reflects the series' theme of female strength and independence—yet another important shade of difference from the stereotypical fiery Latina.

As new entries like *East Los High* suggest, the teen soap is a multifaceted form; it is definitely the home of watercooler series like *Pretty Little Liars* where it feels like every episode is meant to make audiences gasp in shock. However, there is also an increasing tendency to use this subgenre didactically; some series do this in small doses, such as *Riverdale*'s more progressive gender roles and narrative call-outs of sexist attitudes, hoping to improve current generations' viewpoints on important subjects. Additionally, audiences have seen the subgenre grow with multiplatform production as well as more direct calls for changes in teen behavior; both can be seen in Hulu's *East*

[5] Suffering mother

Los High, which also represents a more diverse teen soap with its all-Latinx cast. Either way, the subgenre is more than catfights and secret romances with inappropriate lovers.

Along with analyses of additional subgenres, it would also be helpful in an expanded version of this study to add industrial and historical perspectives to further round out our understanding of the emergence of the teen drama genre. For example, there have been studies of the WB network—Valerie Wee's being one of the most useful for the purposes of this dissertation—but the same cannot be said of FOX, the CW, or Freeform. The CW, as the combination of the WB and UPN, needs examination in light of how it handles race and class as a conglomerate—the loss of UPN, as the "urban contemporary" network, meant less representation of minority families in teen television for some time. The creation of the CW brought more moneyed families into the teen drama genre, but the idea of class in teen drama was brought up in *Beverly Hills, 90210* and class conflict perhaps done the best in *The O.C.*—clearly, FOX is invested in this concept. Freeform (formerly ABC Family) and its use of social media deserves significant analysis through the lens of reception studies. No matter how one chooses to approach these networks, it is clear upon reading interviews with series creators and showrunners that teen dramas get many notes from the network; how do those notes shape the narrative? Were the WB and later teen-focused networks like ABC in the time of *My So-Called Life* and so intrusive that they changed the entire idea of the series?[6] Luckily, unlike other genres, the teen drama appeared at a time where scholars have what feels like infinite material at their fingertips to help them uncover these secrets.

[6] See Caren Murphy for more on ABC bosses' meddling in this series.

This study identifies several key subgenres of teen drama and uses a feminist lens to examine the cultural work of three important series: *Gilmore Girls* as family drama; *Pretty Little Liars* as teen soap; and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as young adult fantasy drama. This approach necessarily excludes other areas ripe for analysis. In a later version of the project, I would like to return to *Gilmore Girls*, especially, and do an audience study to discover why this series, in particular, is so popular with evangelical Christian audiences when so many of the decisions the Gilmore girls make are not aligned with mainline evangelical beliefs. (I do not think it can be as simple as the series' seeming pro-birth stance.) The teen drama's audience is fascinating; they age in to these series that are made just for them, yet if the narrative is compelling enough, when the intended audience leaves the age bracket, they take these series with them into adulthood. If one were to poll American adults in the thirty- to forty-year-old age range, it would be likely that they have a favorite teen drama—perhaps one they loved as a teen or young adult, perhaps one they are watching as an adult today. The proof is in the *Gilmore* pudding; Netflix's revival of *Gilmore Girls* drew nearly five million viewers on average in the 18-49 demographic (Schwindt para. 1). Clearly, the genre is doing something right if *Gilmore Girls'* viewers are that loyal almost ten years after the series ends. As I have discussed in this study, the teen drama is a multifaceted form; it draws on a number of influences to reach as many teenagers as possible. And while it may stumble at times, as evidenced in *Gilmore Girls*, its passionate following proves that the cultural work it strives to accomplish is coming through: *Buffy*'s vision of communal heroism, for example, has not only inspired teen viewers but academics around the globe, and *Pretty Little Liars* has proven that you can make a stylish and slick soap with smart teen girls

who value each other more than popularity or boyfriends. Teenagers are getting the message. The only question is now, are we?

WORKS CITED

"A House Is Not a Home." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

Adalian, Josef. "Why *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* Is Probably Going to Break the Internet." *Vulture.com*. New York Media, LLC, 23 Nov. 2016. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Altman, Rick. "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." *Cinema Journal* 23.3 (Spring 1984): 6-18. Rpt. in *Film Genre Reader II*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. 26-40. Print.

Andreeva, Nellie. "ABC Family to Be Renamed as Freeform." *Deadline*. Deadline, 6 Oct. 2015. Web. 23 Jan. 2017.

Ang, Ien. "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy." *Feminist Television Criticism*. Ed. Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997. 155-166. Print.

--. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. Trans. Della Couling. New York: Methuen, 1985. Print.

"Angel." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season on DVD*. Writ. David Greenwalt. Dir. Scott Brazil. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens to the Twenties*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. Ebook.

"Band Candy." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Jane Espenson. Dir. Michael Lange. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Banks, Miranda J. "A Boy for All Planets: *Roswell, Smallville,* and the Teen Male Melodrama." *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*. Ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI, 2004. 17-28. Print.

Barbaccia, Holly. "Buffy in the 'Terrible House'." *Slayage* 1.4 (2001): n.pag. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967. Print.

--. "Fashion, a Strategy of Desire: Round-table Discussion with Roland Barthes, Jean Duvignaud, and Henri Lefebvre." *The Language of Fashion*. Trans. Andy Stafford. Ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter. New York: Berg, 2006. 86-90. Print.

--. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. and Ed. Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang: New York, 1977. 79-124. Print.

--. "Language and Clothing." *The Language of Fashion*. Trans. Andy Stafford. Ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter. New York: Berg, 2006. 21-32. Print.

--. "Myth Today." *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Print.

--. “Photography and Electoral Appeal.” From *Mythologies*. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* 2nd ed. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. 1320-1321. Print.

--. “The Discourse of History.” *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989. 127-140. Print.

Bavidge, Jenny. “Chosen Ones: Reading the Contemporary Teen Heroine.” *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*. Ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI, 2004. 41-53. Print.

Beail, Linda. “The City, the Suburbs, and Stars Hollow: The Return of the Evening Soap Opera.” *You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics, and Popular Culture*. Ed. Lilly J. Goren. Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 2009. 93-114. E-book.

Best, Amy L. “Freedom, Constraint, and Family Responsibility: Teens and Parents Collaboratively Negotiate Around the Car, Class, Gender, and Culture.” *Journal of Family Issues* 27.1 (2006): 55-84. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 21 Mar. 2017.

Beverly Hills, 90210. Creators Aaron Spelling and Darren Star. Perf. Jason Priestley, Jennie Garth, Shannen Doherty, Luke Perry, Tori Spelling, and Brian Austin Green. Paramount, 2006-2010. DVD.

Bindig, Lori. *Dawson’s Creek: A Critical Understanding*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. Print.

"Blame Booze and Melville." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Jamie Babbitt. Writ. Daniel Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

Block, Alex Ben. "Hulu's Hit PSA Is Beating *Grey's Anatomy*: *East Los High*, a Racy Soap Designed to Curb Teen Pregnancy, Uses 'Salacious' Storylines to Lure Kids to the Message." *Hollywood Reporter*, 2 Aug. 2013, p. 26. *Biography in Context*, 14 Feb. 2017.

Bradley, Laura. "All Your Burning Questions About Netflix's *Gilmore Girls*, Answered." *VanityFair.com*. Condé Nast, 1 Dec. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Brantlinger, Patrick. "What is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37.1 (Jun. 1982): 1-28. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Dec. 2012.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Creator Joss Whedon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, Anthony Stewart Head, David Boreanaz, and James Marsters. 20th Century Fox, 2002. DVD.

Burks, Robin. "'The Shannara Chronicles:' Everything You Need To Know About MTV's New Fantasy Series." *Tech Times*. TechTimes Inc., 29 Jan. 2016. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

Buscombe, Edward. "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema." *Screen* 11.2 (March-April 1970): 33-45. Rpt. in *Film Genre Reader II*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. 11-25. Print.

Busse, Kristina. “Crossing the Final Taboo: Family, Sexuality, and Incest in Buffyverse Fan Fiction.” *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 207-217. Print.

Buttsworth, Sara. “‘Bite Me’: Buffy and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-hero." *Continuum* 16.2 (2002): 185-99. *Project MUSE*. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

Cart, Michael. *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2010. Ebook.

Cawelti, John. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976. Print.

--. *The Six-Gun Mystique.* 2nd ed. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1984.

--. *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1999. Print.

Chandler, Holly. “Slaying the Patriarchy: Transfusions of the Vampire Metaphor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.” *Slayage* 3.1 (2003): n.pag. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

“Choices.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. David Fury. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Christensen, Kimberly. "'With Whom Do You Believe Your Lot Is Cast?': White Feminists and Racism." *Signs* 22.3 (Spring 1997): 617-648. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Feb. 2017.

Christensen, Kyle. "The Final Girl versus Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*: Proposing a Stronger Model of Feminism in Slasher Horror Cinema." *Studies in Popular Culture* 34.1 (Fall 2011): 23-47. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 Jul. 2016.

Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. Print.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

"Consequences." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Marti Noxon. Dir. Michael Gershman. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Crazy." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Patrick Norris. Writ. Andy Reaser. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 138-67. *Google Scholar*. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Curry, Agnes B. and Josef Velazquez. "'Just a Family Legend': The Hidden Logic of *Buffy*'s 'Chosen Family'." *Buffy Goes Dark: Essays on the Final Two Seasons of* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *on Television*. Ed. Lynne Y. Edwards, Elizabeth L. Rambo, and James B. South. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 143-166. Print.

Davis, Glyn and Kay Dickinson. "Introduction." *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, and Identity*. Eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI, 2004. 1-13. Print.

Davis, Glyn and Kay Dickinson, eds. *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, and Identity*. London: BFI, 2004. Print.

de Moraes, Lisa. "TCA: CW's First Crunchy-Gravel Drama 'Reign' Flirts With History." *Deadline.com*. Penske Business Media, LLC. 30 Jul. 2013. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

Detmering, Laura. "'Good Breeding' and 'Acute Discernment': The Politics of Literacy and Family in 'Gilmore Girls'." *Studies in Popular Culture* 34.2 (Spring 2012): 1-21. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

Dika, Vera. *Games of Terror:* Halloween, Friday the 13th, *and the Films of the Stalker Cycle*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1990. Print.

"Dirty Girls." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Seventh Season on DVD*. Writ. Drew Goddard. Dir. Michael Gershman. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Dopplegängland." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Dockterman, Eliana. “Gilmore Girls Creator Amy Sherman-Palladino Wishes You Weren’t So Obsessed With Rory’s Boyfriends.” *Time.com*. Time, Inc., 2 Nov. 2016. Web. 24. Feb. 2017.

Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002. E-book.

“Don’t Look Now.” *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Arlene Sanford. Writ. Jonell Lennon. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2015. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Douglas, Susan. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. London: Penguin Books, 1995. Print.

Dow, Bonnie. *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since 1970*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996. Print.

Driscoll, Catherine. *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Berg, 2011. Print.

Early, Frances. "Staking Her Claim: Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Transgressive Woman Warrior." *Journal of Popular Culture* 35.3 (2001): 11-28. *Project MUSE*. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

East Los High. Creators Carlos Portugal and Kathleen Bedoya. Perf. Danielle Vega, Gabriel Chavarria, Alexandra Rodriguez, and Vanessa Vasquez. Wise Entertainment and Population Media Center, 2013-2017. Hulu.

“Empty Places.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Seventh Season on DVD*. Writ. Drew Z. Greenberg. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"End of Days." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Seventh Season on DVD*. Writ. Jane Espenson and Douglas Petrie. Dir. Marita Grabiak. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Faith, Hope, & Trick." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. David Greenwalt. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Fall." *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*. Dir. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Netflix, 2016. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

"Family." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: *The Complete Fifth Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Feasey, Rebecca. *Masculinity and Popular Television*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP., 2008. E-book.

Feuer, Jane. "Genre Study and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Allen. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987. 138-159. Print.

Fiske, John, and John Hartley. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen, 1978. Print.

"For Whom the Bell Tolls." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Lesli Linka Glatter. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2011. *Netflix*. Web. 4 Mar. 2017.

Fraser, Antonia. *Mary, Queen of Scots*. New York: Delacourt P, 1969. Print.

Gamber, Francesca. “Riding the Third Wave: The Multiple Feminisms of *Gilmore Girls*.” *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 114-131. Print.

“Game Over, Charles.” *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. I. Marlene King. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2015. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Geraghty, Christine. *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime-Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity P, 1991. Print.

Gilmore Girls. Creator Amy Sherman-Palladino. Perf. Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, Scott Patterson, and Melissa McCarthy. Warner Home Video, 2004-2007. DVD.

“Gingerbread.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Thania St. John and Jane Espenson. Dir. James Whitmore, Jr. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Gledhill, Christine. “History of Genre Criticism.” *The Cinema Book*. Ed. Pam Cook. London: BFI, 1985. 58-64. Print.

Goldberg, Lesley. “ABC Family Plots Big Scripted Music Push as Focus Shifts to "Becomers." *The Hollywood Reporter*. The Hollywood Reporter, 14 Apr. 2015. Web. 23 Jan. 2017.

--. “It's Official: 'Pretty Little Liars' to End With Season 7.” *The Hollywood Reporter.com*. The Hollywood Reporter. 29 Aug. 2016. Web. 5 Mar. 2017.

Graham, Lauren. *Talking as Fast as I Can: From* Gilmore Girls *to* Gilmore Girls*, (and Everything in Between)*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2016. Print.

Grant, Barry Keith. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*. London: Wallflower P, 2007. E-book.

--. "Introduction." *Film Genre Reader II*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. 11-25. Print.

Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

--. "The Spectacle of the Other." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (Culture, Media and Identities)*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: SAGE, 1997. 223-279. Print.

"Happy Birthday, Baby." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Gail Mancuso. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2003. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

Hawkins, Paul. "Season Six and the Supreme Ordeal." *Buffy Goes Dark: Essays on the Final Two Seasons of* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *on Television*. Ed. Lynne Y. Edwards, Elizabeth L. Rambo, and James B. South. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 183-197. Print.

"He's Slippin' 'Em Bread . . . Dig?" *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Kenny Ortega. Writ. Daniel Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 27 Feb. 2017.

"Help Wanted." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Chris Long. Writ. Allen Heinberg. Warner Brothers, 2002. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

"Helpless." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. David Fury. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Highfill, Samantha. "Gilmore Creator Talks Logan." *Entertainment Weekly*. Time Inc., 21 Nov. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Hills, Matt. "*Dawson's Creek*: 'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'?" *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*. Ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI, 2004. 54-67. Print.

Hine, Thomas. *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience*. New York: Perennial, 1999. Print.

Hollows, Joanne. *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. Print.

"Homecoming." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. David Greenwalt. Dir. David Greenwalt. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

hooks, bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.

"Hot Water." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Chad Lowe. Writ. Andy Reaser. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2013. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

"Hush." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"I Must Confess." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Norman Buckley. Writ. Oliver Goldstick. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2011. *Netflix*. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

"In the Clamor and the Clangor." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Michael Grossman. Writ. Sheila R. Lawrence and Janet Leahy. Warner Brothers, 2004. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Ingram, Mathew. "The Sulzberger Dynasty Tightens Its Grip on the New York Times." *Fortune*. Time Inc., 19 Oct. 2016. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

"Innocence." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Jensen, Jeff. "Looking Back at 'My So-Called Life.'" *EntertainmentWeekly.com*. Time Inc., 10 Sept. 2004. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Johnson, Sara, Robert W. Blum, and Jay N. Giedd. "Adolescent Maturity and the Brain: The Promise and Pitfalls of Neuroscience Research in Adolescent Health Policy." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45 (2009): 216-221. *Science Digest*. Web. 18 Oct. 2016.

Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2005. Print.

Kappel, Aaron and Jessica Friday. "'Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life' Has a White Feminism Problem." *The Establishment*. The Establishment, 29 Nov. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Keeler, Amanda R. "Branding the Family Drama: Genre Formations and Critical Perspectives on *Gilmore Girls*." *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on* Gilmore Girls. Ed. David Scott Diffrient with David Lavery. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2010. 19-35. Print.

Kimmel, Daniel. *The Fourth Network: How Fox Broke the Rules and Reinvented Television*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 2004. Print.

"Kingdom of the Blind." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Chad Lowe. Writ. Joseph Dougherty. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

Kissell, Rick. "Ratings: 'Pretty Little Liars' Strong, 'Shadowhunters' Premiere Solid in Freeform Launch." *Variety.com*. Variety Media LLC, 13 Jan. 2016. Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

Kociemba, David. "From Beneath You, It Foreshadows: Why *Buffy*'s First Season Matters." *Reading Joss Whedon*. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthea Masson, and David Lavery. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2014. 22-39. Print.

Kuhn, Annette. “Women’s Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera, and Theory.” *Feminist Television Criticism*. Ed. Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D’Acci, and Lynn Spigel. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997. 145-154. Print.

--. and Guy Westwell. “Genre.” *Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. E-book.

Kurutz, Steven. “Fans Flock to Town That Inspired ‘Gilmore Girls’.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times Co., 26 Oct. 2016. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.

Life Unexpected. Creator Liz Tigelaar. Perf. Britt Robertson, Shiri Appleby, and Kristoffer Polaha. Warner Home Video, 2010. DVD.

Lizardi, Ryan. “‘Re-Imagining’ Hegemony and Misogyny in the Contemporary Slasher Remake.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38.3 (2010): 113-21. *Student Resources in Context*. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

McHenry, Jackson. “Showrunners Shawn Ryan and Eric Kripke on *Timeless*, the Perils of History, and How Their Series Is Like *The X-Files*.” *Vulture.com*. New York Media, LLC, 12 Dec. 2016. Web. 27 Mar. 2017.

Markovitz, Jonathan. “Female Paranoia as Survival Skill: Reason or Pathology in a *Nightmare on Elm Street*?” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 17.3 (2000): 211-20. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Mifflin, Lawrie. “TV Aims Few Shows At a Teen-Age Audience.” *The New York Times.com*. The New York Times Company, 3 Dec. 1996. Web. 27 Mar. 2017.

Mittell, Jason. "A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory." *Cinema Journal* 40.3 (2001): *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

--. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

--. *Television and American Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Modleski, Tania. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

--. "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas: Notes on a Feminine Narrative Form." *Film Quarterly* 33.1 (Autumn 1979): 12-21. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Dec. 2016.

Moseley, Rachel. "The Teen Series." *The Television Genre Book*. Ed. Glen Creeber. London: BFI, 2008. 41-43. Print.

Mukherjea, Ananya. "'It's Like Some Primal, Some Animal Force…That Used to Be Us': Animality, Humanity, and Moral Careers in the Buffyverse." *Reading Joss Whedon*. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthea Masson, and David Lavery. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2014. 53-69. Print.

--. "When You Kiss Me, I Want to Die": Gothic Relationships and Identity on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Slayage* 7.2 (2008): n.pag. Web. 5. Mar. 2014.

Mumford, Laura Stempel. *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women, and Television Genre*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.

Murphy, Caryn. "'It Only Got Teenage Girls': Narrative Strategies and the Teenage Perspective of *My So-Called Life*." *Dear Angela: Remembering* My So-Called Life. Ed. Michele Byers and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. 165-178. Print.

Murray, Susan. "Saving Our So-Called Lives: Girl Fandom, Adolescent Subjectivity, and *My So-Called Life*." *Dear Angela: Remembering* My So-Called Life. Ed. Michele Byers and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. 35-48. Print.

My So-Called Life. Creator Winnie Holzman. Perf. Claire Danes, A.J. Langer, Wilson Cruz, and Jared Leto. Shout Factory, 2007. DVD.

Neale, Steve. *Genre and Hollywood*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

--. "Questions of Genre." *Screen* 31.1 (Spring 1990): 45-66. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Dec. 2016.

Nelson, Matthew C. "Stars Hollow, Chilton, and the Politics of Education in *Gilmore Girls*." *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on* Gilmore Girls. Ed. David Scott Diffrient with David Lavery. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2010. 202-213. Print.

Nemetz, Dave. "*Gilmore Girls* Panel: The Cast Reflects on Returning for *A Year in the Life*." *TVLine.com*. TVLine Media, LLC, 29 Nov. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

"Never Letting Go." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. J. Miller Tobin. Writ. Bryan M. Holdman. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2011. *Netflix*. Web. 5 Mar. 2017.

Ng, Philiana. “Bunheads’ Creator Amy Sherman-Palladino Sounds Off on Shonda Rhimes Comments.” *TheHollywoodReporter.com*. The Hollywood Reporter, 18 Jun. 2012. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Och, Dana. “All Laura Palmer’s Children: *Twin Peaks* and Gendering the Discourse of Influence.” *Cinema Journal* 55.3 (Spring 2016): 131-36. *Project MUSE*. Web. 18 Jul. 2016.

“One’s Got Class and the Other One Dyes.” *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Steven Robman. Writ. Daniel Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2002. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

“Out of Mind, Out of Sight.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Reza Badiyi. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

“Passion.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Ty King. Dir. Michael E. Gershman. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Payne-Mulliken, Susan and Valerie Renegar. “Buffy Never Goes It Alone: The Rhetorical Construction of Sisterhood in the Final Season.” Buffy *Meets the Academy: Essays on the Episodes and Scripts as Texts*. Ed. Kevin K. Durand. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 57-77. Print.

Pender, Patricia. *I’m Buffy and You’re History:* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and Contemporary Feminism*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016. Print.

Petridis, Sotiris. “A Historical Approach to the Slasher Film.” *Film International* 12.1 (2014): 76-84. *H. W. Wilson*. Web. 18 Jul. 2016.

Pew Research Center, "Summary Table: Religious Composition of U.S. Adults." *Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center, 2014. Web. 10 Mar. 2017.

"Pilot." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Lesli Linka Glatter. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2000. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

"Pilot." *Life Unexpected: The Complete First and Second Seasons.* Writ. Liz Tigelaar. Dir. Gary Fleder. Warner Home Video, 2011. DVD.

"Pilot." *My-So Called Life*. Writ. Winnie Holzman. Dir. Scott Winant. Shout Factory, 2007. DVD.

"Pilot." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Lesli Linka Glatter. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2010. *Netflix*. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.

"Pilot." *Star-Crossed*. Writ. Meredith Averill. Dir. Gary Fleder. Warner Bros., 2014. Netflix.

Pinedo, Isabel Cristina. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. New York: S U of New York P, 1997. Print.

Playdon, Zoë-Jane. "'What You Are, What's to Come': Feminism, Citizenship and the Divine." *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to* Buffy *and* Angel. Ed. Roz Kaveney. London: Tauris Parke, 2001. 120-47. Print.

Powell, Kendall. "How Does the Teenage Brain Work?" *Nature* 442 (2006): 865-867. *General Science FullText (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

"Presenting Lorelai Gilmore." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Chris Long. Writ. Sheila E. Lawrence. Warner Brothers, 2001. *Netflix*. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

Pretty Little Liars. Developer I. Marlene King. Perf. Lucy Hale, Ashley Benson, Troian Bellisario, and Shay Mitchell. Warner Horizon Television, 2010-present. Netflix.

"*Pretty Little Liars'* Mandi Line Spills Her Secrets About the New Aeropostale Line, Now Available!" *InStyle*, Time, Inc. 9 Jan. 2014. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.

"Pretty Little Liars Summer Finale—Face to Face." *ABCFamily.com*. ABC Family. n.d. Web. 6 Mar. 2017.

"Primeval." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. David Fury. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Raincoats and Recipes." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2004. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Ramasubramanian, Srividya. "Racial/Ethnic Identity, Community-Oriented Media Initiatives, and Transmedia Storytelling." *The Information Society* 32.5 (2016): 333-342. *Education Source*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017.

Reign. Creators Laurie McCarthy and Stephanie SenGupta. Perf. Adelaide Kane, Toby Regbo, Torrance Coombs, and Caitlin Stasey. Warner Bros. Television, 2013-present. Netflix.

"Restless." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Riverdale. Developer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa. Perf. K.J Apa, Lili Reinhart, Camila Mendes, and Cole Sprouse. Warner Bros. Television, 2017. The CW Streaming.

Rose, Anita. "Of Creatures and Creators: *Buffy* Does *Frankenstein*." *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 133-142. Print.

Ross, Sharon Marie. "Defining Teen Culture: The N Network." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 61-77. Print.

--. and Louisa Ellen Stein. "Introduction: Watching Teen TV." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 3-26. Print.

Salinas, Brenda. "'East Los High': Not Just Another Teen Soap." *NPR.org*. NPR, 11 Jul. 2013. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

Schatz, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres*. Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1981. Print.

Schiller, Herbert I. "Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1991): 13–28. Rpt. in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*. Rev. ed. Ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, MA: Blackwell P, 2006. 295-310. Print.

"School Hard." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. David Greenwalt. Dir. John Kretchmer. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Schwindt, Oriana. "'Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life' Ratings: Solid Start for Netflix Series." *Variety.com*. Variety Media, LLC, 1 Dec. 2016. Web. 28 Mar. 2017.

Shannara Chronicles, The. Developers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar. Perf. Austin Butler, Poppy Drayton, and Ivana Baquero. Farah Films, 2016-present. Netflix.

"Single Fright Female." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Joanna Kerns. Writ. Oliver Goldstick and Maya Goldsmith. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Smythe, Dallas W. "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work." *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981. 22-51. Rpt. in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*. Rev. ed. Ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, MA: Blackwell P, 2006. 230-256. Print.

"So . . . Good Talk." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Jamie Babbitt. Writ. Lisa Randolph. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Spicer, Arwen. "'It's Bloody Brilliant!": The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*." *Slayage* 4.3 (2004): n.pag. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

--. "'Love's Bitch but Man Enough to Admit It': Spike's Hybridized Gender." *Slayage* 2.3 (2002): n.pag. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

"Spring." *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*. Dir. Daniel Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino and Daniel Palladino. Netflix, 2016. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Star-Crossed. Creator Meredith Averill. Perf. Aimee Teegarden, Matt Lanter, Grey Damon, Malese Jow. Warner Bros., 2014. Netflix.

Stebner, Ellen. "Lorelai Gilmore, Stealth Antihero." *VanityFair.com*. Condé Nast, 5 Jul. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

Stein, Louisa Ellen. *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2015. Print.

--. "Pushing at the Margins: Teenage Angst in Teen TV and Audience Response." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 224-243. Print.

Steinberg, Brian. "CW Pushes Limits of Sex on Network TV With 'Reign'." *Variety.com*. Variety Media, LLC, 11 Oct. 2013. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

--. "Disney's ABC Family Cable Network Mulling Reboot." *Variety*. Variety, 3 Dec. 2014. Web. 23 Jan. 2017.

Stephey, M.J. "Gen-X: The Ignored Generation?" *Time*. Time, 16 Apr. 2008. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.

"Stolen Kisses." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Zetna Fuentes. Writ. Joseph Dougherty. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

"Summer." *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*. Dir. Daniel Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino and Daniel Palladino. Netflix, 2016. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

"Surface Tension." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Norman Buckley. Writ. Joseph Dougherty. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2011. *Netflix*. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

"Surprise." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Marti Noxon. Dir. Michael Lange. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002. DVD.

Symonds, Gwyn. "'Solving Problems with Sharp Objects': Female Empowerment, Sex and Violence in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Slayage* 3.3-4 (2003): n.pag. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

"Taking This One to the Grave." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Ron Lagomarsino. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

"Teen." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford UP, 2017. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.

"Teenager." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford UP, 2017. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.

"That's What You Get, Folks, For Makin' Whoopee." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Bethany Rooney. Writ. Rebecca Rand Kirshner. Warner Brothers, 2006. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

"The Big One." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Jamie Babbitt. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2002. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

"The Blonde Leading the Blind." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Arlene Sanford. Writ. Charlie Craig. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 6 Mar. 2017.

"The Dark Age." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Dean Batali and Rob Des Hotel. Dir. Bruce Seth Green. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The First Secret." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Dana Gonzales. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2011. *Netflix*. Web. 16 Mar. 2017.

"The Harvest." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. John Kretchmer. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The 'I' in Team." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. David Fury. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The Initiative." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. Douglas Petrie. Dir. James A. Contner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The Lady Killer." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Ron Lagomarsino. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

"The Naked Truth." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Elodie Keene. Writ. Oliver Goldstick and Francesca Rollins. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 16 Mar. 2017.

"The Prom." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Marti Noxon. Dir. David Solomon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The Puppet Show." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season on DVD*. Writ. Dean Batali and Rob Des Hotel. Dir. Ellen Pressman. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"The River's Edge." *Riverdale.* The CW, WHDF, Huntsville, 27 Jan. 2017.

"The Wish." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Third Season on DVD*. Writ. Marti Noxon. Dir. David Greenwalt. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"There's No Place Like Homecoming." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Norman Buckley. Writ. Maya Goldsmith. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2010. *Netflix*. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

"To Live and Let Diorama." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Jackson Douglas. Writ. Daniel Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

Todorov, Tzvetan. "Structural Analysis of Narrative." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* 2nd ed. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. 2023-2030. Print.

"Touched." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Seventh Season on DVD*. Writ. Rebecca Rand Kirshner. Dir. David Solomon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Tseng, Ada. "You Break, You Buy: The Indelible Mark of *Gilmore Girls*." *Asian Pacific Arts*. The Regents of the University of California, 23 Aug. 2006. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Tudor, Andrew. "Genre." *Film Genre Reader II*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. 3-10. Print. *Excerpt from "Genre," from Tudor, Andrew. *Theories of Film*. New York: Viking P, 1973. 131-150. Print.

Turner, Graeme. *Film as Social Practice*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.

"unmAsked." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Lesli Linka Glatter. Writ. I. Marlene King. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

Veronica Mars. Creator Rob Thomas. Perf. Kristen Bell, Percy Daggs III, Jason Dohring, Teddy Dunn, and Amanda Seyfried. Warner Home Video, 2005-2007. DVD.

Wallis, Claudia. "What Makes Teens Tick?" *Time* 163.19 (10 May 2004): 56-65. *Google Scholar*. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

Wang, Hna, and Arvind Singhal. "*East Los High*: Transmedia Edutainment to Promote the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Latina/o Americans." *American Journal of Public Health* 106.6 (June 2016): 1002-1010. *CINAHL Complete*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017.

Watson, Kathryn. "Feminism, Freedom and 'The Gilmore Girls'." *RELEVANT Magazine*. RELEVANT Media Group, 5 Dec. 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

"We've Got Magic to Do." *Gilmore Girls*. Dir. Michael Zinberg. Writ. Daniel Palladino. Warner Brothers, 2005. *Netflix*. Web. 25 Feb. 2017.

Wee, Valerie. "Teen Television and the WB Television Network." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 43-60. Print.

"Welcome to the Hellmouth." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Charles Martin Smith. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"What Lies Beneath." *Pretty Little Liars*. Dir. Patrick Norris. Writ. Jonell Lennon. Warner Horizon Television and Alloy Entertainment, 2012. *Netflix*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

"What's My Line? Part 1." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Howard Gordon and Marti Noxon. Dir. David Solomon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Whelehan, Imelda. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. New York: NYU P, 1995, Print.

"When She Was Bad." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

"Who Are You?" *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fourth Season on DVD*. Writ. Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. DVD.

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "'There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' Buffy': *Buffy* and the Monsters of Teen Life." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 27.2 (Summer 1999): 16-23. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

--. "'Who Died and Made Her the Boss?' Patterns of Mortality in *Buffy*." *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 3-17. Print.

--. *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005. Print.

Williams, J.P. "Choosing Your Own Mother: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in *Buffy*." *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 61-72. Print.

"Winter." *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*. Dir. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Writ. Amy Sherman-Palladino. Netflix, 2016. *Netflix*. Web. 28 Feb. 2017.

Wiseman, Rosalind. *Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World*. 2nd edition. New York: Three Rivers P, 2009. Print.

Woods, Faye. "Generation Gap? Mothers, Daughters and Music." Gilmore Girls *and the Politics of Identity: Essays on Family and Feminism in the Television Series*. Ed. Ritch Calvin. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 127-142. Print.

Wright, Will. *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1975. Print.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SELECTED AMERICAN TEEN DRAMAS BY SUBGENRE

Progenitors

James at 15 (1977-78, NBC)

Fame (1981-87, NBC/Syndication)

21 Jump Street (1987-91, FOX)

The Wonder Years (1988-93, ABC)

Coming-of-Age Dramas

My So-Called Life (1994-95, ABC)

Party of Five (1994-2000, FOX)

Dawson's Creek (1998-2003, the WB)

Felicity (1998-2002, the WB)

Freaks and Geeks (1999-2000, NBC)

Time of Your Life (1999-2000, FOX)

Caitlin's Way (2000-02, Nickelodeon)

Young Americans (2000, the WB)

Glee (2009-15, FOX)

Huge (2010, ABC Family)

Recovery Road (2016, Freeform)

Family Dramas

7th Heaven (1996-2007, the WB/the CW)

Gilmore Girls (2000-07, the WB/the CW)

Everwood (2002-2006, the WB)

Summerland (2004-05, the WB)

Jack and Bobby (2004-05, the WB)

Veronica Mars (2004-07, UPN/the CW)

Friday Night Lights (2006-11, NBC/DirecTV)

Life Unexpected (2010-11, the CW)

The Fosters (2013-present, ABC Family/Freeform)

Multigenerational Soaps

The O.C. (2003-07, FOX)

One Tree Hill (2003-12, the WB/the CW)

Hidden Palms (2007, the CW)

Gossip Girl (2007-12, the CW)

The Secret Life of the American Teenager (2008-13, ABC Family)

Switched at Birth (2011-17, ABC Family/Freeform)

The Lying Game (2011-13, ABC Family)

The Carrie Diaries (2013-14, the CW)

Reign (2013-17, the CW)

Finding Carter (2014-15, MTV)

Teen Soaps

Beverly Hills, 90210 (1990-2000, FOX)

Malibu Shores (1996, NBC)

Undressed (1999-2002, MTV)

Popular (1999-2001, the WB)

90210 (2008-13, the CW)

Pretty Little Liars (2010-present, ABC Family/Freeform)

Skins (2011, MTV)

The Carrie Diaries (2013-14, the CW)

Twisted (2013-14, ABC Family)

East Los High (2013-present, Hulu)

Scream (2015-present, MTV)

Guilt (2016, Freeform)

Riverdale (2017-present, the CW)

Young Adult Fantasy Drama

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003, the WB/UPN)

Roswell (1999-2002, the WB)

Smallville (2001-11, the WB/the CW)

Kyle XY (2006-09, ABC Family)

The Nine Lives of Chloe King (2011, ABC Family)

Star-Crossed (2014, the CW)

The 100 (2014-present, the CW)

The Shannara Chronicles (2016-present, MTV)

Young Adult Fantasy Soap

Point Pleasant (2005, FOX)

The Vampire Diaries (2009-17, the CW)

Teen Wolf (2011-present, MTV)

The Secret Circle (2011-12, the CW)

The Originals (2013-present, the CW)

Ravenswood (2013-14, ABC Family)

Shadowhunters (2016-present, Freeform)

Dead of Summer (2016, Freeform)