

# DERISION, GUILT AND PLEASURE:

TEEN DRAMA FANDOM IN A SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

Ysabel Gerrard

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School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds

United Kingdom

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## Abstract

Fans of contemporary U.S. teen drama television series often feel that their pleasures are devalued. They face derision from people in their lives (for example, partners, friends, and family members), in public and popular discourses, and also within fan spaces. Such derisions come from longstanding and negative perceptions of soap opera fans, and other feminised popular cultures and behaviours. An established body of feminist and fan studies research is dedicated to taking fans' pleasures in such texts seriously, since feminist scholars 'turned to pleasure' in the 1980s. Yet the rise of social media platforms in the mid-2000s warrants a return to questions about fan pleasure and gender, given the centrality of digital technologies to contemporary teen drama fandoms, their ubiquity in everyday life, and the enduring stigmatisation of youthful and feminised media cultures. This thesis offers an examination of teen drama fans' negotiations of their (guilty) pleasures. It focuses on the ways fans navigate the relationship between cultural derision, guilt, and pleasure, and examines the role that social media technologies and their associated discourses play in this complex dynamic: one that is unique to a social media age.

My project uses a combination of in-depth interviews and social media observation data to engage with twenty-two fans of three contemporary U.S. teen drama series: *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), *Revenge* (2011-2015), and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), and makes four original contributions to knowledge. I (1) explore how adult fans' reproduction of what I call a quadruple devaluation (age, social class, gender, and sexual orientation) is intrinsic to their pleasures, (2) show how the various discourses of digital technologies – privacy, participation, and labour – are central to fans' experiences of pleasure, (3) argue that fans disembed, or detach from some of the logics of social media platforms to facilitate secrecy, and (4) conclude by pointing to new relations between guilt and pleasure, arguing that guilt and pleasure (and derision) work together, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for women.

This thesis intervenes in established debates about fan pleasures and feminised popular cultures, offering an exploration of teen drama fandom and forging a dialogue between research on teen drama fandom, (post)feminism, and social media.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

My friend, the one who got me to watch the series, it was an accident how I got her to tell me she watched it. She was really excited about something. She had gotten a text on one of her shifts and I was like, what just happened? And she's like oh, nothing! It's really dorky, I don't want to tell you. And I was like fair enough, alright. And then a couple of minutes later she was like, ok, I have to tell you! And it was basically the season premiere of *Pretty Little Liars*, and she was going to go with a friend to watch it at her house. And then she was like it's really embarrassing, I know! (Katrine, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

Fans of contemporary U.S. teen drama television series often feel that their pleasures are devalued. They face derision from certain people in their lives (for example, partners, friends, and family members), in public and popular discourses, and also within fan spaces themselves, as teen drama fans are often complicit in reproducing derision. This pernicious trend is reflected in the quote above and frames many of my research participants' articulations. In the quote, *Pretty Little Liars* fan Katrine shares a story about her friend's accidental revelation of her 'dorky' and 'embarrassing' fandom. Devaluations of this kind are unsurprising. They have a long history and are connected to negative perceptions of soap opera fans, from which teen drama series derive (Davis and Dickinson, 2004; Ross and Stein, 2008) and other youthful, popular, and feminised media texts and gendered behaviours. As Levine notes, popular spaces identified as feminine continue to be 'denigrated by culture at large' (2015, p.1). An established body of feminist and fan studies research has long been dedicated to taking fans' and audiences' popular pleasures seriously, partly fuelled by a scholarly 'turn to pleasure' in 1980s feminist literature (Hollows, 2000). Often inspired by their own pleasures, these authors explored women's engagement with various feminised media texts and cultures, such as soap operas (see Ang, 1985; Hobson, 1982/1989, 2003; Geraghty, 1991; Brown, 1994; Harrington and Bielby, 1995; Blumenthal, 1997; Baym, 2000) and romance novels (see Radway, 1984; Modleski, 1990). They argued that these texts were gendered as feminine and, as a result, devalued. Yet this sexist assumption, a term that Gill (2011) rightly argues should be reclaimed, has not gone away.

The quote above - where *Pretty Little Liars* fandom is framed as an embarrassing, shameful, and guilty pleasure - resonates across my research findings. Indeed, I suggest that the derision experienced (and often reproduced) by these fans might actually represent a *worsening* progression of sexism, given that they enact their fandom in an age of postfeminism, social media, and flexible sexism. Postfeminist discourses regard feminism as a thing of the past, presenting women - especially young women - with seemingly unrestricted choices and telling them that they can 'have it all' (Moseley and Read, 2002; Genz, 2010), without acknowledging the enduring presence of structural inequalities like sexism (Rottenberg, 2014). Yet such discourses fail to admit that teen drama fandom - that is, the youthful, the feminised, the popular - is the *wrong* choice, which has profound consequences for the fans of my research. Running parallel to these discourses is the growth of social media platforms. First emerging in the mid-2000s, Kaplan and Heinlein defined social media as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (2010, p.60). Social media platforms play a crucial role in contemporary teen drama fandoms and are increasingly moving towards an embrace of a so-called real-name Internet (see Hogan, 2013; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015; Haimson and Hoffman, 2016), tying users' social media and other identities together (Patelis, 2013). But this is especially problematic for my respondents, whose pleasures are derided yet who have fewer opportunities to enact their fandom in 'secret', to borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Oscar.

A combination of these two trends - postfeminist media discourses and social media's changing norms around identity - has arguably fuelled the rise of what Gill (2011) calls 'flexible sexism' (see also Hill et al, 2016). Gill (2011) argues that postfeminism's longstanding denial of structural inequalities like sexism has forced them to emerge in subtler, more dynamic and flexible ways, making them more difficult to see and so normalising them. That sexist derisions of teen drama fandom are manifesting *within* fan spaces evidences this worsening issue. To borrow from Biressi and Nunn, this offers plentiful evidence of the 'persistence of sexism in new and old guises' (2013b, p.216) and warrants the need for feminist intervention into contemporary teen drama fandoms.

Although feminised and popular media forms were once a key focus for feminist scholars, Levine argues that there has been a ‘turn away’ (2015, p.4) from this research for various reasons. This implies that ‘scholarship on gender and feminized forms is an interest belonging to the past, rather than an ongoing concern’ (Levine, 2015, p.4). Yet as Gill (2011), Biressi and Nunn (2013b), Hill et al (2016) and other feminist authors argue, sexism not only endures but might also have *worsened*, making renewed scholarly attention to feminised media cultures both timely and important. Pleasures, I propose, are being renegotiated alongside recent socio-technical developments, thus some of the pleasures discussed by the authors cited above are taking on unique meanings in what Marwick (2013) and others refer to as a ‘social media age’. Yet some of my respondents’ experiences are strikingly similar to those discussed in the feminist and fan studies texts cited above. Despite the changes brought about by social media - be they technological, cultural, discursive, and so on - it is striking to see such continuity in terms of sexist derision. The unique combination of these cultural conditions warrants an urgent need for a *return* to pleasure, inspired by the investigations into feminised popular cultures and pleasures that are foundational to feminist media studies. Only by returning to the kind of research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s - when women’s experiences of feminised popular cultures began to be taken seriously - can I argue through this thesis that their pleasures are no less problematic over three decades on.

My project combines in-depth interviews and social media observation data to engage with twenty-two fans of three contemporary U.S. teen drama series: *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), *Revenge* (2011-2015), and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). Through this thesis, I make four contributions to knowledge about teen drama fans’ renegotiations of pleasure. I (1) explore how adult fans’ reproduction of what I call a quadruple devaluation (age, social class, gender, and sexual orientation) is intrinsic to their pleasures, (2) discuss how the various discourses of digital technologies (privacy, participation, and labour) are central to contemporary fans’ experiences of pleasure, (3) show how some fans try to disembed, or detach from the core logics of social media platforms to hide their fan pleasures from certain people,

and (4) conclude by pointing to new relations between guilt and pleasure, arguing that guilt and pleasure (and derision) work together, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for women.

### **Derision, Guilt and Pleasure**

Before I describe the three teen drama series and outline my thesis structure, I must explain its focus on the relationship between derision, guilt and pleasure. I propose that their longstanding bond is taking on new meanings in a postfeminist and social media age. Since feminist scholars turned to pleasure in the 1980s and 1990s, there has been plentiful evidence of women's problematic experiences of pleasure, especially when they try to engage with youthful, feminised, and popular media texts like teen drama series. This literature identified a range of pleasures and negotiations but centrally recognised that women did not experience this affective response straightforwardly (O'Connor and Klaus, 2000). More recently, Kerr et al (2006), H. Thornham (2009), and Levine (2015) have argued that, despite the wealth of feminist interventions into pleasures and gendered media, the term itself is actually rarely examined, and I intend to remedy this absence through my thesis.

Yet teen drama fans' pleasures are inseparable from derision. Derision emerges in my respondents' everyday lives in various ways: from certain people in their lives (partners, friends, family members, work colleagues, and so on), in public and popular discourses, and also within fan spaces themselves, as teen drama fans are often complicit in reproducing derision. To differing degrees, my respondents are all aware that teen drama fandom is stigmatised. This means they navigate their fandom in very careful and strategic ways. For example, in Chapter Six I explore how fans separate their social media fan identities from other parts of their online/offline lives. This is just one of many examples of my respondents' lived relationship between fan pleasure and derision.

By examining teen drama fans' derided pleasures, it is also necessary for me to consider fans' - especially women's - *guilt*. As Coward noted in 1984:

There's another emotion which comes with pleasure, like a faithful old dog that won't be shaken off. Guilt. Women know all about guilt - it's our speciality. Pleasure generates guilt, and that's bad enough. But even worse is the guilt that is generated when other people discuss our pleasures critically [...]. Pleasure may be sacrosanct but guilt is remorseless. (p.14)

Coward (1984) amongst others (see D. Morley, 1986; A. Gray, 1987, 1992) argued that women feel guilty when they indulge their pleasures, and that this is the understandable result of their 'socialization within a culture that continues to value work above play' (Radway, 1984, p.105). They argued that women's leisure time was devalued because women were constantly expected to care for other people, particularly within the home. When women *did* set time aside to indulge their pleasures - to watch a soap opera or read a romance novel, for example - these acts were often: (1) highly ritualised (Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1986; van Zoonen, 1994), and (2) enacted in solitude (A. Gray, 1987), but (3) always entangled with *guilt*. I wondered whether the teen drama fans I interviewed for my research - the overwhelming majority of which, to my surprise, were adults - had similar experiences. I have found that my female respondents feel uneasy both because of other people's opinions about their fandom, and for abandoning their gendered duties, like housework and childcare, to indulge their pleasures.

The relationship between guilt and pleasure has arguably worsened in recent years: a postfeminist age where young women in particular are presented with seemingly unrestricted choices, yet teen drama fandom is the *wrong* choice. This has profound consequences for those who find teen drama fandom to be pleasurable. It also means that, for teen drama fans, derision, guilt and pleasure are inseparable.

## Research Questions

This research is motivated by one main research question and four sub-questions, which are as follows:

1. How does the relationship between derision, guilt and pleasure emerge through teen drama fans' articulations and negotiations, and how are social media platforms integrated into and conceptualised within these dynamics?
2. How is pleasure understood here, and how do adult fans negotiate it?
3. How are some of the discourses of social media technologies (e.g., 'privacy') tied up with teen drama fans' activities?
4. How do forms of derision emerge in teen drama fans' everyday lives? How do the fans respond to this, and what can we infer?
5. What inferences can we draw from the longstanding resonances between fans and audiences of soap operas, romance novels, and other devalued texts discussed by feminist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s and my research?

I address question one, my main research question, in all chapters of this thesis. Chapter Four - 'Adults' Normalisations of Teen Drama Fandom' - deals explicitly with question two, and Chapter Five - 'Discourses of the Digital: Privacy, Participation, and Labour' - addresses question three. Chapter Six considers how fans navigate social media's various 'logics' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) in response to derision, and offers a socio-technical response to question four. Chapter Seven - 'Guilty Pleasures, or Pleasurable Guilt?' - responds to question five by addressing the longstanding politics of women's guilty leisure time, first discussed when feminist scholars turned to pleasure in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Teen Drama Series: Introducing *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge*, and *The Vampire Diaries***

In this thesis, I examine fandoms of three contemporary, popular, and fictional U.S. teen drama television series: *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), *Revenge* (2011-2015), and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). My decision to focus on teen drama series was initially motivated by the significant lack of academic research into teen drama fandoms and teen



television series more broadly. Despite my research participants' clear knowledge of the genre's devalued cultural status, there are few if any scholarly considerations of contemporary teen drama fandoms. This lack of attention might be baffling on the surface, given the global popularity and dominance of U.S. teen drama series, but it indicates a broader cultural *and* scholarly exclusion of young and feminised fan cultures. Extant feminist research about teen television tends to use textual analysis as its main research method (for example, Kelly, 2009; Feasey, 2012; Berridge, 2011, 2013), and while textual readings of the series are important, they are unequipped to answer questions about fans' and audiences' experiences. There are also only two edited collections on teen television series: Davis and Dickinson's *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity* (2004) and Ross and Stein's *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom* (2008), and again the vast majority of the essays in these collections are textual analyses. My second motivation for conducting this research was my own fandom of these series, particularly *Pretty Little Liars*. Like my respondents, I too experience the stigmas levelled at my fandom (which I discuss reflexively in Chapter Three) and sought to examine other fans' experiences. Although I do not conduct a textual analysis of the series in my work - a methodological decision driven by the research questions I sought to address - it is important for readers who are unfamiliar with the shows to have a brief insight into their narratives, especially because their storylines and characters played a key role in my discussions with fans.

*Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), which was in its seventh and final season at the time of writing, was a U.S. teen drama series partly based on a book series of the same name. It fell under the mystery and romance sub-genres (IMDb, 2017a) and told the story of four female teenage friends - Aria Montgomery, Emily Fields, Hanna Marin, and Spencer Hastings - who began receiving a series of mysterious text messages from 'A' after the death of their friend, Alison DiLaurentis. The series was set in the suburban, middle-class, fictional town of Rosewood, Pennsylvania, and progresses with the girls trying to discover the identity of 'A'. The series' narrative was notoriously complex but was celebrated by my respondents for prioritising female friendships above romantic relationships, normalising LGBTQ+ relationships and 'coming out' narratives, and for dealing with a contemporary and difficult

subject matter: the surveillance and bullying of the four teenage girls through digital technologies, which has striking and likely intentional resonances with ongoing public and feminist debates (see for example Gill, 2016b).

The final episode of *Revenge* (2011-2015), which ran for four seasons, aired when I was completing my fieldwork, though the fans I interviewed were already aware of the show's impending cancellation. It fell under the mystery and thriller sub-genres (IMDb, 2017b) and told the story of a twenty-something woman, Emily Thorne, who returned to her hometown to exact revenge - hence the show's title - against the people who wrongfully accused and convicted her father of a terrorist act. Set in the wealthy North American neighbourhood of The Hamptons, Long Island, the show also attracted praise from my participants for depicting a strong female lead who, like the female characters on *Pretty Little Liars*, was not always focussed on her romantic relationships. The show also earned compliments amongst my respondents for representing strong female friendships.

*The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) aired its final episode as I was writing this thesis. The series, which fell under the fantasy/horror sub-genre (IMDb, 2017c), told the story of a teenage girl, Elena Gilbert, who was caught in a love triangle with two vampire brothers: Damon and Stefan Salvatore. The two vampires tried to integrate into a school in Virginia with other non-vampire and non-supernatural humans, and the series revolved around the dramatic merging of different teenage worlds and identities. The show was centred on a love-triangle and thus its narrative had different gender politics to *Pretty Little Liars* and *Revenge*. Indeed, *The Vampire Diaries* was the series most frequently derided - or 'Othered' - by my respondents who did not enjoy the show, mainly because it was centred on a romantic relationship and inspired different fan cultures. I say more about this trend in my empirical chapters (Four, Five, Six and Seven), which I now describe in turn.

## Thesis Structure

The next chapter - 'Renewing Fan Pleasures in a Social Media Age' - contains a review of relevant academic literature. I unite research on fandom, gender, social media and feminism to position my work within specific theories and discourses. As I do throughout my thesis, in Chapter Two I outline (and problematise) longstanding derisions of youthful and feminised cultures and behaviours. But I also consider some factors that might be *changing* how contemporary teen drama fandom is enacted and experienced. That is, I consider changes to how sexism operates in a postfeminist age. I also explore newer iterations of sexist terms like 'groupie', which has long been used to deride supposedly hysterical fans of popular cultural icons. I then examine how scholars are re-addressing notions like privacy, labour and space in an age of social media, and consider how people's identities can be enacted through platforms. Finally, I examine the term 'guilty pleasure' which, despite its popularity, is rarely discussed academically. I argue that my findings point to *new* relations between derision, guilt and pleasure based on a combination of the above trends: the rise of a postfeminist sensibility, the growth of social media platforms, and sexism's increasingly flexible nature.

In Chapter Three - 'Research Methods and the Ethics of Social Media Research' - I turn to a discussion of my research methods and ethical considerations. I used a combination of semi-structured Skype interviews, structured online interviews, and social media observations to engage with twenty-two fans of three teen drama series: *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. Given the majority of my respondents' desires to enact their fandom in secret - or 'anonymously', to borrow a term the fans used regularly - it is imperative to protect their identities at all stages of this research. In Chapter Three, I explore the challenges of conducting research into online fandoms and explain how I recruited research participants, informed them about the project, sought their consent to be interviewed and observed, and omitted certain identifying details from the transcripts and from the published results. I also detail the methods I used to analyse the transcripts and observation data - thematic analysis - and consider the politics of my chosen research methods and the types of knowledge they can and cannot

produce. In Chapter Three and throughout, I also consider my own role in this project, as someone who identifies as both a scholar *and* a teen drama fan. While the primary motivation for conducting this research was to examine changes to teen drama fans' experiences in a social media age, I nonetheless acknowledge how this was tied up with my own experiences of derision, guilt and pleasure.

Chapter Four is the first of my empirical chapters, where I analyse my research data and introduce my twenty-two research participants. This chapter - 'Adults' Normalisations of Teen Drama Fandom' - considers how *adult* fans of teen drama series negotiate their pleasures, and argues that they use various techniques to normalise what they feel are unacceptable identities. This chapter shows how adult fans reproduce what I call a 'quadruple devaluation' (that is, age, social class, gender and sexual orientation) in an effort to make their fandom look and feel more acceptable to me as a researcher, to other fans of the show, and perhaps to other people within their lives. They do this by drawing on teen drama series' intertextual references to objects of so-called 'high culture', and by placing value on education (both in terms of being *educated* and *educating* other fans of the shows). These particular sections demonstrate striking resonances between my findings and feminist research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars first 'turned' to pleasure. I then examine newer iterations of the longstanding (and ageist, sexist, and heteronormative) discourse of the 'groupie': the 'fangirls' and 'shipper fans' of teen drama series. I show how adult fans reproduce these discourses *within* fan spaces by ostracising other, typically younger and female fans of the show in an effort to enact what they feel is a more acceptable version of adulthood. Although these derisions might not be deliberate, they demonstrate the changing nature of sexism within contemporary digital fandoms, and the endurance of teen girl fan stereotypes.

In Chapter Five I explore how social media's most dominant discourses - privacy, participation and labour - are tied up with teen drama fans' negotiations. Although these terms are not new to a social media age, their role in users' lives is the focus of much scholarly and popular debate. I begin this chapter - entitled 'Discourses of the Digital: Privacy, Participation,

and Labour' - by examining the meaningfulness of privacy to teen drama fans, and explore how they try to achieve this through social media platforms. I explain that fans seek out private - or 'secret' - spaces online to enact their fandom away from certain people in their lives; however, the complexity of platforms' technical infrastructures makes this process difficult for fans. I then explore how fans produce and reproduce cultures of acceptability within digital fan spaces. I argue that 'Liking' and other quantifiable socio-technical functions on platforms create new cultures of acceptability, which fans feel they must familiarise themselves with. Finally, I show how fans imagine their activities to be forms of labour, by describing their fandom as a 'part-time job', 'full-time job', and 'work'. I argue that they likely frame their fandom as a form of labour because it offers them a more masculine, rational and therefore *acceptable* subject position. Whilst these findings nod to existing stigmas of fan cultures, many of the negotiations I discuss in this chapter are unique to a social media age, especially 'participation'.

In Chapter Six - 'Digital Disembedding Through Online Teen Drama Fandom' - I take a closer look at social media platforms' logics and politics around their users' identities, and consider the implications for users like teen drama fans whose identities are stigmatised. I discuss platforms' increasing moves towards the embrace of a so-called 'real-name Internet' and argue that users like my respondents are afforded increasingly fewer opportunities to enact identities that differ from what platforms like Facebook refer to as their 'real' (i.e. legal) ones. This is concerning for fans of youthful, feminised and popular media cultures, amongst many other marginalised social groups affected by these changes. In the chapter, I challenge claims made by Hine (2015) and others that the Internet and other digital technologies have become 'embedded' (or, entangled, enmeshed, interwoven) with everyday life. My respondents' uses of social media - where they deliberately and strategically try to *disembed*, or detach their social media fan identities from other parts of their online/offline lives - signal a more careful and strategic negotiation than claims like Hine's (2015) permit. In this chapter, I also discuss the importance of binary terms like online/offline and real/virtual to my respondents despite a scholarly and popular move away from them. I conclude the chapter by exploring how teen

drama fans have developed what I call ‘strategies of sharing’ on social media in an effort to prevent their secret fan identities from being linked other parts of their lives.

My final empirical chapter - ‘Guilty Pleasures, or Pleasurable Guilt?’ - examines the ‘guilty pleasure’ discourse which, despite its popularity, is scarcely discussed academically. I begin this chapter by arguing that the term is gendered, as it is women’s popular cultures that tend to be linked to a ‘guilty’ subjectivity. I also demonstrate how female *and* male fans of teen drama series reproduce a gendered hierarchy of acceptability, through which it is young and feminised popular media cultures that are afforded the least value, a longstanding and problematic trend. I then consider new relations between derision, guilt and pleasure in a postfeminist age. That is, women - especially young women - are told that they can make ‘choices’ about their lives because of their newfound *post*-feminist freedoms, however they must choose an identity that falls in line with the dominant version of appropriate girlhood or womanhood. But teen drama fandom is the *wrong* choice. I also consider how my respondents who are also mothers frame their fandom as a ‘guilty’ act, perhaps because they do not think they should be engaging in pleasurable activities. I argue that to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for women.

In my eighth and final chapter, I draw my thesis to a close and offer some conclusions. I also suggest three directions for future research: (1) a call for digital media scholars to further explore issues around fans’ digital privacy, (2) the potential consequences of a full embrace of a real-name Internet, especially for users whose identities are stigmatised, and (3) a call for more frequent turns to pleasure, given the stubbornness and perhaps *worsening* of teen drama fandom’s cultural status. I now turn to my second chapter: the literature review.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review: Renewing Fan Pleasures in a Social Media Age

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to locate my project within specific theories and discourses. It unites academic literature on fandom, feminism, gender, and social media to address changes in the ways that teen drama fans' pleasures are being renegotiated in a digital era. The chapter's title - 'renewing fan pleasures in a social media age' - captures my aim to develop a renewed understanding of teen drama fandom in light of the fairly recent rise of social media platforms. This is not to say that technology *itself* has altered fans' experiences. Rather, platforms have affordances and discourses that are entangled with fans' negotiations of their devalued pleasures. In what follows, I introduce literature in the order that it is discussed in my empirical chapters, though it is important to note that some broader themes recur throughout.

I firstly discuss feminist scholars' 'turn to pleasure' (Hollows, 2000) in the 1980s to argue that social media technologies and their discourses have altered teen drama fans' experiences of pleasure. I then define 'fandom' and 'teen drama series', both to demonstrate my understanding of these terms and because my respondents articulate them in complex ways to rationalise their practices. Next, I position teen drama fandom within a culture of 'flexible sexism' (sGill, 2011). I explain how contemporary forms of sexism are characterised by their flexibility, and so emerge through fans' negotiations in unique ways. The following section addresses a similar theme, as it explores how the contemporary 'fangirl' discourse embodies longstanding anxieties around female fandoms and girls' expressions of sexual desire. The fangirl, along with the 'groupie' and the 'shipper fan' were mobilised by teen drama fans to normalise their pleasures, which demonstrates the terms' perniciousness and pervasiveness. I then examine two popular discourses of digital technologies: 'cyberspace' and 'sharing', both of which are meaningful to teen drama fans as they speak to the ways people negotiate their identities through the Internet and social media. The next section considers new questions about privacy, given the emergence of social media platforms in the mid-2000s. It considers the extent

to which social media users can control their privacy, an issue that is especially important to fans who wish to maintain their acts of fandom as secrets. I then turn to another discourse of digital technologies, labour, to argue that its connotations of masculinity and rationality are central to my respondents' justifications of their fan pleasures. The following section examines the naturalisation - or, embeddedness - of 'authentic' identities to social media platforms, and begins my discussion of the ways fans *disembed* (or detach from) this and other logics. I next consider how fans' pleasures can be located in their negotiations of 'space', especially in the act of creating a discrete space within the home to indulge their fan pleasures. Finally, I turn to a discussion of so-called 'guilty pleasures', noting how women's pleasures are always entangled with guilt due to the longstanding devaluation of their leisure time and gendered inequalities within the home.

I begin this chapter by explaining why my thesis represents a unique return to longstanding feminist debates about pleasure and feminised popular cultures.

### **Returning to Pleasure: Feminist Perspectives**

The early 1980s marked a political turn to pleasure in feminist media scholarship, to which this thesis returns. This audience research reflected feminist scholars' changing attitudes to the 'mass-produced genres of femininity: romance fiction, film melodrama and "weepies", women's magazines and television soap opera' (Brunsdon, 1997, p.31). It moved away from an earlier reliance on textual analyses of images of women (see for example Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1971; Rowbotham, 1973), which were politically 'unsatisfactory' (van Zoonen, 1994, p.106) as they could not fully explain audiences' pleasures. The subsequent 'turn' to empirical research with audiences and fans of mainly women's popular cultures could be thought of as a response to this problem. These scholars argued for the importance of understanding women's engagement with feminised media texts and not simply the texts themselves, an important and enduring tradition (see more recently Petersen, 2012; Busse, 2013; Zubernis and Larsen, 2013;



Cann, 2015). There were fierce debates about taking feminine texts more seriously at the time, which for Modleski seemed to:

Betray a kind of self-mockery, a fear that someone will think badly of the writer for even touching on the subject, however gingerly. (2008, p.4)

Feminist scholars' turn to pleasure therefore responded to various forms of derision: critics' dismissal of romance and similar genres, a fairly justifiable 'hostility' (Modleski, 2008, p.4) felt within some feminist circles, and the derisions experienced by ordinary women (e.g., romance readers). This project responds to similar forms of derision - from people in my respondents' lives, in public and popular discourses, and within fan spaces themselves - but expresses gratitude to the feminists who originally turned to pleasure for opening up a space in which this kind of research could be conducted.

Indeed, the 'relative academic normalization' (Hills, 2016, p.xviii) of fan studies in recent years is deeply indebted to this feminist research (Jenkins, 2014). The genre that received perhaps the most attention at the time was soap opera. This work was published in the 1980s and 1990s (see Hobson, 1982/1989, 2003; Ang, 1985; Seiter et al, 1989; Geraghty, 1991; Brown, 1994; Harrington and Bielby, 1995; Brunson, 1997) and paved the way for contemporary studies on feminism, fandom, and pleasure, including my own. Other writers examined the connections between pleasure and a number of other gendered media texts, such as women's magazines (Winship, 1987), romance novels (Radway, 1984; Modleski, 1990), and men's television series such as *Star Trek* (Bacon-Smith, 1992). My research proposes that it is necessary to maintain a continued focus on pleasure and centrally that we need to return to it, not least because it is being reconfigured in a digital age. That is not to say that social media and other digital technologies are to blame for these changes. Rather, I examine how their pleasures are implicated in a complex and new relationship between gender, derision and social media, which brings with it socio-technical affordances and discourses.

I say ‘return’ here because feminist research from the 2000s onwards did not turn its back on pleasure. Literature from the 1980s and 1990s instigated a profound politicisation of pleasure, and so my work intervenes in - or returns to - discussions that have endured ever since. As O’Connor and Klaus argue, pleasure should be thought of as a ‘multi-faceted’ (2000, p.369) phenomenon that emerges through research in various ways: through the research design, methodology, encounters with research participants/texts, and in the analysis, interpretation, and publication of findings. The scholars cited in this chapter identify several types of pleasure, many of which resonate with my own findings. Yet my research focuses more closely on how their pleasures intersect with *derision* in an age of social media. Although fandom and the digital have long been discussed (for example, Baym, 2000; Bury, 2005; Booth, 2016), there are no similar feminist studies on the relationship between teen drama fans’ pleasures and social media. As I note next, teen drama fandom has long been under-researched, despite its pervasiveness in popular culture and its historical links to soap opera and melodrama (see Davis and Dickinson, 2004; Ross and Stein, 2008). To focus on *digital* teen drama fandom thus represents a unique return to scholarship from the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Understanding Teen Drama Fandom**

Both ‘fandom’ and ‘teen drama’ are valuable discourses for my respondents, and they were articulated in complex ways throughout my study to position themselves and to normalise their practices. Through their negotiations, teen drama fans demonstrate an understanding that their fan pleasures are devalued, and a wealth of fan studies literature has addressed this problem. Indeed, the rise of fan studies as an academic field was partly driven by its early scholars’ political motivations, as they sought to legitimise fandom in the face of cultural derision (for example, Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992). Since this time there have been various and arguably premature celebrations of fandom’s scholarly and mainstream normalisation. Sandvoss, for example, claimed in 2005 that fandom ‘seems to have become a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world’ (p.3). J. Gray et al made a similar point in 2007, but linked fandom’s entry into the mainstream to the rise of

‘participatory’ Web 2.0 technologies in the mid-2000s. The authors argued that fans are ‘wooded and championed by the cultural industries’ (J. Gray et al, 2007, p.4) as their practices are afforded greater value in a participatory era, a claim echoed in Jenkins’ work (2006a,b). Yet such celebrations did not account for enduring cultural devaluations of young and feminised fans, fan objects and fan behaviours, as Hills (2012), Busse (2013) and Stanfill (2013) have more recently noted. Lewis’ 1992 claim that fans ‘get a bad press’ (p.iiv) still resonates for my research participants, and the title of this section intends to capture enduring inequalities that are felt by my respondents. The title also captures scholarly disagreements over fandom’s definition (Baym, 2007), which is reflected in my participants’ differing values about what their teen fandom should entail. I now turn to a closer discussion of these debates, examining how scholars have defined both fandom and teen drama series to later return to these ideas and consider how fans *themselves* discuss ‘acceptable’ enactments of fandom (see Chapter Five).

### *Defining Fandom and Foregrounding Pleasure*

No two fans, fandoms or fan practices are alike, and a singular and monolithic ‘teen drama fandom’ does not exist (Brooker, 2002; Busse and Hellekson, 2006; Duffett, 2013). For example, although one might speak of a *Pretty Little Liars* fandom, there are various hierarchies, conditions and norms within fan spaces that might appear similar on the surface (for example, two Facebook fan Pages for the show).<sup>1</sup> Scholarly disagreements over fandom’s definition might be influenced by the diversity of fan cultures themselves, as fans have their own assumptions about what their activities ‘should’ look like. The various scholarly attempts to define fandom have traditionally focussed on fans’ *visible* participation, which derives from the history of political reclamation that I noted earlier. Yet scholars such as Gray et al (2007), Hills (2002, 2013), Zubernis and Larsen (2013) and Turk (2014) have argued that fandom need not be defined by visible and production-oriented participation in the limiting way that earlier fan studies scholars described (for example, Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> When I capitalise ‘Pages’, I am referring to Facebook’s Pages function. Where I use a lower-case ‘p’, I intend for this term to capture a range of social media fan accounts (or profiles, spaces, locations, etc).

expectation for fans to participate in visible ways might actually be exclusionary, particularly to those whose pleasures reside in culturally derided fan objects (see also Brennan, 2013; Robertson, 2014).

Instead, I draw on Duffett to argue that fans centrally find their identities ‘wrapped up in the *pleasures* connected to popular culture’ (2013, p.18, emphasis added), whether they talk to other fans through social media platforms, attend fan conventions, produce fan art, create videos, write blog posts, or publish fan fiction. A fan might also ‘merely love a show, watch it religiously, talk about it, and yet engage in no other fan practices or activities’ (J. Gray et al., 2007, pp. 3-4). For example, a number of my participants did not self-identify as ‘fans’ yet they still engage in practices that would be labelled as such, and drew on the discourse of fandom as a way of negotiating and rationalising their identities. According to Duffett’s (2013) definition, fans have an expectation that fandom will be a pleasurable experience. However I complicate this by proposing that their pleasures are not experienced straightforwardly, regardless of the fan object in question. Fandom is *itself* a problematic practice, but fans’ pleasures become even more complex when the object of their attention is a teen drama series. As such, the next section considers why teen drama series are devalued.

### *Teen Drama Series and the Triple Devaluation*

Contemporary devaluations of fandom are much the same as those discussed by scholars in the early 1990s. Fandom, irrespective of fan object, is subjected to a triple devaluation. It is ‘devalued as feminized - comprised of either insufficiently masculine men or hysterical women (Driscoll, 2006; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Lewis, 1992b)’ (Stanfill, 2013, p.124), centred on popular and therefore unworthy cultures (see Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Baym, 2000), and depicted as a pleasure for young people, as illustrated by the ‘fanboy’ and ‘fangirl’ discourses (Click, 2009; Hills, 2012; Busse, 2013). Yet this triple-threat worsens when the fan object is a teen drama series. This is partly because the genre derives from soap opera, which is understood to be feminised and unworthy (Davis and Dickinson,

2004; Ross and Stein, 2008). It is also because the genre is associated with a female and teenage demographic. Teen drama fans are therefore subjected to particularly harsh and often highly visible cultural derisions which shapes their experiences of fandom. ‘Teen drama’ emerged as a television genre in the mid-1990s (Osgerby, 2004), yet its alignment with soap opera on an imagined cultural hierarchy of taste has not afforded it the same volume of feminist critique. The genre’s pervasiveness in contemporary (popular) cultures, the fairly recent rise of ‘digital fandom’ (Booth, 2016) *and* its enduring cultural devaluation warrants renewed scholarly attention. Racial identities did not obviously emerge through my research findings, but this perhaps speaks to the unremarkability of whiteness in Western visual cultures (Dyer, 1997), the depiction of fandom as ‘a sort of failed nonheteronormative whiteness’ (Stanfill, 2011, n.p.) in mainstream media representations, the ‘assumed whiteness’ (K. Gray, 2012, n.p.) of social media users, and to the whiteness of the media texts I analysed (Berridge, 2013). However future research into fandom and pleasure should address other levels of devaluation based on racial identities to unpack why they might not have emerged so obviously in my fieldwork.

The three fan objects that I examine in this thesis - *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge* and *The Vampire Diaries* - can all be identified as U.S. teen drama series, yet the genre is notoriously difficult to pin down. As Davis and Dickinson explain, there is a ‘dilemma’ (2004, p.5) over how to identify teen TV:

Should one think about it primarily in relation to a target audience (and, indeed, one wonders if this viewer group is strictly teenaged anyway), or is it more of a genre with an intricate interrelationship between current thematic concerns, certain types of audience and their modes of engagement with these defined texts? (2004, p.5)

For example, the earlier seasons of *Pretty Little Liars* bore all the hallmarks of a teen drama: they were mostly set in a school, the main characters were teenagers, and they focussed on storylines involving ‘sex and sexuality, drug and alcohol use, family tensions and negotiating one’s place among one’s peers’ (Davis and Dickinson, 2004, p.3). However the more recent seasons were ‘flash-forwards’ (Bricker, 2015) to the Liars’ college years, thus disrupting some of these recognisable genre codes. *The Vampire Diaries* was not set in a school, though its

narrative focused on a love-triangle between three teenagers. Although its main characters were teen-aged, this was complicated by the vampires' ageing process, as the two main male characters have the bodies of seventeen-year-olds yet are over one hundred years old. Of the three series, *Revenge* was perhaps the least representative of a teen drama series, mostly because its main characters were in their late teens and are therefore not at school. The demographics of these shows also differed: *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* drew in the 12-34 demographic (The Futon Critic, 2010; TV by the Numbers, 2015), whereas *Revenge* was aired post-watershed (9:00pm and 10:00pm) and therefore had lower teenage viewership, tending to attract viewers aged 18-49 (see The Futon Critic, 2011). However the show and its actors were still nominated for multiple Teen Choice Awards, which are voted for by 10-15 year olds (see IMDb, 2016).

Despite their differing narrative tropes and viewer demographics, the vast majority of my participants identified all three shows as *teen drama series*. As I explain in the following chapters (Four, Five, Six and Seven), most of my respondents imagine the fandom of all three shows to be mostly teenage and female, and the adult fans in particular explain how their narratives are typically teenage. My participants drew on a combination of the above - target audience, thematic concerns, and audiences' modes of engagement - to identify all three series as teen dramas. This means that they experience the triple-devaluation levelled at their fandom, making 'teen drama' a valuable discourse for the fans as it is central to their pleasure as fans of these shows. I now further my discussion of gender inequalities by examining the manifestations of 'flexible sexism' (see Gill, 2011) in contemporary media cultures.

### **Postfeminism and the Rise of 'Flexible Sexism'**

Contemporary U.S. teen drama series and their fans are currently situated within an era that has been labelled 'postfeminist' (see for example McRobbie, 2004a,b, 2007, 2009; Gill, 2007c, 2014, 2016; S. Thornham, 2007; Tasker and Negra, 2007; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Keller, 2016), which is tied up with their experiences of pleasure. This term is used to capture a range

of discourses related to feminism yet it is contested in both academic and popular literature. As Genz and Brabon (2009) noted, the prefix ‘post’ implies that the battles of feminism have been won and that gender inequalities have now largely been eradicated. According to this logic, any enduring imbalances are the result of *individual* failures rather than structural inequalities such as sexism (Gill, 2007c, 2011; Rottenberg, 2014). Yet women continue to be subjected to sexism other intersecting ‘isms’, many of which are invoked by exclusionary (i.e., young, white, middle-class, and heterosexual) postfeminist discourses themselves (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Gill, 2011, 2014; Rottenberg, 2014). By emphasising the ‘pastness’ of feminism and centralising individualism, postfeminist discourses have arguably enabled the emergence of *new* forms of sexism; a term that Gill (2011) argues should be reclaimed. This concept resonates with my findings in two ways.

First, teen drama fans know that their pleasures are disparaged and that this is partly because their fandom and fan objects are gendered as *feminine*. This demonstrates an enduring need for feminism and contradicting the postfeminist notion that ‘feminism’s work is done’ (Douglas, 2010). And second, the concept emerges through fans’ articulations as they draw on sexist discourses to normalise their pleasures (see Chapter Four). I argue that fans are not being deliberately discriminatory and instead invoke already circulating discourses about gender, social class and age to defend their fan identities. Sexism of this kind has been discussed by Gill (2011), who argues that sexist discourses have become increasingly *flexible* as they adapt to postfeminist environments. In their research on the reception of data visualisations, Hill et al borrow from Gill (2011) to argue that ‘gendered derision is often entangled with legitimate criticisms of poor visualization execution’ (2016, p.331), making this form of sexism hard to see and so normalising it.

These new forms of sexism are dangerous precisely because postfeminist discourses have long denied their very existence. Flexible sexism might be more harmful because of how it operates: in ‘agile, dynamic, changing, and diverse’ ways rather than as a ‘single, unchanging “thing” (e.g., a set of relatively stable stereotypes)’ (Gill, 2011, p.62). Flexible sexism is also

‘thoroughly intersectional’ (Gill, 2011, p.67), and Chapter Four examines how gendered derisions of teen drama fandoms intersect with class and age.<sup>2</sup> I should note here that my respondents are likely not being intentionally sexist. Rather, they ‘mobilized certain cultural discourses’ (Hill et al, 2016, p.332) during our interviews to combat denigration. Gill’s flexible sexism is thus a particularly useful tool to analyse fans’ experiences of derision, and also resonates with an emerging body of feminist media scholarship that addresses feminism’s renewed visibility.

Several scholars have recently noted a ‘resurgence of interest in feminism in the media and among young women’ (Gill, 2016a, p.610) (see for example Keller, 2011; Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Weidhase, 2015; Brady, 2016; Gill, 2016a; Scharff et al, 2016). These scholars offer various interpretations of the renewed popular interest in feminism. Brady, for example, challenges the ‘repeated framing of contemporary media as generative of an inauthentic celebrity feminism that is at odds with the aims and strategies of the feminist movement’ (2016, p.430). Broadly speaking, however, they all recognise that feminism’s renewed visibility is linked to a recognition of the ‘current [and longstanding] inequalities between men and women’ (Keller and Ringrose, 2015, p.1) (or, to the endurance of sexism). Some of these authors also question the usefulness of postfeminism as an analytical category, given feminism’s renewed visibility. Authors such as Keller and Ryan have called for the problematisation of postfeminism because of the term’s apparent ‘failure to speak to or connect with contemporary feminism’ (2015 in Gill, 2016a, p.610).

Yet the term is important for my project, as I argue that it is postfeminism’s longstanding denial of sexism that gave rise to the flexible forms of sexism that I discuss in Chapter Four. By this, I am referring to the way the term itself works to render feminism as a thing of the past - *postfeminism* - and also because popular media texts discursively position

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<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge that scholarly and other discussions of intersectionality typically include race and ethnicity, though I do not explicitly discuss such identity markers in my thesis. Where I do discuss racial identities (e.g., briefly in Chapters One and Two), I note the overwhelming whiteness of teen drama series’ actors (Berridge, 2013) and perhaps by extension their implied audience.



women as agentic and free from sexist and other inequalities. Within digital fan spaces, my respondents draw on sexist discourses to deride other fans and justify their own pleasures. Sexism is concealed by other discourses in fans' articulations, which makes it harder to see and so normalises it (Hill et al, 2016). Postfeminism thus remains a useful concept within feminist media studies, and I argue alongside Gill that feminist scholars need to 'think together' (2016a, p.625) emerging feminisms with postfeminism. To quote Biressi and Nunn:

Time spent debating the *existence* of feminism (at least within the academy and political activism) is time lost on its necessary practice, whether in terms of research, debate or action within the field. (2013b, pp. 215-216, emphasis in original)

Although the above literature represents another turn or 'wave' within feminist scholarship, it is important because it illustrates a need for feminism. This resonates with one of my project's broader political aims, which is to demonstrate the endurance of sexist derisions of (popular) cultures and behaviours associated with girls and young women. The next section continues my discussion of gender inequality by examining devaluations of the 'fangirl', a concept that provides 'plentiful evidence of the persistence of sexism in new and old guises' (Biressi and Nunn, 2013b, p.216).

### **The Derided Pleasures of Fangirling**

Although elements of fandom have entered the mainstream in recent years, partly because of the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies, fan practices that are coded as young and feminine such as 'fangirling' continue to be devalued. The fangirl is one of the most visible mediated images of fandom in contemporary (popular) culture, and is used to condemn girls and young women for their 'extreme' (Busse, 2013, p.78), 'hysterical' (van der Graaf, 2014, p.38) and 'oversexed' (Zubernis and Larsen, 2013, p.4) desires towards fan objects, who are usually male popular cultural icons. To readers who are unfamiliar with the term, it is useful to refer to the *Urban Dictionary*, a web-based dictionary featuring slang and colloquial terms. The two most popular definitions of a 'fangirl', as voted for by the site's users, are as follows:

1. A rabid breed of human female who is obsessed [sic] with either a fictional character or an actor. Similar to the breed of fanboy. Fangirls congregate at anime conventions and livejournal. Have been known to glomp, grope, and tackle when encountering said obsessions [sic].

*Hugh Jackman: 'ello.*

*Fangirl: SQUEEEEEEE! \*immediately attaches to Jackman's leg\**

*Jackman: Security!* (Urban Dictionary, 2003, emphases in original)

2. A female who has overstepped the line between healthy fandom and indecent obsession

*Fan: Hakkai from Saiyuki is really cool, he's smart and nice and hey, he's pretty cute.*

*Fangirl: Lyke OMG!!!11!one! Hakkai iz so lke totly my huzbend!*

*Fan: You DO realize he is a two dimensional image on your television screen right?*

*Fangirl: NOOO!! He'z reel and he iz al myne!* (Urban Dictionary, 2004, emphases in original)

Like new forms of sexism, cultural derisions of fangirls are ‘thoroughly intersectional’ (Gill, 2011, p.67), as the above definitions have four entangled emphases: gender, age, class, and sexual orientation. The fangirl is therefore subjected to what I call a *quadruple devaluation*.

First, the fangirl is gendered as she is characterised by her performances of hyperfemininity (Cann, 2015). This is because fangirling is linked to excessive emotionality: long stereotyped as a feminine trait (Jenson, 1992; Baym, 2000; Duffett, 2013). Second, the *fangirl* is distinguished from other gendered female identities such as tween, teen, or young woman. According to the above definitions, fangirls’ youthful identities are discursively constructed as immature, naïve, and passive. For example, they are ‘obsessed [sic]’ with male popular cultural icons, their enactments of fandom are ‘rabid’ (Urban Dictionary, 2003), and they are also passively duped by popular cultures: ‘you DO realise he is a two dimensional character on your television screen right?’ (Urban Dictionary, 2004). Third, implicit in these quotes are classed assumptions about the objects of fangirls’ attention: mostly male and contemporary *popular* cultural icons such as Hugh Jackman (Urban Dictionary, 2004) (see also van der Graaf, 2014). Finally, the fangirl is characterised by her (hyper)sexual desires, which are discursively constructed as both heteronormative and ‘rabid’ (Urban Dictionary, 2003; Pinkowitz, 2011, n.p.). For example, one fangirl ‘\*immediately attaches to Jackman’s leg\*’ (Urban Dictionary, 2003), and another says that the object of her fandom is ‘totly my huzbend!’ (Urban Dictionary, 2004). According to these definitions, fangirls’ behaviours are over-ruled by

their uncontrollable (hetero)sexual desires. By overstepping an imagined ‘line between healthy fandom and indecent obsession’ (Urban Dictionary, 2004), fangirls’ gendered excessiveness is deemed inappropriate.

‘Fangirling’ is a sexist and intersectional discourse, as it is linked to longstanding politics around female sexual pleasure and to the ways media texts and discourses have historically tried to contain celebrations of women’s sexuality (see Coward, 1984; Tarr, 1985; Geraghty, 2008). Indeed, the passage of time across these references illustrates the endurance of this argument. Tarr, for example, argued in an article of the same name that there are ‘boundaries of permitted pleasure’ (1985) for women. Fangirls’ hyper-visibility and hysteria crosses this imagined line, reflecting fears that girls will fall outside of the dominant versions of ‘acceptable’ girlhood, such as the ‘can-do’ (Harris, 2004) and ‘Girl Power’ (Gonick, 2009) girls. As the fangirl is a *girl* and her identity is assumed to be unthreatening, her attachment to male popular cultural icons represents a deviant form of adolescence. This raises questions about the kinds of pleasures that girls can have, or can publicly express. An earlier manifestation of the fangirl is the ‘groupie’, a term that emerged in the 1960s to describe female music fans who were more interested in having sex with male music artists and bands than in their musical talents (see Cline, 1992; Ehrenreich et al, 1992, and more recently Hill, 2016). ‘Groupie’ is a derogative and heteronormative phrase that embodies the same anxieties as the fangirl: girls’ and young women’s uncontrollable hysteria.

Yet fangirls and groupies do not only circulate through media discourses. Indeed, Chapter Four addresses how my *adult* participants invoke the fangirl and the groupie, along with the ‘shipper fan’ (Williams, 2011), in order to normalise their pleasures. The discourse is therefore both pernicious and pervasive as it continues to resonate for fans well into their adulthood. I argue that fangirls are subjected to a quadruple-devaluation (age, class, gender *and* sexual orientation), rather than the triple devaluation that I discussed in relation to fandom itself. In Chapter Four I also frame the fangirl as a manifestation of flexible sexism as she operates through ‘intra-fan’ dynamics - that is, the pathologisation ‘of fans, by fans’ (Hills, 2012, p.121)

within the same fandom (see also Stanfill, 2013). Fangirls' hyper-visibility becomes increasingly problematic in a digital age, as social media introduces new avenues through which such sexist discourses can travel. Here, I am not simply referring to the technologies themselves but also the *discourses* that they inspire. In Chapter Four and Five, I argue that the fangirl and related discourses are implicated in fans' imaginings of social media's affordances, as fandom of this kind is not often valued as appropriate participation in digital fandoms. I now turn to a closer examination of these digital debates.

### **Discourses of the Digital and Fan Identity: Cyberspace and Sharing**

As Hine (2015) and others argue, digital technologies such as social media should not be understood on a purely technical level. That is, while the digital has a number of technical affordances, it is also made meaningful to users because it is a valuable *discourse* (Papacharissi, 2010; Marwick, 2013). The digital therefore emerges in people's lives 'in practice', to borrow from Hine, as it is 'realized through particular combinations of devices, people, and circumstances' (2015, p.29). Scholars interested in affordance theory make similar arguments (see Baym, 2010; McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015; Nagy and Neff, 2015), as they recognise that social media's affordances are 'socio-technical', comprised of both the 'materiality of technological artifacts and the lived practices of communication' (McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015, p.1). Through their articulations and negotiations, the fans of my study draw on two of the most pervasive digital discourses of the past few decades: 'cyberspace' and 'sharing'. That is, these discourses underpin what fans say, what they do, and why and how they do it. The terms emerged during different eras of the Internet's relatively short history, but each is meaningful to users - cyberspace enduringly so - as it speaks to their identity negotiations. The fans of my research do not use these exact terms, but instead draw on cyberspace's distinction between online/offline identities and on the risks associated with sharing on social media to navigate derision. This section illustrates my understanding of these terms and also nods to the ways they emerge through my research findings.

‘Cyberspace’ is a discourse that accompanied the birth of the Internet in the early 1990s. Early Internet researchers such as Stone (1995), Turkle (1996) and Plant (1997) argued that the Internet represented a discrete space - a *cyberspace* - that existed separately from offline and therefore ‘real’ life. The discourse embodied hopes about the possibilities of Internet communication, as it was hoped to free people from their ‘earthly bodies, allowing for pure communication unfettered from discrimination’ (Marwick, 2013, p.25). This era marked the popularisation of binary terms such as online/offline and real/virtual, which captured the perceived separation of Internet identities from everyday life. Yet even though this *term* fell out of fashion both academically and otherwise, the concept of a real-virtual dialectic did not, and indeed continues to persist as a powerful discourse today. Meanwhile the notion of a ‘cyberspace’ was replaced by a new identity-driven discourse: ‘sharing’. It was also superseded by a scholarly and popular insistence on the entanglement of the digital and everyday life, as I discuss later in this chapter (for example, Pink, 2012; Hine, 2015; Pink et al, 2016).

The platforms frequented by the fans of my study are underpinned by Web 2.0’s technologies and ideologies. As Zimmer explains, the term ‘Web 2.0’ was originally used to describe ‘the common features of various Web companies that survived the “dot-com burst” of the late 1990s (O’Rielly, 2005)’ (2008, n.p.). Social media are defined by Kaplan and Heinlein as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content’ (2010, p.60). Such technologies are driven by user-generated content and ordinary people’s participation, an ideology that has received widespread academic attention (for example, Jenkins, 2006a,b; Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011; Delwiche and Henderson, 2013). Yet as H. Kennedy notes, social media platforms do not use this term and instead invite users to ‘share’ (2016, p.23) information about their lives through words, images, videos, and other forms of data (see also John, 2012; J. Kennedy, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). The term is ubiquitous across social media platforms and replaces cyberspace’s ‘disembodiment’ (Marwick, 2013, p.25) hypothesis with an increased emphasis on Internet users’ authentic identities.

‘Authenticity’ is a notoriously slippery term (for example, Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013), but platforms like Facebook use it to denote a distinction between so-called ‘real’ identities and “‘fake” or fraudulent ones’ (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). As Haimson and Hoffman explain:

As Web services evolved from these early, often simple text-based platforms to richer, so-called ‘Web 2.0’ applications (O’Reilly, 2005), [...] fluidity and experimentation with identity eventually gave way to an expectation that people should represent an established, rather than experimental, identity (Marwick, 2013). (2016, n.p.)

I say more about platforms’ increasing insistence on authentic identities later in this chapter, but include this quote here because it describes a clear shift in discourses about the Internet and identity over the past few decades. The fans of my research must now navigate social media’s norms and rules around identity, which encourage users to share data about their lives rather than conceive of the Internet as a distinct cyberspace that enables experimentation. As Patelis notes, ‘the virtual is no longer understood as something more than an extension of real social life’ (2013, pp.121-122). Although platforms like 4chan and Reddit continue to promote this ideology (Bergstrom, 2011; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), those most frequently used by my participants - Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter - do not. With its ‘positive connotations of equality, selflessness and giving’ (John, 2012, p.176), sharing appears to offer users agency and control over the identities they use on social media. Yet the platforms listed above encourage the use of ‘authentic’ identities (for example, Hogan, 2013; Patelis, 2013; McNicol, 2013; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015; Haimson and Hoffman, 2016), which maintains the value of a separate online space - a cyberspace - for fans who wish to keep their acts of fandom as ‘secrets’, to borrow from one of my participants (Oscar). In Chapter Six, I show how the binary terms that accompanied the rise of the Internet (online/offline and real/virtual) are enduringly meaningful to fans whose pleasures are derided. The same chapter also address the ways fans navigate the risks of sharing content with social media using their so-called ‘real’ identities, another meaningful discusses for fans.

Teen drama fans negotiate social media in a unique way, as they must do so in the face of cultural derision. It is here where the originality of my project is located, as I argue that the dynamic between derision, guilt and pleasure is tied up with the meaningfulness of discourses like cyberspace and sharing to fans. This is perhaps why the former is enduringly valuable to fans and why the latter is often associated with risk. The next section examines another discourse characterising debates about social media: privacy.

### **Privacy and the Politics of Control**

Privacy emerges as a valuable discourse in my research, as teen drama fans simultaneously navigate changing norms around the sharing of their personal information online yet strategically conceal their fan pleasures and identities from certain people. Scholars from diverse fields have theorised privacy in various ways, such as: ‘a claim, a right, an interest, a value, a preference, or merely a state of existence’ (Nissenbaum, 2010, p.2). However my thesis frames privacy as a valuable *discourse* for teen drama fans, which takes on several new meanings in a social media age. The rise of social media over the past decade has inspired new questions about privacy, particularly because platforms actively encourage the ‘sharing’ of users’ personal data (John, 2012; J. Kennedy, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). As Young and Quan-Haase note, ‘by their very nature and design, SNSs encourage users to disclose substantial amounts of personal information’ (2013, p.481). Indeed, one can argue that the very purpose of social media ‘challenges conventional notions of privacy’ (Raynes-Goldie, 2010, n.p.). Such sentiments are echoed in mainstream media discourses. For example, boyd and Marwick criticise recent statements made by Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg and Google’s Eric Schmidt that ‘privacy is disappearing as a social norm’ (2011, p.5) (see also Bergstrom, 2011; H. Kennedy, 2016). Similarly, *TIME* magazine has recently claimed that platforms like Facebook are ‘redefining privacy’ (Fletcher, 2010). These statements imply that privacy no longer matters to platform owners in an age of social media, an attitude that has consequences for those who willingly use and contribute data to these services. As Bergstrom asks, could users’ embrace of social media:

Lead to a shift in thinking about the way we ‘should’ and ‘ought’ to share information online? Perhaps we are moving away from the fluid playground of identity described by Turkle and Stone [...], and moving to a more fixed link between our online and off-line selves championed by Zuckerberg [and Schmidt]. (2011, n.p.)

Bergstrom’s questions echo work by scholars such as Pink (2012), Hine (2015), and Pink et al (2016) who situate social media platforms within everyday life and contest a distinction between online and offline lives, spaces and selves. I say more about these debates later in this chapter, but note them here because teen drama fans do not straightforwardly adopt the entanglement encouraged by platform owners. Indeed, I argue in Chapter Five that privacy continues to matter to teen drama fans, particularly to those who seek to maintain their derided acts of fandom as secrets. This suggests that the concept needs further interrogation, not least because my participants evoke a real/virtual dialectic within a framework of privacy.

In recent years, scholars have argued for the nuanced and subjective meanings and practices of privacy in an attempt to think of it as a discourse rather than a tangible practice. This work mostly focuses on teenagers (boyd and Marwick, 2011; boyd, 2014) and young adults (boyd and Hargittai, 2010; Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Young and Quan-Hasse, 2013), and is also aligned with more complex understandings of young people. This work frames privacy in various ways, but broadly shows how young social media users often try to *control* the flow of their personal information and navigate platforms in a way that enables ‘feelings’ of privacy (Nissenbaum, 2010; boyd and Marwick, 2011; H. Kennedy, 2016), which resonates with the fans of my research. As Nissenbaum notes, this is not necessarily about social media users having the ‘right to control information about themselves [...] but ensuring that it flows *appropriately*’ (2010, p.2, emphasis in original). For example, Raynes-Goldie (2010) distinguishes between ‘social’ and ‘institutional’ privacy on Facebook to argue that young adults are ‘more concerned about controlling access to personal information rather than how the company behind Facebook [...] and its partners might use that information’ (2010, n.p.). The same can be said about my respondents, as I explain in Chapter Four. Similarly, boyd (2010) explores how social media users are situated within a constant negotiation between the



disclosure of PII (personally identifiable information) and the limitation of PEI (potentially embarrassing information). In these examples, social media users are shown to be actively controlling and negotiating their privacy, though to varying degrees of success. As Marwick and boyd note, ‘privacy in social media cannot be entirely maintained and established by individuals’ as a ‘user’s desired approach to information flow may be violated by her network or by a system’s technical architecture’ (2014, p.1062). My participants balance their secret fandom with a desire for privacy and platforms’ architecture.

The socio-technical politics of control are important to my research, as I show how fans are concerned with negating the harmful effects of exposure (Raynes-Goldie, 2010), and consciously limit their disclosure of PII in an effort to avoid the release of PEI (boyd, 2010). In other words, they strategically control social media in a way that maintains their fandom as a private, secret act. Although social media users’ content is not, as H. Kennedy notes, ‘technically’ (2016, p.201) private, certain platforms have an ability to facilitate a *feeling* of privacy for their users, or of ‘interiority’ to borrow from Trottier (2012, p.8). For example, a number of H. Kennedy’s research participants ‘suggested that social media *feel* private, personal and intimate, even when they are not’ (2016, p.201, emphasis in original). Chapter Five explores this notion, and shows how users’ feelings of privacy can vary according to the platform in question. Fans might also have multiple accounts on one social media platform (e.g., a Facebook Profile and Page), but negotiate their privacy differently according to the account and its purpose.<sup>3</sup> Teen drama fans try to maintain their privacy and limit the exposure of PEI *as fans*, but I suggest that this might not extend to their other uses of social media. I now turn to a discussion of another discourse of digital technology: labour.

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<sup>3</sup> When I capitalise ‘Profile’, I am referring to Facebook’s Profile function. Where I use a lower-case ‘p’, I intend for this term to capture a range of social media fan accounts (or pages, spaces, locations, etc).

## The Gendering of Fan Labour

Another discourse invoked by my research participants is ‘labour’, which teen drama fans frequently use as a discursive tool to rationalise their pleasures. The rise of social media has triggered new or renewed questions about labour relations, as Web 2.0 technologies rely on the contribution of user-generated content (UGC) and therefore redefine producer/consumer relations, as captured by hybrid terms such as ‘produsage’ (Bruns, 2008). Hesmondhalgh notes that these transformations to cultural production are not ‘without their critics’, and a ‘dominant theme of recent critical analysis of digital media is that they involve unpaid work on the part of participants’ (2010, p.268). Duffy explains that the highly charged free labour debate ‘pivots on the issue of whether unpaid social media activities reroute power from media institutions to audiences, or alternatively, allow companies to exploit consumers by freely harnessing their content and data’ (2015a, p.711). This explanation recognises that Web 2.0 users not only produce valuable, creative content but also their mere participation in social media generates ‘huge amounts of personal data’ (Fuchs, 2011, p.289). Fuchs draws on Marxist logic to argue that Web 2.0 ‘exploits users by commodifying their personal data and usage behaviour’ (2011, p.304), a perspective that has been critiqued by some scholars (for example, Hesmondhalgh, 2010). Fans frequently appear in debates about the new forms of labour brought about by social media. For example, Stanfill and Condis edited a special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* entitled ‘Fandom and/as Labor’, which sits alongside various journal articles and book chapters by other authors (for example, Baym and Burnett, 2009; De Kosnik, 2013; Turk, 2014).

Yet Hesmondhalgh questions the straightforward applicability of the term ‘labour’ to forms of cultural production, and asks:

Are we really meant to see people who sit at their computers modifying code or typing out responses to TV shows as ‘exploited’ in the same way as those who endure appalling conditions and pay in Indonesian sweatshops? Clearly not – and this raises the question of how to integrate such analysis into more satisfactory understandings of capitalism, exploitation, power and freedom. (2010, pp. 271-272)

Hesmondhalgh (2010) draws parallels between free labour debates and domestic labour, the unpaid household duties with which women have historically (and unfairly) been assigned (see also Fortunati, 2007; Gill, 2007b; Gregg, 2009; Jarrett, 2014, 2016; Duffy, 2015a,b). Jarrett notes that the dominant framework for contemporary free labour debates has ‘barely featured’ feminist research into the ‘affective labor performed in the home - “women’s work”’ (2014, p.14), despite parallels between some of their main arguments. In debates about Web 2.0, this creates a male and masculinised image of the supposed free labourer (Oullette in Andrejevic et al, 2014). Indeed, ‘it often seems as if immaterial labor was only “invented” when it moved out of the kitchen and onto the Internet’ (Jarrett, 2014, p.15).

What this body of work suggests is that the ‘free labourer’ of social media is *masculinised*. This gendered division of labour emerges through teen drama fans’ articulations, as they frequently draw on the masculinised discourse of paid, material, and productive labour to justify and rationalise their derided acts of fandom. They describe their fandom using terms like ‘part-time job’, ‘full-time job’, ‘work’, and ‘effort’, which (unconsciously) reproduce dominant and gendered assumptions about what gets valued as acceptable productive labour. Gregg amongst others discusses the division between public (paid, masculinised) and private (unpaid, feminised) spheres, ‘implying that work in the home is less “material” than that in the formal workplace’ (2009, p.211). Jarrett similarly notes that dominant capitalist systems have long privileged ‘strictly monetized exchange while undermining the importance of nonmonetized production’ (2014, p.15). Forms of labour that are associated with women and femininity include non-monetised domestic duties such as housework and caring for children, and continue to be deemed marginal to masculine forms of production, as noted by Biressi and Nunn:

The private sphere and, specifically, the home and the domestic realm remain essentially a denigrated space, and women’s association with homemaking and the family as a site of consumption continues to be problematic. (2013b, p.222)

Female fans in particular thus adopt a masculine subject position to produce a less problematic fan identity, emphasising their ‘rationality’ (van Zoonen, 1992, p.16; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008, p.231) above qualities that are usually ascribed to women, such as ‘emotionality’ (van Zoonen, 1992, p.16). Rather than making normative judgements about the reasonable rewards for my participants’ (usually unpaid) fan labour, in Chapter Five I suggest that ‘labour’ can be understood as a discursive tool that teen drama fans use to rationalise their fan pleasures. Their rationalisations also speak to historical stereotypes of fan activities as ‘frivolous, irrelevant, and even pathological’ (De Kosnik, 2013, p.98). Stanfill and Condis agree that work around fan labour offers an ‘antidote to surprisingly tenacious notions of fan activity as a valueless pleasure’ (2015, n.p.) (see also De Kosnik, 2013). Chapter Five examines how fans’ knowledge of gendered assumptions around labour and of derisions of fandom itself become implicated in their negotiations.

### **Social Media and Dis/embeddedness: Enforced Authenticity and Pseudonymity**

As I noted earlier in this chapter, several scholars have argued that digital media technologies and their attendant discourses are becoming increasingly *embedded* in their users’ everyday lives (for example, Pink, 2012; van Dijck and Poell, 2013; Hine, 2015; Pink et al, 2016). ‘Embeddedness’ is a term used by Hine in her recent book *Ethnography for the Internet* and refers to the sense in which digital technologies become ‘entwined with multiple forms of context and frames of meaning-making’ (2015, p.33). For Hine, an embedded approach to Internet research asks ‘how the internet comes to mean different things in different settings’ (2015, p.36), and embraces the *multiplicity* of digital technologies. This idea represents one of many moves away from scholarly and other constructions of the Internet as a ‘cyberspace’, in which it was imagined to be a domain set ‘apart from everyday life’ (Hine, 2015, p.33). Hine borrows her embedded approach to Internet ethnography from Miller and Slater (2000), whose exploration of Internet use in Trinidad was one of the first accounts to reject a cyberspatial model. Other digital media theorists like Pink (2012) and Pink et al (2016) take similar approaches in their recent work on the digital and everyday life. For example, Pink considers

the centrality of digital media to experiences of everyday life, but notes that they are felt ‘unevenly and in different ways among different individuals, groups and regions of the world’ (2012, p.124). This resonates with Hine’s (2015) point that there are *multiple* experiences and understandings of digital media. While my research does not ethnographically examine how social media is a part of fans’ ‘everyday worlds’ (Pink et al, 2016, p.10), it is influenced by research that accounts for how social media is shaped and given meaning by its users. In other words, it is concerned with how social media is made *meaningful* to fans, what they imagine its role in their lives to be, and how this is tied up with their fan pleasures.

As van Dijck and Poell note, the various ‘logics’ of social media platforms have ‘penetrated deeply into the mechanics of everyday life’ (2013, p.3). Indeed, social media companies are increasingly adopting this discursive approach, as they attempt to naturalise their embeddedness through a range of socio-technical principles related to their users’ identities. For example, Facebook - the most popular platform amongst my research participants - has recently adopted what it calls a ‘real-name’ policy. The policy requires users to use ‘the name that they go by in everyday life’ (Facebook, 2016c) and to present their ‘authentic identity’ (Facebook, 2016a), which must be verifiable by identity documentation if necessary (Facebook, 2016d). Facebook’s real-name policy is concerning for various reasons, not least because it excludes users with ‘marginalized or non-normative identities’ (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). Twitter, the second most popular platform amongst my participants, now allows ordinary users to ‘verify’ their identities using a phone number, a confirmed email address, a complete bio, profile and header photographs, a birthday, a website, and for the account to be unlocked to ‘public’ tweets (Burgess, 2016b). This privilege was formerly reserved for celebrities, sports stars, journalists, and other high-profile people. To confirm verification requests, Twitter also states that it requires ‘a copy of your official government-issued photo identification (e.g. passport or driver’s license)’ (Twitter, 2017). Verifying your Twitter account is not mandatory and is instead intended to let ‘people know that an account of public interest is authentic’ (Twitter, 2017); however, ordinary users are increasingly submitting such requests.

Facebook and Twitter's policies and logics represent platforms' increasing attempts to maintain consistency between users' social media and 'physical world identities' (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). Although not all platforms are governed by this logic, its consequences are widely felt and so become implicated in fans' experiences. One effect noted by Patelis is that 'virtual identity and anonymity are stigmatized' (2013, p.122) on some social media platforms, and in the case of Facebook Profiles are actually breaches of policy. In this context, anonymous - and, I add, pseudonymous - identities are 'understood as "fake"' (Patelis, 2013, p.122). Again, this contrasts with early research and discourses about the Internet that celebrated its facilitation of anonymity, pseudonymity, and other forms of 'identity play' (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015, n.p). Anonymity is defined by Hogan as a '*state* implying the absence of personally identifying qualities', whereas pseudonymity is a '*practice*' employed by social media users to 'facilitate nonidentifiable content' (2013, p.4, emphases in original). There is a history of scholarly discussion about the values of anonymity and pseudonymity online. Some debate the extent to which they enable harmful practices such as trolling, flaming, and doxxing (Bergstrom, 2011; Phillips, 2011; McCosker, 2013), others argue that they benefit users (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), and some maintain that they are neither wholly good nor bad (H. Kennedy, 2006). Although there are consequences of anonymity within certain contexts, I argue that pseudonymity is valuable for teen drama fans as they can engage in derided activities and enact seemingly unacceptable identities.

Indeed, if platforms' real-name logic constitutes a form of 'enforced authenticity' (McNicol, 2013; Haimson and Hoffman, 2016) for users, in some cases it might be *more* authentic to defy it than to 'present an online self that is in accordance with Facebook's [and other platforms'] policies' (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). This quote resonates with my research findings, as I argue in Chapter Six that it is easier for teen drama fans to 'pushback against the system' (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.) and adopt pseudonymous and *inauthentic* identities through certain social media platforms, like Facebook Pages. Not only do fans authenticate their identities through usernames and profiles, but also do so through the content that they produce. Although research around the entanglement of social media in

everyday life has clear value for my research, I argue that some of these ideas, particularly Hine's notion of embeddedness can be reframed and rearticulated to account for the ways social media users might consciously *disembed* (or detach, separate from, or other such terms) from certain platforms and their logics. I explore the practice of disembedding in Chapter Six.

In Chapter Six and throughout, I conceive of teen drama fandom as an activity that is part of everyday life. The rise of fan studies as a separate academic field threatens to de-situate it, to borrow from Pink (2012), from other forms of media engagement and audiencehood. Thus my participants' fandom, including their acts of disembedding, are still positioned within the everyday. Disembeddedness is complex and I introduce the notion as a way of thinking about these emerging dynamics, within which teen drama fans are never wholly embedded within nor disembedded from social media's increasingly pervasive logics. I now explore the ways social media are imagined by their users, such as teen drama fans. Although teen drama fandom is part of the everyday, it is also important to remember that social media is often *imagined* as a separate space from the real. Although these two issues may be counterintuitive, we nevertheless need to conceptualise them together in order to understand how 'the virtual' and other such spaces are being evoked, and why they are meaningful to fans.

### **Locating Pleasure: Domestic Spaces and Digital Cultures**

Several feminist media scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s located a form of pleasure in the discrete spaces that women created for themselves, usually within the private, domestic sphere of the home to engage with feminised and devalued media texts (Hobson, 1982/1989; Radway, 1984; Geraghty, 1991; Brown, 1994; Baym, 2000). Rather than constructing women's pleasures as problematic (as with the fangirl, whose pleasures produce her hysteria), this literature identified places where pleasure might be *permissible*. For these authors, it is the agentic act of creating a space that is intrinsically pleasurable. This is a different form of pleasure to those discussed so far. For example, normalising your fandom by drawing on discourses of the digital (e.g., labour) facilitates a form of pleasure, whereas this

section discusses how fans' pleasures can be located in certain acts. I examine how women's articulations of pleasure as a particular space enables a form of agency, and can be characterised as 'resistant' or 'hidden protest[s]' (van Zoonen, 1994, p.112) against patriarchal cultures. I note a striking continuity between existing feminist work and my current study, as the act of creating a separate space is enduringly pleasurable to teen drama fans. Yet I also consider how space is being renegotiated in a social media age, as platforms have introduced a series of new discourses.

Radway found that women often strategically 'carve out a solitary space' (1984, p.211) within the home, away from their husbands and children to read romance novels. Radway (1984) characterised the act of creating these spaces as resistant, as the romance readers made time for themselves within domestic spaces where they were typically 'expected to care for others' (Baym, 2000, p.15). As van Zoonen summarises, 'in the case of romance reading, this means a claim to leisure time otherwise denied to the ordinary housewife and a possibility of withdrawing from the caring and self-sacrificing role expected of them' (1994, p.112). Similarly, Hobson (1982/1989) and Geraghty (1991) found that women's viewing practices were sometimes embedded within domestic labour activities (for example, watching pre-recorded soap operas when they are cooking or cleaning). This is because women were often denied the opportunity to watch feminised television genres, as 'masculine power' tended to 'control viewing choices in the home (D. Morley, 1994)' (van Zoonen, 1994, p.112) (see also Blumenthal, 1997). For these authors, the act of creating a space served as a political and important form of resistance against the devaluation of women's leisure time, and against gendered inequalities within heteronormative domestic spaces. As Seiter notes, 'the home is perceived as a place of leisure for men and a place of work for women' (1999, p.21); a dynamic that remains strikingly unchanged for my adult, female, and heterosexual research participants.

In this literature, it is the act of creating a space that is *theirs* within the home, solitary or otherwise, that is pleasurable for women. Although I identify a number of pleasures that are unique to a social media age in my thesis, it is noteworthy that this type of pleasure is



enduringly meaningful to teen drama fans, particularly to my adult and female participants. I argue in Chapter Seven that there are clear connections between this earlier feminist work and my own, particularly because the home continues to be a place where women must fulfil domestic duties and confront gendered derisions of their fandom. My understanding of the home as a domestic and therefore feminised space derives from longstanding debates about the gendering of a public/private divide, partly ignited by Habermas' 1962 model of the public sphere (see also Fraser, 1992; Papacharissi, 2010; Jarrett, 2016). What is important for my thesis is how domestic spaces continue to be masculinised, despite social media's partial reconfiguration of spatial relations.

The idea that space emerges discursively is borrowed from feminist geography, as scholars such as Massey argue that space is produced through *discourse* and 'not just as a location in which interaction takes place' (2005, p.16). Social media has introduced a series of unique discourses, which are entangled with fans' negotiations of other spaces. Teen drama fandom exists within a dynamic and complex 'web', to borrow from Massey (1994, p.265), of inter-related spaces within fans' lives. 'Space' is a valuable discourse for my participants, and they use it to navigate derision both within and outside of the home. Chapter Seven explores how some of the fans 'carve out a solitary space' (Radway, 1984, p.211) within the home to watch teen drama series and participate in fan activities, just as Radway's romance readers did. But they also engage in fandom using social media, which means that platforms' affordances are entangled with their organisation of space. The same chapter also considers how this act is implicated in fans' negotiations of their so-called 'guilty pleasures', a discussion I now extend.

## Guilty Pleasures, or Pleasurable Guilt?

There's another emotion which comes with pleasure, like a faithful old dog that won't be shaken off. Guilt. Women know all about guilt - it's our speciality. Pleasure generates guilt, and that's bad enough. But even worse is the guilt that is generated when other people discuss our pleasures critically [...]. Pleasure may be sacrosanct but guilt is remorseless. (Coward, 1984, p.14)

Teen drama fandom is often framed, both by the fans themselves and in public and popular discourses, as a 'guilty pleasure'. For example, Ranker.com invites users to vote for the 'best guilty pleasure TV shows', asking 'why are we so ashamed to admit that we can't get enough of these so-called guilty pleasure TV shows?' and suggests that 'perhaps it's because, deep down, we recognize that these "so bad they're addictive" TV programs are truly terrible' (2017). At the time of writing, in early 2017, the site's users have ranked *Pretty Little Liars* third, *The Vampire Diaries* twelfth, and *Revenge* eighteenth (Ranker.com, 2017). Indeed, five of the site's top ten 'guilty pleasure TV shows' are teen drama series: *Xena Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-present), and *Once Upon a Time* (2011-present) (Ranker.com, 2017). Similarly, Complex.com tells you 'what your teen show guilty pleasure says about you', who the show is 'perfect for', and what the 'worst line of the pilot' episode is (2014). Not only does this article straightforwardly align guilty pleasures with teen television series but it also lists two of fan objects I discuss: *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The former is framed as a 'half heavily-plotted soap opera, half high school PTSD' while the latter is 'perfect for soap opera fans who like a little horror and horror fans who like a little melodrama' (Complex.com, 2014). The phrase 'guilty pleasure' is thus gendered, as it is largely used to refer to female-oriented texts and pleasures such as teen drama series and soap operas (see also Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1986; A. Gray, 1992; Haig, 2014; Cann, 2015).

For H. Thornham, there are particular 'confines or structures in which pleasure *can* be admitted to, or experienced', and I argue that when media texts are associated with young women, pleasure cannot be 'admitted to, or experienced' straightforwardly (2009, p.142,

emphasis in original). Hence the pleasures that are associated with young and feminised popular cultures are often described as *guilty* pleasures, which means that the term works to discursively undermine and devalue them. Yet the notion of a ‘guilty pleasure’ is surprisingly under-discussed within feminist media studies and related fields, though extant work on pleasure and feminised popular cultures (e.g., soap opera) does allude to a complex relationship between guilt and pleasure (for example, Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1986; A. Gray, 1987, 1992). In Chapter Seven, I argue that teen drama fans experience guilt because of the genre’s devalued cultural status. To borrow from Radway, their affective responses are shaped as much by their ‘own uneasiness’ as they are by ‘others’ disapproval’ (1984, p.105). However my research findings also point to *new* relations between guilt and pleasure, and I argued in Chapter Eight that guilt and pleasure (and derision) work together, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for women.

Feminist scholars have used the term ‘guilty pleasure’ in various ways, but share a commitment to highlighting its gendered nature (Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1986; A. Gray, 1992; Haig, 2014; Cann, 2015). For example, in her recent research with high-school aged mixed-gender students, Cann (2015) found that some students used the term ‘guilty pleasure’ to deride and devalue female-oriented popular cultures, such as U.S. teen drama series *90210* (2008-2013). For Cann’s participants, ‘guilty pleasure’ works as a discursive tool to dismiss feminised media texts, rearticulating their ‘lesser value within the wider cultural context’ (2015, p.162). In her research on *Twilight* fandom, Haig (2014) also argues that the uncomfortable relationship between guilt and pleasure is gendered, but shows how the phrase operates as more than a tool to devalue the feminine. Haig explains that cultural derisions of *Twilight* have provoked an ‘ironic, critical fandom in which readers and viewers bemoan the flaws of the books and films, while keenly devouring (if sometimes furtively) the texts’ (2014, pp.11-12). This critical form of fandom is known as ‘snark’, and is defined as a ‘combination of “snide” and “remark”’ (Haig, 2014, p.12). For Haig, *Twilight* snark is distinctive because fans’ criticisms appear, ‘in large part, to constitute that pleasure’ (2014, p.15). Guilt is therefore implicated in *Twilight* fans’ pleasurable activities: an idea that drives my arguments in Chapter

Seven. The term ‘guilty pleasure’ can thus be used to dismiss feminised media cultures and elevate one’s own status, or it can be taken apart to reveal the complex ways guilt and pleasure are entangled and implicated in people’s responses to derided media.

Other feminist media scholars have considered the gender politics of guilty pleasures within domestic spaces. For example, D. Morley (1986) and A. Gray (1987, 1992) examined the guilt that women experience when they abandon their household duties in favour of watching television (see D. Morley, 1986; A. Gray, 1987, 1992). As I explain in the previous section, the home - the privatised, feminised, domestic sphere - has long been understood as a place of work rather than leisure for women (see Seiter, 1999). A. Gray argues that this gendered division of labour has become naturalised, and is ‘embedded in the “unconscious” of many households’ (1992, p.43). This means that when women neglect their household duties to indulge their pleasures (in, for example, soap operas, romance novels, or teen drama series), they experience *guilt*. As Radway explains, women’s guilt thus arises as a result of their ‘own uneasiness about indulging in such an obviously pleasurable experience as much as it does as the consequence of others’ disapproval’ (1984, p.105). This guilt is the understandable result of their ‘socialization within a culture that continues to value work above play’ (Radway, 1984, p.105).

For this reason, women’s pleasures are often located in what D. Morley called ‘solo viewing’ (1986, pp.153-156): when women watch television alone. This echoes the feminist research discussed previously, which described how women create secret spaces for themselves to engage with feminised media texts. Scholars like Chambers (2016) have published more recent accounts of household media dynamics, but Radway (1984), D. Morley (1986), and A. Gray (1987, 1992) are three of the few to focus on the specific link between guilt, pleasure, and domesticity.

As I argued in the previous section, my findings are strikingly similar to those shared by feminist scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s. However my research revisits these debates and operationalises ‘guilty pleasures’ in a unique way. In Chapter Seven, I argue that the guilt

of abandoning domestic (and feminised) duties, such as childcare, is itself pleasurable for many of my adult and female teen drama fans. To borrow from Bury, fandom offers my participants a guilty and therefore pleasurable ‘space of their own’ (2005). It argues that extant literature tends to dichotomise ‘guilt’ and ‘pleasure’, and overlooks how guilt is itself pleasurable for teen drama fans (for an exception, see Haig, 2014). My thesis offers a theorisation of guilty pleasures by arguing that the complex and contradictory dynamics of a ‘guilty pleasure’ are themselves pleasurable. That is, a guilty pleasure can be thought of as pleasure *in and of itself*.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has located my project within specific theories and discourses, which include: feminist scholars’ turn to pleasure in the 1980s; definitions of ‘fandom’; postfeminism and the rise of more ‘flexible’ forms of sexism; the ‘fangirl’, ‘groupie’ and ‘shipper’ discourses; discourses of digital technologies; changes to fans’ and others users’ identities on social media platforms; ‘cyberspace’ and other earlier Internet studies concepts; fan labour and gender; social media platforms’ norms and rules around ‘authentic’ and pseudonymous identities; the notion of a domestic ‘space’; and the ‘guilty pleasure’ discourse. In the next chapter, I discuss my research methods and ethical considerations, before turning to an in-depth discussion of my research findings, where I unite the ideas discussed in my literature review, and explore teen drama fans’ unique negotiations in a social media age.

## Chapter Three: Research Methods and the Ethics of Social Media Research

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods I used to conduct this project and the ethics of researching social media platforms and their users, not least because methodological choices inevitably ‘inform and are informed by ethical issues’ (Buchanan, 2010, p.92) (see also Markham, 1998, 2006). The qualitative semi-structured Skype interviews, structured online interviews, and social media observations, which together constitute my three methodological approaches, have been shaped by ethical considerations from the research design and initial recruitment of participants to the way I have presented my findings (and will do through all subsequent publications). The emergence of social media platforms in the mid-2000s ignited a host of new and challenging questions about research ethics. Indeed, the tasks that ethical review boards have traditionally been charged with - ensuring that adequate informed consent is obtained from research participants, minimising the occurrence of risk and/or harm to research subjects, and maintaining anonymity and confidentiality - have become more challenging when researchers intend to investigate online environments (Buchanan, 2010, p.87; Beninger, 2017, p.58). Internet research ethics (IRE) have been widely discussed (for example, Ess, 2009; Markham and Baym, 2009; McKee and Porter, 2009; Buchanan, 2010; Zimmer, 2010; Markham, 2012; Markham and Buchanan, 2012; Beninger, 2017), particularly by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which published its widely cited *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research* recommendations in 2002, and revised it in 2012. The core issues raised by this and other IRE publications include: the definition of ‘human subjects’, the public/private divide, obtaining informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and identifying potential risks and harms; all of which will be addressed in this chapter, though not necessarily in that order.

I begin by acknowledging my own subject position as both an academic *and* a fan, and draw on the work of feminist researchers to reflexively account for my role in the research

process and outputs. I then explain how I recruited my participants, informed them about the study, and obtained their consent to be interviewed and observed. Next, I offer more details about my chosen research methods and explain why they were the most appropriate for my project and for the research questions I sought to address. I then describe how I stored, coded, and analysed the data, and conclude the chapter by introducing readers to my twenty-two research participants, outlining their distribution across social media platforms and their demographics.

### **Aca-Fandom and Situating the ‘Self’ in Research**

It would be unwise to progress with this chapter (and indeed with the thesis as a whole) before admitting that I am a fan of *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. I would call myself a ‘lurker’, a role defined by Baym as ‘people who never post’ (2000, p.33) in online communities or to social media. To borrow from J. Gray et al (2007), this means that I do not visibly participate in online fandoms, though I do follow a number of fan accounts on Instagram and Twitter, belong to various Facebook fan Groups, and have more recently followed some of the show’s actors on Snapchat. The main reason I ‘lurk’ mirrors my primary motivation for conducting this study: because the shows and their fans are derided, and because I do not want certain people in my life to associate me with this subject position. I am an adult, female, and feminist academic who feels that her pleasures should reside in worthier, perhaps middle-class objects and activities. This standpoint is reflected by the vast majority of my research participants and resonates with a wealth of feminist scholarship. I explained in Chapter One that derision emerges through my research in multiple ways, and one of which is that my own experiences of derision are implicated in the design of this research, and in my unease at ‘outing’ myself as a fan through my writing.

The subject position that I inhabit has been called ‘aca-fandom’ (or ‘fan-scholar’), a term that emerged in the 1990s ‘now most associated with the work of Hills (2002) and Jenkins (1992, 2006a)’ (Petersen, 2012, p.55) used to label academics who are also fans. There were, of

course, other writers whose work pre-dates this particular term and who did identify as fans (for example, Ang, 1985). Other fan studies scholars have debated the term, with some celebrating its critical capacity to ‘implode subject/object binaries as a practice of research, which has long been a concern for feminist methodologists (Cook and Fonow, 1986)’ (Evans and Stasi, 2014, p.14). Some of the feminist projects that inspired my own, like Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1984) and Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* (1992) were criticised for reinforcing a subject/object binary, as they privileged the researchers’ interpretations and relegated the respondents ‘to the position of “them”’ (Ang, 2003, p.229). Both Radway and Bacon-Smith failed to admit to their own pleasures and identifications in romance novels and *Star Trek*, despite clearly visible tensions between their fan and researcher/feminist subject positions (Brundson, 1997; Hollows, 2000; Ang, 2003; Petersen, 2012; Evans and Stasi, 2014). Although feminist scholars turned to pleasure in the 1980s, some of their publications were characterised by this kind of ‘feminist ambivalence’, as they could neither ‘repudiate these pleasures and identifications, nor simply celebrate them’ (Brundson, 1995, p.61). The notion of a ‘feminist ambivalence’ is equally apparent in my own research, not just for the participants but for me as well. Although I would never repudiate my participants’ pleasures, given that I share them, celebrating our joint identifications is equally troubling, as reflected by my hesitance to self-identify as a fan and to make my participation visible.

Other fan studies scholars, such as Bury, express ‘discontent’ (in Jenkins et al, 2011, n.p.) with the aca-fan label because it works to reinstate gendered boundaries, as ‘it might be easier to claim aca-fan status for men, when it is female fans who are often deemed “hysterical”’ (Evans and Stasi, 2014, p.14). Feminist scholars who research feminised media texts continue to experience an uncomfortable subject position, which inevitably ‘affect[s] the research process and outcome’ (R. Berger, 2015, p.220). Understanding the researcher as an agent whose positionality affects the research and the knowledge that is produced is known as ‘reflexivity’, a concept that derives from feminist epistemology (see Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995). Feminist research on reflexivity is plentiful, and is defined by Stanley and Wise as follows:



The researcher is an active presence, an agent, in research, and she constructs what is actually a viewpoint, a point of view that is both a *construction* or version and is consequently and necessarily *partial* in its understandings. (1993, p.6, emphases in original)

A key criticism of Radway (1984) and Bacon-Smith's (1992) work is that they failed to reflexively deal with their *own* pleasures, but this does not mean that they were expected to unproblematically 'out' themselves as both fans and feminists. This critique is levelled at issues of reflexivity and their need to attend to their ambivalence, and acknowledge how it might have affected their research.

Although self-reflexivity can be interpreted as inappropriate irrationality (Baym, 2009), a gendered perception, I recognise how my own subject position as a teen drama fan is implicated in my research. Reflexivity highlights power dynamics, and I understand that:

The public representation of the fan (as somewhat crazy, overinvested, and highly gendered) places the researcher in a powerful position, in a context where research already assumes hierarchization between researcher and researched (Press and Livingstone 2006). (Evans and Stasi, 2014, p.14)

An unequal researcher/researched dynamic is inevitable in any research scenario. Yet by aligning myself with teen drama fandom and demonstrating my knowledge of both the texts' narratives and of fan dynamics, I hoped my respondents would be able to overcome some of the obstacles they typically face when talking about their derided fandom. My uncomfortable positionality underpins this project in terms of: (1) my motivation for undertaking it and my unease at publishing the results, (2) the relationships I have developed with my respondents, and (3) my identification with some of their negotiations. I practiced 'continual internal dialogue and critical evaluation' (R. Berger, 2013, p.220) of my own role at all stages in this project, and will continue to do so long after I publish the results. I do not simply observe, investigate, and then describe teen drama fandoms to my readers. I continually recognise that I am an 'active presence, an agent' (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p.6) in my project. I reflexively account for my

own role in my research design and data collection, analysis, and interpretation here and throughout.

## **Participant Recruitment, Consent, and Identities**

### *Participant Recruitment*

I began my fieldwork by interviewing a *Pretty Little Liars* fan named Heather, who I first met at an academic conference. The interview was conducted in-person and served a dual purpose as both an entry point into her fan network, and as an opportunity to pilot the interview questions (see Appendix C). Heather then recommended that I speak to another *Pretty Little Liars* fan and each of my participants did the same thing, a technique known as ‘snowball sampling’ (for example, Patton, 2002; Marwick, 2013). Given many of my participants’ hesitations to disclose their identities in fan spaces, let alone to an unknown academic researcher, snowball sampling was an ideal recruitment method. When I describe my early interactions with fans in my empirical chapters, I do not say which participants directed me to others. This is because I do not want them to be able to identify each other through any published materials, which several fans have expressed an interest in reading.

Given that I commenced the fieldwork with a *Pretty Little Liars* fan and allowed my participants to direct me to other fans of either that show, *Revenge* or *The Vampire Diaries*, I have an unequal number of participants per series. I ended up able to conduct a greater number of online interviews for *The Vampire Diaries* than I did for *Pretty Little Liars*. These trends are the result of snowball sampling, where I encouraged participants to guide me to certain fans and texts and thus relied on their personal networks. However the aim of this research is not to generalise across fan cultures (e.g., ‘Do *Pretty Little Liars* fans articulate different pleasures to *The Vampire Diaries* fans?’). In her commentary on ‘quality’ in qualitative research, Baym argues that generalisability in qualitative research scenarios:

is neither relevant nor possible. The goal instead is comparability and the ability to offer analyses that can be coordinated with others (Montgomery and Baxter, 1998). The writers in this collection do not argue that findings should offer generalization to other contexts; quite the contrary, they argue that local specificity is essential to making sense of the internet in contemporary life. (Baym, 2009, p.175)

This is an often-observed point about qualitative research, which is nicely summarised by Baym (2009). That is, whilst there are some commonalities between fans, their pleasures and experiences are *individualised*. It was also difficult to target individual fans to ensure numeric consistency, given my reliance on snowball sampling. I also could not anticipate whether certain fans would feel comfortable with Skype rather than online interviews, and there was a trend across my *The Vampire Diaries* respondents to avoid Skype, which is again a direct result of snowball sampling.

I used three online avenues to contact potential participants: my University email address, my Twitter account, and my Facebook Profile. Although Twitter is a non-academic social networking platform (unlike academia.edu or similar), I consider my account to be for 'professional' purposes as I identify as a School of Media and Communication PhD Candidate and use the account to interact with fellow scholars. Unlike other social media researchers like Miguel (2016), I did not create a separate academic account on Facebook to recruit participants. Instead I used my personal Profile, through which I interact with friends from both within and outside of academia. McKee and Porter note that a key issue facing online researchers is that the methods to establish their presence and identity differ from face-to-face interactions, through which participants can make assumptions about the researcher based on their 'embodiment (presence of a physical body)' (2009, p.99). I used my Facebook Profile to establish my credibility as a researcher, given that it features various identity markers (e.g., a profile picture, gender, current city, and work and education information). This helped me to be transparent about my identity and intentions, which is 'critical to maintaining both personal and research credibility when studying online communities' (McKee and Porter, 2009, p.102). A number of my participants told me that they had 'Googled' me before they agreed to be interviewed and had looked at my Facebook Profile, Twitter account and University profile.

There are of course consequences to this decision, and so I took measures to protect the privacy of my own Facebook friends by, for example, restricting the visibility of my friends list to 'only me', limiting the audience of past posts, removing or hiding profile and cover images featuring other people, and hiding content from Facebook users who had not requested to be my friend. I also had to 'like', 'follow' and 'join' certain online fan spaces for the purposes of the fieldwork, and was conscious that people in my personal network would associate these with my identity. This was admittedly uncomfortable, but necessary to gain my respondents' trust. After the interviews had taken place, a small number of my research participants added me as a friend on Facebook, or followed me on Instagram (on which I have a 'private' account) and Twitter. I happily accepted these requests, given that I had a lot in common with some of my research participants, especially those who were fellow twenty-something teen drama fans. Their friendship is an entirely unexpected outcome of this research, though I did encounter a couple of difficult scenarios (see also Skeggs, 1995). I will not list these here, given that they were resolved and it is not my intention to embarrass or harm any of my participants.

### *Obtaining Informed Consent*

Once I had recruited research participants, I obtained their informed consent to be interviewed and observed. Participants were given an information sheet about the nature of the research, their voluntary involvement in Skype, online or in-person interviews, their voluntary involvement in social media observations, and the recording, storage and distribution of my research data (see Appendix A). If they consented, participants were asked to sign a consent form, which was written in lay terms and made clear their right to withdraw from the research (see Appendix B). Participants returned their signed consent forms (either typed or hand-written) through personal email addresses or through their social media fan accounts (e.g., Facebook Messenger). I signed and returned a completed copy of the form to each participant before the interview took place.

Given my focus on fandom of teen popular cultures, I expected some of my participants to be classed as underage (under sixteen years old), and I decided at the outset not to seek consent from underage participants' parents or guardians if this scenario emerged. In fact, of the participants who did disclose their age or age range, none were underage, although some, particularly those who conducted online interviews, did not identify their ages at all. Spriggs maintains that 'parental consent in addition to young people's consent is not always ethically required (2009, p.9). This is because adolescence is a time for young people to establish 'independence', and so they may choose to 'keep parts of their lives private' (Stern, 2004, p.280 in Spriggs, 2009, p.8) from their parents or guardians. boyd (2014) shares this perspective, arguing in her latest book that social media offer teens private spaces away from their parents. Indeed, my research findings demonstrate the extent to which fans try to maintain their fandom as a secret, an act that may have been compromised by obtaining parental consent. Although I did not seek parental consent, all of my participants were 'adequately informed about the research and its implications' (Spriggs, 2009, p.8) (see Appendices A and B), and I requested in the consent form that underage participants present their parents/guardians with a copy of the information sheet.

The issue of obtaining informed consent when using social media data is much debated by Internet researchers. Indeed, in online environments it is 'not often done' (Dias, 2003, p.33). Broadly speaking, Internet researchers' approach to obtaining informed consent rests on three main factors: (1) the politics of the platform, (2) the type of data they are trying to gather, and (3) researchers' and users' interpretations of an online public/private divide.

First, and as Gillespie (2010) notes, there are politics to social media platforms. For example, Bergstrom (2011) and van der Nagel and Frith (2015) both argue that platforms like Reddit and 4chan are characterised by different norms around identity, and so researchers might treat users' data differently. However the platforms most frequently used by my respondents (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) feel the effects of a so-called real-name Internet more powerfully

than Reddit and 4chan users (see Hogan, 2013), and so it was more ethical to obtain their informed consent.

Second, a researcher's approach will also depend on the type of data they are trying to gather. Although some scholars have argued that informed consent should always been sought when using people's information, 'obtaining it from individuals in practice can be very difficult' (Beninger, 2017, p.58), especially in online environments. Given my relatively small number of respondents and the nature of our communication before the interviews and observations took place, obtaining informed consent was not especially difficult.

The issue is also related to the third, which concerns researchers' and users' interpretations of an online public/private divide. For example, boyd (2010) and Markham and Buchanan (2012) argue that users' communication in 'public' social media spaces may not be perceived by them as such. Similarly, Zimmer argues that 'just because personal information is made available in some fashion on a social network, does not mean it is fair game for capture and release to all (see, generally, Stutzman, 2006; Zimmer, 2006; McGeeveran, 2007; boyd, 2008a)' (2010, p.323). Although some fans' social media accounts are publicly available and searchable, I do not regard their data as 'available writings to be harvested freely by any and all researchers' (McKee and Porter, 2009, p.79), and so I sought their consent to include it (though without directly quoting from it, as I explain later) in my research outputs.

### *Protecting Participants' Identities*

As noted in the AoIR's 2012 *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research* recommendations, it is often difficult to ascertain users' identities in online spaces, despite recent scholarly research into the ways 'online' identities coalesce with those lived in everyday life (for example, van Dijck and Poell, 2013; Hine, 2015; Pink, 2016; Pink et al, 2016). Indeed, I later detail the subversive measures fans take to conceal or even falsify their identity markers. Given their desire to maintain secrecy and also the popularity of pseudonymity on social media

(see for example Hogan, 2013; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), I decided not to ask participants to provide their identity markers, such as their legal name, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, education, or country of residence. I instead allowed this information to emerge through their articulations. This approach was better suited to the pseudonymous nature of online fandoms and to the fairly sensitive and potentially embarrassing nature of the information that I was dealing with. It means of course that some identificatory information is absent, but I deemed this far less important than the substance of their conversations. Before the interviews took place, some fans even stipulated that they would not provide me with identifying information if I asked for it.

Although many fans have chosen pseudonyms to engage in teen drama fandoms, I asked them to select another pseudonym for the purposes of my research. As Buchanan and other Internet researchers note, ‘online pseudonyms are often identifiable’ (2010, p.96) as they can be traced through search engines and other online tools. As Markham explains:

Traditional methods for protecting privacy by hiding or anonymizing data no longer suffice in situations where social researchers need to design studies, manage data, and build research reports in increasingly public, archivable, searchable, and traceable spaces. (2012, p.334)

Requesting that participants choose a pseudonym distinct from the one they use on social media thus ensures that they are not searchable, and protects them from potential harms that may occur when the research is stored, published, and presented. Some participants described their identity markers during the interview, which I have written about in my empirical chapters and also collated in a table (see Table 3). However I have omitted some particularly sensitive information from my published results (including this thesis). Bruckman advises Internet researchers to take this approach even if it “diminishes the quality of the research” (2002, n.p.)’ (in Buchanan, 2010, p.96) because it minimises the risk of harm to participants. However this decision might not negatively affect my project, given its partial focus on fans’ subversive attempts to falsify or conceal their identities.

## Interviews

I recruited twenty-two participants for this study, all of whom participated in interviews. I interviewed twelve *Pretty Little Liars* fans, seven *The Vampire Diaries* fans, and three *Revenge* fans between September 2014 and June 2015. Within this ten-month period, I conducted thirteen Skype interviews, eight online interviews, and one in-person interview. Interviews are an ideal tool for my project as they enable researchers to ‘establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants’ (Creswell, 2014, p.19). The method helps researchers to ‘obtain information they cannot gain by observations alone’ (A.A. Berger, 2014, p.159) and is ideally suited my main research question, which addresses the ways fans *articulate* the complex relationship between derision, guilt and pleasure, a question that could only be answered by talking to them. I quote directly from the interview data in my empirical chapters, though have omitted any information that could be used to identify the research participant. This of course meant that some valuable data had to be removed, however this is a fair and appropriate compromise for ensuring participants’ anonymity and minimising potential harm.

Although interviews were an ideal method to address my research questions, there are important issues about the kinds of knowledge that interviews produce. As Skeggs et al note, the design of a research project allows participants ‘access to different modes of articulation’ (2008, p.7). The authors argue that interviews are performative; they do not ‘simply “capture” or reveal the world out there’ but ‘generate the conditions of possibility that frame the object of analysis’ (Skeggs et al, 2008, p.20). Although I announced myself as a teen drama fan to each participant before the interviews took place, the research scenario *itself* will have shaped fans’ articulations of their pleasures. Their awareness that I was an academic researcher would have led them to interpret me in a certain way, though this would have been different for each participant, as Skeggs et al explain:



Participants interpreted us differently as: equals who happened to be academics; junior researchers; students; representatives of the State or social workers; people they could help or who could help them; or people whose identities were simply baffling. (2008, p.9)

I was able to draw on my own knowledge of the series and experiences as a teen drama fan when I talked to participants, but my social position will have played a role in the kinds of knowledge that I produced. For example, in Chapter Seven I discuss participants' articulations of their guilt. I argue that guilt and pleasure are entwined because of the broader cultural context I outline, but I suggest there are times when fans' articulations of their guilt might be performative, particularly when they discuss their other roles and identities as mothers, wives, students, workers, and not simply 'teen drama fans'. Combining the interviews with other research methods (e.g., focus groups or text-in-action (see Wood, 2009)) would have given me access to different kinds of knowledge. However these approaches were not suitable to the issues and questions I sought to address, nor were they feasible given the secrecy that my respondents often crave.

### *Skype Interviews*

The Skype interviews lasted between sixty to one hundred and eighty minutes each (see Table 1) and were semi-structured. That is, 'the interviewer usually has a written list of questions to ask the informant but tries, to the extent possible, to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews' (A.A. Berger, 2014, p.160). I took hand-written notes during all of my Skype interviews, and also recorded them to enable transcription and further note taking. I chose to interview participants using Skype due to both their globally distributed nature and because the technology enables them to maintain their anonymity. As Hanna notes, Skype allows researchers and participants to remain in a 'safe location' (2012, p.241). For example, creating a Skype account requires users to submit only their telephone number or email address, and users are not required to provide other identity markers (see Skype, 2017). I strongly suspect that some of my participants falsified their Skype name, or even created a separate account for the purposes of the interview. Participants were given the choice to conduct

either audio or video interviews: nine chose video interviews and four chose audio (see Table 1). I loosely followed a set of interviews questions, though the participants were not sent these questions ahead of the interview (see Appendix C).

One of the criticisms levelled at Skype interviews - particularly Skype audio - is that researchers can lose some of the visual and interpersonal ‘subtleties associated with physical interaction’ (Hanna, 2012, p.20). However Skype was the most appropriate tool for my research, given not only the broad geographical distribution of my participants but also some fans’ desire to retain their anonymity. Other fan studies scholars, such as Bury (2016), have used Skype interviews for similar reasons. Asking all participants to meet face-to-face or to engage in Skype video interviews would risk alienating certain fans. Indeed, the fans who wanted to keep their identities a ‘secret’ provided me with rich and unique research findings that I would otherwise have lost.

### *Online Interviews*

The online interviews were structured around a list of roughly twelve questions, which were sent to participants via email or Facebook Messenger ahead of the interview (see Appendix D). Eight participants were interviewed using this method as they did not feel comfortable to be interviewed through Skype audio or video for various reasons, which included language barriers and concerns about privacy. Online interviews were therefore a more suitable and respectful choice. Participants were sent a list of questions ahead of the interview, but I placed no limit on the amount that they could write. Some respondents (e.g., Carrie and Vicky) wrote two or three sentences per question, whereas Gioia and Kat’s responses each exceeded two pages. As the online interviews had a different format to those conducted through Skype, this meant I was not ‘comparing “like with like” “data”’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012, p.118). When I discuss my data in my empirical chapters, I acknowledge how the data was ‘made’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012, p.118) through my chosen methodology and research practices.

## Social Media Observations

To supplement my interview data, I conducted social media observations of seventeen of my twenty-two research participants. I observed those who consented for a three-month period, starting from the date of the interview. The observations helped me to build a deeper picture of my respondents' online participatory practices, given my desire to understand how they navigate as well as articulate their derided fan pleasures. I did not observe Heather, Parker, Katrine, Megan and Melody on social media. This is because Heather and Parker are also lurkers in *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms, and because the latter three have written blogs and articles about the series rather than participating through social media. I occupied the role of observer as participant (Gold, 1958; Walsh, 1998), which meant I observed fans' social media participation but did not pretend to be an actual group member. I did not announce my presence as a researcher in the fandoms because (1) I wanted to avoid reactivity. That is, my presence affecting what happened in the groups (A.A. Berger, 2014), and (2) because only those people who consented to participate in my research were observed.

To conduct the observations, I devised an observation guide and began by looking for basic information, such as the frequency of the participants' comments and their content and topic (see Appendix F). I then made fairly open and general notes about what was actually happening in the fan space, and coded my remarks alongside the interview data. In my empirical chapters and in any subsequent publications, I do not use direct quotes from my participants' social media fan accounts. This decision minimises the potential harm that could occur if the information was to be linked back to an individual 'by means of Internet search or other technology' (Markham and Buchanan, 2012, p.9). As boyd notes, 'just because something is publicly accessible doesn't mean people want it to be publicized' (2010, n.p.).

There are various tools that researchers can use to capture social media data; some are in-platform and others are more complex (H. Kennedy, 2016). For example, Twitter has a built-in advanced search function that allows users to filter tweets and save them as a HTML or

complete Web page, while researchers at the University of Amsterdam's Digital Methods Initiative (DMI) have developed various digital tools for similar purposes (for example, Rogers, 2013; Digital Methods Initiative, 2017). However I chose not to collect and save fans' social media data for two main reasons. First, because this data identifies my research participants, even though it would have been stored appropriately. And second, because this method would have captured the data of users who were not the object of my study, an important ethical issue raised by Markham and Buchanan:

Does the object of analysis include persons or texts beyond the immediate parameters outlined by the study? What are the potential ethical consequences and how might these be addressed? (For example, collecting data from a blog often includes comments; collecting data from a social media stream reveals links to other people or data outside the specific scope of the study). (2012, p.9)

I thus relied on taking field notes when I conducted my observations, and ensured that no identifying information such as participants' pseudonyms or social media handles were included. Hine argues that digital environments can 'seduce' (2015, p.75) researchers with the ease of recording, archiving, and searching for data. Yet storing and later reviewing social media data was not ethically appropriate for my research, and nor did this approach allow me to analyse fans' participation as the three-month observation period progressed. Hine explains that keeping field notes:

Encourages an active reflection on decisions about what is and is not to be counted as data, focuses the mind on the present moment of experience, and avoids deferring analysis to some solitary future moment away from the field. (2015, p.74)

Once the three-month observation period had ended, I coded and analysed my field notes alongside the interview data.

## Data Storage and Analysis

My participants' consent forms and interview data (both the transcripts and audio recordings) were stored on the secure University of Leeds network (N-Drive). I stored hard copies of the consent forms (those signed by both myself and my participants) on-campus in a locked cabinet in a secure office. These documents were stored separately to ensure that participants' fan and non-fan identities could not be linked. I used Nvivo software to code my research data and stored these files on the same secure network (N-Drive).

I used thematic analysis to identify and analyse themes and patterns within my data corpus and to help me organise my findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data analysis involved four main phases, a process influenced by Braun and Clarke (2006), Creswell, (2014), and A.A. Berger (2014): (1) Transcribing all interviews, gaining familiarity with the data corpus (both interviews and observation data), and making early notes about theme, (2) generating initial codes and looking for themes and patterns across the data corpus, (3) applying the proposed themes to the data corpus using Nvivo software, and identifying new themes and revising old ones as appropriate, and (4) producing the written analysis (Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven), re-visiting the data for a final time, and finalising the selected extracts. The main and final themes I developed were: acceptability; affordances; age; embeddedness; fangirls/groupies/shippers; fan stereotypes; gender; guilt; intra/inter-fan dynamics; labour; metrics; normalisation; participation; platforms; rationalisation; sexual orientation; sharing; social class. Some of these themes were dominant in all interview transcripts (e.g., fan stereotypes), while others emerged less frequently (e.g., metrics). The frequency with which certain themes emerged within and across the transcripts did not necessarily indicate their importance in relation to pleasure. There were also, of course, sub-themes and nuances within each of these categories. I discuss these issues in greater depth in my empirical chapters (Four, Five, Six and Seven).

Researchers often describe themes as 'emerging' through their data, which of course:

Denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers (Taylor and Ussher, 2001). (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80)

Thematic analysis always involves *choices* on the part of the researcher. I acknowledge that the themes I identified during my analysis were directly connected to the questions I sought to address about the connection between fandom, social media and pleasure, though I was nonetheless surprised and excited by what I discovered (e.g., the dominance of labour relations). My analysis also involved comparing unlike data (Skype and online interviews), which meant that different kinds of knowledge were produced through these interview methods.

My themes capture a range of *discourses* around fandom, gender and social media, a notion that discuss throughout but predominantly in Chapter Five. By 'discourse' I refer to the sense in which language (in addition to images and other forms of communication) is not neutral, and instead reveals ways of thinking about the world (for example, Gill, 1995; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Gill, 2000; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Put simply, a discourse is a form of knowledge that is 'structured' (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p.6). Pertinent to my object of research - devalued fan practices - and to the notion of discourse are questions of *power*. To quote Fairclough and Wodak:

Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may give rise to ideological effects - that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people. (1997, p.258)

This research is centrally concerned with issues of power and inequality, how they manifest in teen drama fandoms, and what this means for fans' pleasures. The gendered and other inequalities that I have discussed so far play a crucial role in teen drama fans' experiences, namely that they are inextricable from guilt (Coward, 1984). Thus widely recognised discourses are produced and reproduced by teen drama fans, and are negotiated in complex ways to reconcile their problematic pleasures.

## **Meet the Participants**

I conclude this chapter by briefly introducing readers to my twenty-two research participants. I provide fuller and richer descriptions of my respondents in the empirical chapters, though the tables below provide readers with a broad overview of their demographics and involvement in the research before I present my data in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. Table 1 details the interview dates, methods, and lengths. Table 2 shows the distribution of my research participants across social media platforms. Facebook is clearly the most popular platform amongst my respondents, and the only ones without Facebook fan accounts were those who I interviewed in-person, lurked, participated in other fans' accounts, or were recruited because they write about the show elsewhere. After Facebook, the most popular platforms amongst my fans were Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. Five participants also administered websites, and some others had blogs, Snapchat, or Wattpad accounts. The final table presents my participants' demographic details (see Table 3). As I explained earlier, I did not ask for any of this information and instead allowed participants to self-disclose through the interviews. It was more difficult to ascertain the online interviewees' identities, and so I have fewer demographic details for these participants. I also acknowledge that the information they gave me might be false, though this practice actually informs my analysis of my research findings (see for example Chapter Six).

Table 1. Interview dates, methods, and lengths

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Fan object</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Length</b>
Amanda	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	29 <sup>th</sup> September 2014	Skype audio	1:00:38
Carrie	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	14 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Elena	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Emily	<i>Revenge</i>	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2014	Skype video	1:17:31
Felix	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	Skype video	1:29:29
Gioia	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Heather	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	26 <sup>th</sup> September 2014	In-person	54:47
Jessica	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	21 <sup>st</sup> October 2014	Skype video	49:02
Kat	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Kate	<i>Revenge</i>	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	Skype video	52:30
Katrine	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	28 <sup>th</sup> October 2014	Skype video	56:57
Margaux	<i>Revenge</i>	19 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Marissa	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	30 <sup>th</sup> January 2015	Skype audio	1:10:07
Megan	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	30 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	Skype video	2:12:50
Melody	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2014	Skype audio	1:09:33
Nina	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2015	Skype video	1:32:19
Oscar	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	Skype video	1:29:29
Parker	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2014	Skype video	56:33
Reesa	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2014	Skype audio	1:03:20
Taylor	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	7 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	Skype video	1:00:44
Vicky	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a
Virginie	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2015	Facebook Messenger	n/a



Table 2. Distribution of participants across social media platforms (fan accounts)

Participant	Facebook Page	Twitter	Instagram	Website	Tumblr	Other
Amanda	x	x	x			
Carrie	x					
Elena	x					
Emily	x	x	x	x	x	
Felix	x	x	x	x		Podcast
Gioia	x					
Heather	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Lurker
Jessica	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Facebook participant
Kat	x					
Kate	x	x	x	x		
Katrine	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Blog
Margaux	x					
Marissa	x					
Megan	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Blog
Melody	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Blog
Nina	x	x		x	x	Snapchat
Oscar	x	x	x	x		Podcast
Parker	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Lurker
Reesa	x	x			x	Wattpad
Taylor	x	x			x	
Vicky	x					
Virginie	x					
<b>Total</b>	16	8	5	5	4	n/a

Table 3. Participant demographics<sup>4</sup>

Participant	Gender	Age/age range	Sexual orientation	Occupation	Marital status	Education	Country of residence
Amanda	Female	Early-forties	Heterosexual	Events manager	Married	MBA	North America
Carrie	Female	Teenager	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Elena	Female	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Emily	Female	Early-twenties	Unknown	Communications	Unknown	Bachelors	North America
Felix	Male	Thirties	Heterosexual	Marketing	In a relationship	Bachelors	North America
Gioia	Female	Late-twenties	Heterosexual	Administrative worker	Single	Unknown	Italy
Heather	Female	Twenties	Unknown	Student and bartender	In a relationship	PhD student	United Kingdom
Jessica	Female	Thirties	Heterosexual	Teacher, real-estate agent and mompreneur	Married	MBA	North America
Kat	Female	Late-teens	Unknown	Student	Unknown	Bachelors student	North America
Kate	Female	Early-twenties	Unknown	Student and part-time worker	Unknown	Bachelors student	Brazil
Katrine	Female	Early-twenties	Unknown	Writer and gallery worker	Single	Masters	North America
Margaux	Female	Late-twenties	Heterosexual	Student	In a relationship	Bachelors	Brazil
Marissa	Female	Late-teens	Unknown	Student	Unknown	Bachelors student	North America
Megan	Female	Mid-twenties	Unknown	Freelance television writer	Unknown	Bachelors	North America
Melody	Female	Late-thirties	Unknown	Entrepreneur and social media consultant	Single	Masters	North America
Nina	Female	Mid-twenties	Unknown	Journalist	Single	Unknown	North America
Oscar	Male	Thirties	Heterosexual	Marketing	In a relationship	Bachelors	North America
Parker	Male	Late-twenties	Gay	Student	Married	PhD student	United Kingdom
Reesa	Female	Early-twenties	Unknown	Student and make-up artist	Single	Bachelors student	Central Europe
Taylor	Female	Thirties	Heterosexual	Stay-at-home-mom	Married	Masters	North America
Vicky	Female	Teenager	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Virginie	Female	Twenties	Unknown	Teacher	Unknown	Bachelors	France

## Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the research methods I used to conduct this project. It has addressed the ethics of researching social media platforms and their users, given that ethical

<sup>4</sup> Table 3 features some labels fans assigned to themselves (e.g., ‘Mompreneur’) (see Littler (2017) for a discussion of this neoliberal and meritocratic discourse).

issues crucially underpin methodological choices and vice versa (Markham, 1998, 2006; Buchanan, 2010). It has discussed my role in the research as an ‘aca-fan’ (both an academic and a fan) and therefore stressed my active involvement in the project’s processes and outcomes (Stanley and Wise, 1993). It outlined my methods for recruiting research participants, informing them about the study, and obtaining their consent to be interviewed and observed. It addressed ongoing debates about how best to protect participants’ identities in online research, given the increasing ease with which their online participation is ‘archivable, searchable, and traceable’ (Markham, 2012, p.334). Crucially, my methodological approach and ethical considerations were intended to minimise any potential risks or harms to my research participants.

In terms of benefits, my study provided participants with an outlet to reflect on their fandom. It also gave them the chance to talk about the object of their fandom extensively, in a one-to-one environment, with someone whose research was dedicated to understanding and relaying their views. It offered my respondents a rare space to voice their fan pleasures within a broader culture that is intent on devaluing them, to someone who is both an academic researcher *and* a fan, and who shares their experiences of derision, guilt, and pleasure. To quote Kat, a fan who ‘role-plays’ as a character from *The Vampire Diaries*, ‘thank you for reminding me why I love Katerina’.

In the following four chapters, I discuss the experiences of more teen drama fans like Kat and explore my empirical data. Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven tackle the relationship between teen drama fandom and guilt, derision, and pleasure by examining four main themes: (1) adult fans’ normalisations of their fandom, (2) the meaningfulness of discourses of digital technologies (e.g., social media) to fans, (3) fans’ subversive practices of disembedding from social media, and (4) how guilt sometimes gets valued *as* a pleasure for teen drama fans. These chapters are underpinned by my commitment to conducting ethical research, and to maximising the benefits and minimising the harms to research participants.

## Chapter Four: Adults' Normalisations of Teen Drama Fandom

### Introduction: 'This is Just More Normal'

*Pretty Little Liars* fans aren't, like, the Comic-Con type of people \*laughs\*. I feel like this is just more normal. [...] In my opinion, those are the very interesting people who are into the whole, you know-- Those people who are very-- And I think those types of fans are obsessive, because they'll go to these conventions, they'll dress up as the characters or whatever. If they did a *Pretty Little Liars* convention, I don't think that we would be showing up there, you know, as Black Veil. I don't think it would be that extreme. (Jessica, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

As teen drama series have a low cultural status, their adult fans often try to normalise their activities and pleasures. In so doing, they reproduce the same intersecting classist, ageist, and sexist discourses that are levelled against them, as we can see from the quote above. In the quote, Jessica, who I introduce later in this chapter, differentiates *Pretty Little Liars* fans from 'the Comic-Con type of people' by arguing that the former are 'more normal'. She ostracises other fans for their 'obsessive' and 'extreme' behaviours, such as those who dress up as characters at conventions. The quote reflects the disdain that fans often face for their 'extreme' (Busse, 2013, p.78), 'obsessive' (Click, 2009, n.p.), and 'excessively emotional' (J. Gray, 2003, p.67) behaviour, and can be unpacked to show how these discourses are sexist, ageist and classist, as I do throughout this chapter. Indeed, Jessica literally uses the word 'normal' to defend her own fandom and the fan spaces that she inhabits and finds pleasurable. I am not suggesting that fans like Jessica are being deliberately discriminatory here, but argue instead that she and other adult fans mobilise four intersecting cultural discourses - age, gender, social class, and sexual orientation - in response to derision. These four discourses combine to form a *quadruple devaluation*, a notion that is unique to adults' teen drama fandom and works in two main ways: (1) it can be used to help adult fans to normalise their devalued pleasures, as they ostracise other fans' behaviours (e.g., 'fangirling') to make their own pleasures seem more acceptable, and (2) they mobilise it to generate a form of pleasure, as some of my adult respondents enjoy adopting roles that elevate their cultural status (e.g., being an 'educator' of other fans). Both of these findings are deeply troubling for teen drama fandom as they suggest

that derision is inescapable, given that it is mobilised in *direct response* to other forms of criticism.

Given this, the central focus of this chapter is how adults normalise their teen drama fandom, why they do so, what this means for their pleasures, and how this should be understood in relation to broader debates around sexism. I do this firstly through an examination of some adult fans' discussions of teen drama series' intertextual references to objects of high culture, such as classic film and literature. Teen drama series and fandom are both considered to be popular or 'low' forms of culture, which means that fans' articulations can be read as attempts to legitimise their pleasures. The series' intertextual references make their fandom more permissible, yet this might also reinforce a longstanding class-based divide between high and low cultures. Following this, I show how several adult fans emphasise the importance of education in fandom, both in terms of educating other fans and being educated themselves. Although this technique is a form of pleasure for fans, it also frames younger fans' participation as somewhat irrational, reinforcing ageist stereotypes of their behaviour and creating rigid boundaries of acceptability within teen drama fandoms. Finally, I show how some adult fans draw on the popular and sexist discourses of the 'groupie', the 'fangirl' and the 'shipper' in their articulations, by constructing them as imagined Others against which their own enactments of fandom can be measured. Scholars such as Hills (2012), Busse (2013) and Stanfill (2013) make similar arguments about how fans shift stereotypes onto others, and I further these debates by arguing that this tactic is intrinsic to adult fans' pleasures. I also argue that the perpetuation of sexism through intra-fan dynamics (Hills, 2012; Stanfill, 2013), a term I define later, represents its durability and flexibility in a postfeminist age (Gill 2011; Hill et al, 2016).

There are a wealth of fan pleasures identified within this section, then, including humour and postfeminist 'knowingness', recognition of intertextual references, developing 'theories', 'role-playing', educating other fans, and characters' relationships. As I note these pleasures, I show how they exist in tension with derision: a central underpinning theme of my thesis. A number of fan studies scholars have shown how fans reproduce intersecting

inequalities within fandoms (for example, Baym, 2000; Hills, 2012; Busse, 2013; Stanfill, 2013). But for my study and for adult fans in particular, the reproduction of derision might be thought of as intrinsic to their pleasures and may well constitute a pleasure in and of itself. Perhaps it is only by rearticulating stereotypes and ostracising other fans that their pleasures can become permissible, though this is not necessarily a deliberate act.

### **High Cultures and Permissible Pleasures**

Teen drama series' cultural status is underpinned by longstanding assumptions about social class and culture. In 2008, Skeggs et al noted that 'the analysis of class formations in audience research' had 'slipped from the research agenda' (p.6). Later, Biressi and Nunn explained that there was 'scepticism on the part of some scholars about the continuing value of reading culture in class terms' (2013as, p.17), despite its resonance in their research and in my own. This 'swing' was said to be driven by 'theoretical shifts in thinking about identity formation' (Skeggs et al, 2008, p.6), which gave rise to neoliberal processes of individualisation. Yet there has been a renewed emphasis on research of this kind, partly driven by their work and inspired by the need to understand how such processes are working (see also Skeggs and Wood, 2011, 2012; Biressi and Nunn, 2013a). In fan studies, scholars such as Pinkowitz (2011), Hills (2012), Busse (2013), and Stanfill (2013) continue to draw on seminal texts about social class and fandom, such as Jenson's (1992), to argue that classed stereotypes of fandom as dangerous and unworthy endure. This research argued that derisions of television fan cultures are classed, as both are associated with *popular* cultures. It argued that fans are pathologised due to their irrational attachments to popular cultures, which adds a gendered element to debates about class, as 'behaviour perceived as fundamentally irrational, excessively emotional, foolish and passive has made the fan decisively feminine' (J. Gray, 1999, in J. Gray, 2003, p.67). In keeping with Pinkowitz (2011), Hills (2012), Busse (2013), Stanfill (2013) and other fan studies scholars, I argue that teen drama fans mobilise classed discourses as a way of normalising their pleasures.

This section shows how fans have developed a range of techniques to negotiate derision, one of which is that some adult fans draw on teen drama series' intertextual references to high cultures (texts that are associated with the higher social classes). In one of the only two anthologies about teen television, Hills made a similar point about the narrative of *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003). He argued that it 'sought to elevate itself above a devalued "teen TV" status [...] intertextually (by aligning itself with Williamson's other, high-profile work in teen horror cinema)' (2004, p.55). In what follows, I argue that teen drama fans are also doing this work by noting the shows' intertextual references in order to elevate the status of their pleasures. To make this case, I draw on empirical data from three *Pretty Little Liars* fans: Felix, Oscar, and Taylor.

Felix and Oscar self-identify as thirty-something, heterosexual and North American men who are both fans of *Pretty Little Liars*. They run their own website and administer Facebook, Instagram and Twitter fan accounts for the show, and also present a weekly iTunes podcast. One point of discussion in our interview was the name of their various fan accounts, as it is deliberately gendered male. The title implies that they are adult men and therefore fall outside of the show's core demographic. This knowing and intentionality humorous approach illustrates Felix and Oscar's awareness that they do not 'belong' within *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms because of their age and gender. The theme of humour extends to the content that they produce, particularly through their captions of still images from the show, which they post on Instagram and Twitter. Felix and Oscar's identity negotiations, which I discuss further in Chapter Seven, reflect their recognition that the show is devalued. When I asked them about the name of their fan accounts, Oscar told me that the title started out as a 'somewhat of a joke':

Oscar: Originally that was not the name of our podcast, and we didn't really have a name for it. We just called it *A Pretty Little Liars Podcast*. Around like the seventeenth or eighteenth episode, I think one of us just said, jokingly, we could call it [name]. I think it's just to say, you know, hey, like, it's not just girls that watch this show, guys watch the show also.

Felix: And should!

Oscar: And to kind of be a little tongue-in-cheek, you know. Kind of-- I guess the title is a little bit protesting too much, you know, and kind of knowing that. But still saying, hey, we watch the show too, you know? And we don't care.

Through their fan identities, Felix and Oscar reject the assumption that *Pretty Little Liars* fans are exclusively young and female. Their negotiations also reflect their awareness that the show is disparaged, and that this is because it is aimed at 'girls' (Oscar). Their 'tongue-in-cheek' (Oscar) approach knowingly plays on derisions of teen drama series and on the subversiveness of their own fan identities. I say more about Gill's (2011) notion of flexible sexism later in this chapter, but note here how sexist discourses are being repackaged as ironic and knowing: a key characteristic of postfeminist media cultures (Gill, 2007c). At the same time, my research also highlights how sexist derisions are problematically *embedded* within fans' pleasures, particularly - as with Felix and Oscar's - through a knowing and humorous approach. This, I suggest, makes such discourses harder to see, ultimately normalising and even masking them.

Despite Oscar's assertion that he and Felix 'don't care' that they are adult and male fans of the show, *Pretty Little Liars*' references to high cultures make their pleasures more permissible. They discuss these references at great lengths in their podcast, on social media, and also during our interview. As Felix explains, part of the 'prep work' for recording their podcast includes 'research[ing]' show's 'extensive [...] references and homage to classic films and what have you', which include Alfred Hitchcock films, film noir, and classic books such as *Lolita* (1955) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). To an extent, this undermines Oscar's claim that he and Felix 'don't care' that they are adult and male fans of *Pretty Little Liars*, as they partially disavow their 'tongue-in-cheek' (Oscar) perspective by trying to normalise their fandom.

Another of my participants, Taylor, makes similar references to high cultures on her social media fan accounts, and also during our interview. Taylor self-identifies as a thirty-something, heterosexual, and North American woman who is a fan of *Pretty Little Liars*. Taylor identified herself as a 'stay-at-home mom' to her two-year-old daughter, lives with her husband, and has a Masters degree. She administers Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter fan accounts, which



are dedicated to a popular fan theory about the identity of A: the show's antagonist. Similar to Felix and Oscar, Taylor's articulations and enactments of fandom reflect her awareness that her subject position - as a *Pretty Little Liars* fan - is culturally devalued. Although she is aware that the show's demographic is teenagers, she argues that its intertextual references enable it to 'transcend to something that appeals to adults', especially to educated adults like herself. Like Felix and Oscar, Taylor's fan pleasures are partly fuelled by the ways the show speaks to its adult audiences. For her, intertextuality is central to the show's narrative, to her theories about A's identity, and therefore to her fan identity and pleasures.

On her fan accounts, she writes extensively about the show's references to the books *The Bell Jar* (1963), *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), and also the films *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and *Black Swan* (2010). If she is unfamiliar with a reference from the show, she will conduct 'research' on it, like Felix and Oscar do. For Taylor, the *Black Swan* reference played a central role in her decision to set up her fan accounts and to become what she calls a 'PLL theorist', as she explains below:

I was online and I was looking at theories, and I saw um... I saw the *Black Swan* theory from UnmAsked, which is, you know, season two episode twenty-five. And that-- That was-- That just blew my mind. And that's when I started researching on my own and kind of started putting everything together, going back and forth. I've watched *Pretty Little Liars* episodes I can't even tell you how many times. And that's why it's so funny when people say to me, have you even watched the show? There's no way she's A. And I'm like, I've probably watched this episode more times than the years you are \*laughs\*. So I think that that scene and that theory propelled me to watch more for myself and re-watch everything. [...] That was that a-ha moment for me [...] because I really wanted to validate that original theory I'd seen. (Taylor)

Here, Taylor claims that she found the *Black Swan* theory to be particularly convincing, which 'propelled' her to 'validate' it through her own research. She later notes that the show's intertextuality means that its fans 'get to be [...] investigator[s], in a way. That's what it feels like' (Taylor). She clearly takes pleasure in researching and developing theories about A's identity, which arguably feels like a more acceptable identity for her because her theories involve high cultures and research.

Intertextuality is a key part of *Pretty Little Liars*' narrative and plays a crucial role in many fans' theories, as Felix and Oscar explain below:

Oscar: I think one of the things that I noticed when I started watching the show was that, even though it is ostensibly a teen show [and] it's about teen characters, the writers-- Like, all their references are like Hitchcock and old film noir. It's like they're doing this teen show, but they're going to fill it with the kinds of things that interest them as well. So I've always felt like there's a surface level to the show, and then like a more-- A deeper, underneath level, where you can enjoy some broader aspects than just the teen stuff. It's funny, for a teenage show it has so few references to, like, normal teenage life. They have the, you know, occasional girl talk and whatnot, but it's extremely rare that they'll ever mention anything in like popular culture that would be relevant to teens at all.

Felix: Well, and one of the directors of the show, Norman Buckley, will constantly kind of jokingly rant that he wishes the teen audience got concepts like existentialism more because it's so integral to the show.

While *Pretty Little Liars* is, as Oscar claims, 'ostensibly a teen show', its fans and viewers need to have a certain level of knowledge about classic films and literature in order to fully understand the narrative. For Oscar, there is a 'deeper, underneath level' of meaning to the show, which is strictly intended for adults' pleasures. Felix explains that one of the show's directors 'jokingly rants' about the teen audiences' lack of knowledge of 'concepts like existentialism', which are included for the interest of adult viewers. Their understanding forms an important part of their pleasure and also underpins their fan identities. This nods to Taylor's claim that the series 'transcend[s] to something that appeals to adults', and implies that its intertextual references work on two levels: they (1) are central to the narrative and therefore to fans' theories, and (2) facilitate fans' pleasures, particularly those who self-identify as adults.

However intertextuality also reinforces the longstanding classed divide between popular and high cultures, and its intersections with gender and age. Felix, Oscar and Taylor's pleasures are only permissible if *Pretty Little Liars* can be linked to high cultures, which I argue does nothing to disrupt or subvert these assumptions. As Jenson (1992) and others have noted, fandom is associated with popular cultures, meaning fans' pleasures are deemed to be obsessive, irrational, and therefore unworthy. Yet people's pleasures in forms of high culture are considered to be rational and therefore worthier. Although Jenson was writing in 1992, it is clear from my analysis that assumptions about fandom and the unworthiness of lowbrow texts

remain entrenched. Indeed, these classed (and also gendered) assumptions play a dominant role in my research data, a deeply problematic finding. Oscar reinforces the gendered distinction between high and low cultures by noting that the feminised elements of the show, such as its ‘girl talk’ exist only at a ‘surface level’. This works to devalue the show’s teen and female audience, who he argues only understand ‘the teen stuff’. Yet he and Felix seemingly naturally appreciate its ‘deeper’ levels because they are adult men. Taylor similarly devalues younger fans in her response to those questioning her knowledge of the show, by stating that she has ‘probably watched this episode more times than the years you are \*laughs\*’. In this statement, which ends with laughter, Taylor assumes that those questioning her knowledge are young fans, which again reinforces a maturity boundary.

Although Felix, Oscar, and Taylor’s references to high cultures make their own pleasures more permissible, they are not deliberately ostracising the young and female fans of the show. Indeed, Felix and Oscar’s explicit identification as adult, male, and heterosexual *Pretty Little Liars* fans is an important and political statement, given the devaluation that is evidently felt by many fans, especially men. The same can be said about Taylor, who ‘unmasked’ her identity as an adult fan on Twitter to coincide with a *Pretty Little Liars* episode of the same name. I do not read Felix, Oscar and Taylor’s attempts to normalise their fan identities as conscious classism, ageism, or sexism. Rather, their recognition of the show’s references to classic films and literature helps them to navigate their fandom of a derided television series, and to occupy unacceptable yet simultaneously *pleasurable* subject positions. Whilst their fan identities seem to be subversive, given the show’s derided status, inequalities such as classism are embedded in their negotiations of fandom. When analysing teen drama fandoms, pleasure and derision should therefore be theorised together.

This section has shown how assumptions about what constitute acceptable forms of culture are embedded within adult teen drama fans’ negotiations. I have argued that Felix, Oscar and Taylor’s understanding of *Pretty Little Liars*’ cultural status influences how they navigate both the text’s narrative and their fandom. All three fans recognise the show’s intertextual

references to objects of high culture (which I suspect is linked to the writers' own pleasures and to their attempts to legitimise *Pretty Little Liars* as a worthy television text), and take pleasure in recognising them. The reason this recognition is pleasurable - and perhaps why they told me, an adult academic researcher, about it - is because intertextual references counter the show's popular, lowbrow, and devalued status. In short, the references make adults' teen drama fandom a more acceptable, normal, and rational activity. The fans also discuss these references at length on social media, which means they normalised their fandom both within fan spaces and in the performative research scenario, where they were aware that I was an academic researcher (see Skeggs et al, 2008). I now further this discussion by showing how adult fans create hierarchies of acceptability within fandoms and communicate these boundaries in our discussions.

### **Education and Enactments of Acceptable Adulthood**

Teen drama fans, particularly those who are adults, are subjected to derision from multiple angles: in dominant popular discourses, from certain people in their lives, and also within fan spaces. In light of this, adult fans often emphasise the importance of education, which suggests they are trying to enact what they perceive to be more acceptable fan identities. Some fans place value on being an *educator*, through their roles as fan account administrators, participants, or in their everyday lives (for example, being employed as a teacher), and other fans value being *educated* with a formal education. In what follows, I show how adult fans routinely disparage younger fans for their seemingly unacceptable behaviour, which creates boundaries of acceptability within fandoms.

This practice resonates with Skeggs et al's respondents, whose awareness of the 'cultural attitude of derision towards "reality" television' (2008, p.9) led them to hold the form at a distance during the interviews. For example, one interviewee, Ann, provided a 'contextualized and "useful" educational reason' (Skeggs et al, 2008, p.9) for watching *Supernanny* (2004-2012), a reality television show about parents who struggle with their children's behavioural issues. My adult fans' emphases on their own education *and* their roles

as educators within the fandom are motivated by similar stereotypes of fans as ‘uneducated and emotional’, who are ‘damned through their association with “low status” cultural forms’ (Hollows, 2000, p.179). Adding to this, Stanfill has recently argued that fans’ supposed irrationality ‘sometimes takes a more sinister form’, as fans are defined by their confusion about ‘the distinctions between fantasy and reality, which leads to connotations of insanity and lack of behavioural and affective boundaries (Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Kozinets, 2001; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b)’ (2013, p.124). Talking about *Twilight* anti-fandoms, Pinkowitz similarly argues that the Anti Twilight Movement (ATM) perpetuates:

Accepted cultural notions about the superiority of the reasoned, the academic, and the elite, as well as of the inferiority of the popular, the emotional, and the feminine; it does so in hopes of rendering its own antifandom safe from similar cultural censures. (2011, n.p.).

I suggest that my respondents’ awareness of these stigmas led them to frame their identities in more rational terms, such as education, knowledge, experience, and maturity. My position as an academic researcher might also have played a role. This is why younger fans, who are naturally less educated, are often the targets of adult fans’ scorn. As I note in the previous section, these rationalisations are also gendered, as emotionality has long been problematically associated with femininity, whereas rationality is masculinised (van Zoonen, 1992; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008; Pinkowitz, 2010; Busse, 2013; Duffett, 2013).

Enacting what they perceive to be a more acceptable form of adulthood is an important form of pleasure for fans as it helps them to normalise their devalued pleasures. However, I suggest that this practice might also constitute a form of pleasure, as some of my adult respondents enjoy adopting roles as ‘educators’, or explaining that they are educating other fans to elevate their cultural status. Yet these articulations problematically reinforce sexist and ageist stigmas about younger fans’ behaviours. These negotiations are particularly prevalent in *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms, perhaps because the show’s narrative revolves around a mystery: the identity of the antagonist A. This means that fans are encouraged to develop so-called ‘theories’ about A’s identity, which might naturalise the significance of education and rationality. To

make this case, this section draws on empirical data from four *Pretty Little Liars* fans: Amanda, Jessica, Taylor, and Katrine.

In some ways, Amanda, Jessica and Taylor's fan identities are very similar, as they all emphasise their roles as educators both within and outside of *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms. The discourse helps them to legitimise their fandom, given their recognition that they fall outside of the show's target demographic. Amanda, Jessica and Taylor self-identity as heterosexual and North American women, and are all married with children. Amanda is in her early forties, and Jessica and Taylor are in their thirties. Amanda administers Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter fan accounts for the show, although she mostly neglects the latter two. I therefore discuss only her Facebook Page in this section. Jessica participates in various *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook fan Pages and Groups but does not administer any fan accounts herself. Taylor administers Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter fan accounts, which are dedicated to a theory about A's identity. Although they all frame themselves as educators, their fan identities differ in other ways. For example, Jessica participates in fandoms using her Facebook Profile, which features various markers of what she refers to as her 'real' identity, such as her Profile picture, gender, age, and current location, whereas Taylor conceals aspects of her identity in an effort to retain what she calls her 'anonymity'. Amanda, however, enacts the identity of one of her teenage children. To quote Amanda, 'people think I'm a teenager, pretty much'.

Amanda is the only fan I interviewed who, to my knowledge, deliberately falsifies her identity markers on her fan accounts. Most of my other participants conceal aspects of their identity, but do not falsify them. To do this, she uses her child's identity markers such as their gender and age. She falsifies information that might make either or both of them identifiable, such as her child's legal name, and instead uses a pseudonym. As Amanda explains below, she did not initially intend to take on her child's identity and instead started out by 'kind of role-playing' the part of a male character on the show, Ezra Fitz:

When I made the Page, I never stated who I was, I never stated anything about me. And then um... And then it was in 2011, so our big theories were about Ezra and Aria. So I was actually kind of pretending to be a male because of-- Because of the Ezra theory. I was playing-- Kind of role-playing. Kind of, but not. I was kind of acting like a man, and I was criticising people on their grammar, because I really wanted to do that anyway, and he's a teacher, right? [...] [I wasn't] trying to-- Trying to, like, con anybody. [...] [But] I wasn't going to tell anybody who I really was, because of the prejudices that I had already encountered. (Amanda)

Amanda evidently believes that her subject position, as an adult and female fan of the show, is problematic. This perception is centrally motivated by the 'prejudices' that she encountered when she participated in the show's official Facebook Page, where she was 'harassed' because of her age. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Ezra is an English teacher at the Liars' school, Rosewood High, and so part of Amanda's role-play was to criticise other fans' grammar. But Amanda explains that she was only 'kind of' role-playing as she finds this activity to be pleasurable regardless. Being an educator is an integral part of Amanda's fan identity, which she initially channelled through Ezra's character. Amanda predicts that the *Pretty Little Liars* fandom is largely comprised of teenage girls who are 'thirteen to fifteen years old', an assumption that is echoed by the overwhelming majority of my research participants. Thus she somewhat convolutedly employs the very stereotypes she herself undermines through her own engagement. This also means that she knowingly acts as a teacher to younger fans, creating a firm boundary between them. Amanda's identity negotiations both facilitate her pleasures as she can participate in the fandom whilst still conforming to the conventions of acceptable adulthood (see also H. Thornham, 2009), but they are also pleasurable *in and of themselves*.

Amanda explained that she eventually stopped 'role-playing' Ezra's character and now enacts the identity of her teenage child. Yet she continues to criticise people's grammar, which means that being an educator is a central and pleasurable part of her fan identity, as she explains in the following passage:

I'm just in there to help people understand the show. That's my only goal, is to enjoy it and to help people understand it better, because they're teenagers and they don't see past all the tricks that the producers put in there. [...] Like, I'm not a fanatic. But I'm trying to-- I'm trying to beat the producers. [I'm] trying to, you know, think on their level and stay ahead of them. It's just everybody has a different goal of watching a TV show, and my goal is to interpret it better than everybody else so I can educate people to think the right way. (Amanda)

Here, Amanda suggests that *Pretty Little Liars*' teenage fans fail to see past the 'tricks' that the producers embed in its narrative. This echoes a quote from Oscar that I analysed in the previous section, where he derides the 'surface level [...] girl talk' of the show's narrative and contends that he and Felix understand it at a 'deeper' level. Amanda similarly claims that she is able to think on the same level as the show's producers, which other fans cannot 'because they're teenagers'. She takes on the role of an educator on her Facebook fan Page as she aims to educate her perceived teenage audience to 'think the right way', and to better 'understand' and 'interpret' the show's narrative. What is interesting here is that Amanda constructs a clear boundary between herself and her teenage Page participants, yet they are not aware that she is actually an adult. Amanda takes on her child's identity as she views it to be more acceptable than her own, but in many ways she does not 'act' like a teenager on the Page. Even if Amanda takes on a teenage identity, her enactments of fandom must still resonate with the conventions of acceptable adulthood in order to become pleasurable.

In the quote, Amanda also contends that she is not a 'fanatic' of the show, thus drawing on the longstanding equation of fandom with fanaticism (Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992). The term 'fan' derives from 'fanatic' (Jenkins, 1992), which means that fans are '(believed to be) extreme in their obsession with acquiring as much information about the object of fandom as possible (Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b)' (Stanfill, 2013, p.124). As I explain later in this chapter, fanaticism is also associated with expressions of young femininity, and manifests through popular gendered discourses such as 'groupie', 'fangirl', and 'shipper fan'. By claiming that she is an educator and 'not a fanatic', Amanda rejects these longstanding stereotypes and legitimises her adult fan identity. In so doing, she works against the image of the female fan as being 'guided by an inappropriate emotionality that operates separately from (and overrules) their cognition (Jenson, 1992)' (Baym, 2000, p.37), which again works to normalise her fandom. I am not suggesting that Amanda is being intentionally derisive here, but that she is mobilising already circulating discourses to (1) justify her pleasures in a media text that is not aimed at people her age, and (2) develop a new form of pleasure for herself.



Other adult fans, such as Jessica and Taylor, also value an adult and therefore more educated perspective in *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms. Jessica, for example, participates in a particular Facebook fan Page because the administrator is ‘a little older’ than the show’s demographic, which she identifies as being ‘young teenagers’. The Page attracts other mothers like herself ‘with kids and everything’, which she enjoys. For Jessica, this particular Page administrator does not facilitate ‘teenybopper conversations’, unlike other Pages that are seemingly populated with younger fans. She acknowledges that the Page owner is younger than she is but is ‘very well educated’. For Jessica, the discussions on this Page are ‘not the same as others’, and she explains that:

Because I’m used to, like, the young kids-- I teach high school so I’ve always, you know, talked *Pretty Little Liars* with my students and everything. And it’s a different-- I see a little bit of everything on there and it’s not the same, you know, the young kids who see everything for what it is \*laughs\*. [...] It gets to the point sometimes where I’m like, people, these are fictional characters. [...] I think that the younger people probably take it to heart a little bit. I’m like, relax people. This isn’t a real person we’re talking about, you know? This is a character. [...] When you get a little older, you realise that this is just a show. (Jessica)

It is clear that Jessica values education, both in terms of the level at which the Page owner is educated and her own status as a high school teacher. I suggest that this helps Jessica to subvert the stereotype that fans are uneducated (see also Hollows, 2000), which she evidently recognises. She values a certain *Pretty Little Liars* fan Page because it is ‘different’ from the others, as its participants understand the narrative at a higher level than the younger fans who ‘see everything for what it is’. Amanda similarly claims that she tries to think on the same level as the show’s producers, a discourse that Jessica reinforces when she states that she ‘know[s] how they’re writing’ and that most of her theories ‘have been pretty good so far’. Both fans’ abilities to correctly theorise the show’s narrative constitute another pleasure, as their identities can be aligned with those of the show’s adult producers. Although this makes their fandom more acceptable, it also devalues younger fans’ participation, which they position on lower ‘level’ than their own.

In the quote, Jessica also derides younger fans for their overly emotional enactments of fandom. As an adult she recognises that *Pretty Little Liars* is ‘just a show’, whereas younger fans ‘take it to heart a little bit’. This echoes similar findings by Busse (2013) and Stanfill (2013), who explain that fans often try to subvert the stereotype that they are *too* attached to fan objects. I say more about extreme enactments of fandom later in this chapter, but note it here because Jessica reproduces this discourse in order to construct a boundary between herself and younger fans. She argues that younger fans ‘see everything for what is it’, whereas she is educated enough to theorise the show’s narrative correctly, suggesting that she only permits a certain extent of attachment to the show. In the following quote, Taylor echoes Jessica’s sentiment about acceptable fan attachment:

Some of the best fan Pages, in my opinion, that I actually know who the people are, they’re all kind of my age. [...] If you’re older you’re just going to know how to deal with-- You have more experience, you know. You just have more knowledge of things in general, you know. And then you maybe learn faster, you know, versus like a twelve-year-old or a thirteen-year-old. (Taylor)

Taylor argues that ‘some of the best fan Pages’ are administered by people of a similar age to her. This is because older fans are more knowledgeable and so are better equipped to ‘deal with’ the responsibility of Page administration. Some of the discourses in Taylor’s quote, such as ‘older’, ‘experience’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘learn[ing]’ all work to invalidate younger fans’ participation. Similar to Amanda and Jessica, I suggest that Taylor draws on these discourses to: (1) rationalise and therefore facilitate her own fan pleasures, and (2) generate a distinct form of pleasure. In other words, elevating their own status - as both *educated* and as *educators* - becomes part of their fan pleasure.

Another of my participants, Katrine, draws on similar discourses in her articulations, though her fan identity is different to Amanda, Jessica, and Taylor’s, hence why I introduce her last. Katrine self-identifies as a twenty-something, heterosexual and North American woman who is a fan of *Pretty Little Liars*. I found Katrine through a series of blog posts that she had written about the show, which had been shared on one of my participants’ Facebook fan Pages. Although she is a fan of the show, Katrine does not administer or participate in any social media

fan accounts. She also positions herself as a ‘closet fan’ - a rhetoric that derives from hiding or being ‘in the closet’ about your sexual orientation (see for example Stanfill, 2011; Brennan, 2013). She is a writer and her (unpaid and thus precarious) contribution to the blog is one of the many jobs that she has. During our interview, Katrine explained that the blog’s owner asked her to watch *Pretty Little Liars* for ‘research purposes’ and then write about it. Before she watched the show, Katrine told me that she perceived the show to be a ‘guilty pleasure’. She said:

I’m not gonna lie, when I first started watching it, in my head, it was, this is a guilty pleasure. Like everything’s gonna be really silly that I write, and it’s gonna be like satire. (Katrine)

It is interesting that Katrine uses the phrase ‘satire’ here, as Oscar uses a similar term to describe his and Felix’s negotiations (‘tongue-in-cheek’). This shows that humour and satire are common techniques that the show’s adult fans use to normalise their pleasures. Katrine’s blog posts are dedicated to analysing the content of the show, and to her argument that it positively depicts girl friendships, heterosexual and LGBTQ+ relationships, and teenage girls’ self-identities. Through the blog posts, Katrine also challenges derisions of young women’s popular cultures like *Pretty Little Liars* and reflects on her own fandom of the show. She uses her legal name to author her blogs; an act that I argue is political and important given the various devaluations that she is subjected to.

Although Katrine challenges derision by questioning the show’s status as a ‘guilty pleasure’, a term that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Seven, she also reproduces and thereby naturalises these discourses our interview. For example, she explains that:

Katrine: My eyes were opened with *Pretty Little Liars*, watching something that had been deemed girly and cheesy and, you know, no content and then finding that there actually was content in it. And that kind of-- It was like the gateway drug to me watching other things, like getting into *The Vampire Diaries* and, you know. It became more of an intelligent watching as opposed to... Like, things that I had been told were guilty pleasures, I started watching to find more in them. [...] And I will admit to people that I watch that series now, and, I mean... Right now the only show that I watch that I wouldn’t really announce to people is *Made in Chelsea*, but I don’t even know what the audience is that watches that show. And people in America don’t know when I’m talking about it, even if I happen to mention it.

Ysabel: Is that why you wouldn’t mention it? Or...

Katrine: In America, yeah, because then I'd have to explain it. And then, if I had to explain it, I'd have to say that it's like *The Hills*, which I would never admit that I would watch because I wouldn't watch *The Hills*. [...]

Like, there's no educational content in that. At all \*laughs\* [...] But I really-- Like, I wouldn't judge anyone who watched either of those shows, I would just kind of go \*laughs\* oh good! You're kind of like me.

Katrine originally assumed that there was 'no content' in *Pretty Little Liars*' narrative, probably because it is a teen drama series. 'Content' is a discourse that teen drama fans frequently draw on: Katrine for example links it to the show's narrative, whereas other fans evaluate social media fan accounts according to the quality of the content that their administrators produce. I say more about this in Chapter Five, but note it here because I propose that the show's seemingly rich narrative helped Katrine to become more comfortable with her pleasures. To quote, 'I will admit to people that I watch that series now' (Katrine). She explains that watching *Pretty Little Liars* became more 'intelligent' as she realised that its narrative was not 'girly' or 'cheesy'. As Skeggs and Wood note, in reality television series women 'do' gender 'excessively' and 'improperly' (2012, p.67), which is why Katrine uses 'girly'-ness as the measure of a show's quality. Despite her blog posts' political intentions to challenge stigmas of the show, she actually reproduced them during our interview by Othering less 'intelligent' and therefore lower class television series.

In the quote, Katrine reinforces a classed divide between high and low cultures. As Mittel (2004) notes, all television genres can be located somewhere on a highbrow/lowbrow axis. Following this, Harrington and Bielby argue that 'women's genre[s]' such as soap opera sit at 'the absolute bottom of the television hierarchy' (1995, p.5). Whilst teen drama series like *Pretty Little Liars* derive from soap opera, Katrine positions *The Hills* (2006-2010) and *Made in Chelsea* (2011-present) even lower on this hierarchy. Both texts are reality television series aimed largely at young women, which means they are afforded so little value that Katrine will not admit to people that she watches them. For Katrine, these shows have 'no educational content [...]. At all \*laughs\*'. Yet *Pretty Little Liars* has more content and therefore makes for more 'intelligent watching'. Here, Katrine frames her fan pleasures in more stereotypically rational, adult, and therefore acceptable terms. She values education in a similar way to

Amanda, Jessica and Taylor, yet she articulates it slightly differently. Katrine does not ostracise other fans because she does not participate in fandoms, but she justifies her pleasures by reproducing stigmas of lower-classed, feminine, and youthful texts such as *The Hills* and *Made in Chelsea*. Her negotiations reflect the complexity of the fan subject position, and the difficulties of disconnecting from ageist, sexist, and other such cultural discourses, which means that they are embedded within her pleasures.

This section has explored a particular technique that adult *Pretty Little Liars* fans use to normalise their fandom: emphasising the importance of education. This technique helps adult fans to elevate their status above younger fans', and works to both legitimise their pleasures and itself constitutes a valuable form of pleasure. It distances them from enduring stereotypes of irrational and crazed fans, despite the partial mainstreaming of fan practices in recent years. My findings suggest that teen drama fandom is not, and might never be included in this cultural shift, given the embeddedness of sexist, classist, and ageist stigmas of teen drama fandom in some of my respondents' negotiations. While the fans cited in this section are likely not being deliberately discriminatory, it is clear that derision is inextricable from their pleasures and practices. I now turn to my final section, which examines the ways in which new and perhaps even more pernicious forms of sexism are emerging through the reproduction of three gendered discourses within fandoms: the groupie, the fangirl, and the shipper fan.

### **Reproducing Sexism: Groupies, Fangirls and Shippers**

As I noted in Chapter Two, there have been various academic celebrations of fandom's destigmatisation, which emerged in the mid-2000s. Sandvoss, for example, claimed in 2005 that fandom 'seems to have become a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world' (p.3). As Jenkins' (2006a,b) work on convergence culture suggests, part of this normalisation can be attributed to the rise of Web 2.0 technologies in the mid 2000s. This is because Web 2.0 discursively and technically foregrounds fans' and other ordinary people's participation; a concept that I return to in later chapters. As Grey et al argued in 2007, fans are

‘wooded and championed by the cultural industries’ (p.4) as their practices are afforded greater value in a participatory era. Yet other fan studies authors, such as Hills (2012), Busse (2013) and Stanfill (2013) have more recently argued that not all fans benefit from the supposed mainstreaming of fan cultures, as the fan is a subject position that continues to be ‘fraught with baggage from historical and contemporary media representations’ (Stanfill, 2013, p.117). Although fandom is valuable to the cultural industries, it is not universally accepted. For example, an enduringly negative discourse about fans is the ‘groupie’, a term popularised in the 1960s that was used to deride female music fans’ sexual interests towards male music artists or bands (see Cline, 1992; Ehrenreich et al, 1992; Hill, 2016). Such scholarly work on the groupie has fallen out of fashion, but the use of this discourse within fan spaces has not. Thus running parallel to fandom’s supposed normalisation is the re-emergence of the groupie as a derogatory slur *and* the rise of a new and perhaps even more problematic vocabulary that is used to disparage fans, especially fans of young and feminine popular cultures: ‘fangirls’ and ‘shippers’.

Fangirls and shippers have recently emerged as dominant mediated images of fandom. Like groupies, fangirls are known for their hyperfeminine and hysterical enactments of fandom (see Click, 2009; Busse, 2013; Cann, 2015). Though groupies are arguably linked to hypersexuality more so than fangirls, perhaps because the latter’s identity as a *girl* emphasises her sexual immaturity. ‘Shipper’, a term short for “‘Relationshipippers””, refers to fans who are interested in fictional romantic relationships in texts such as television series, films, and books (Scodari and Felder, 2000, p.240 in Williams, 2011, p.271). Both discourses are used to devalue female-centred fans, fandoms and behaviours, which means that they are intrinsically sexist and ageist (or, “‘gender plus,” that is, gender plus age or ‘orientation’, to borrow from Hills (2012, p.121)). Though I add to Hills’ (2012) term to account for classed assumptions about teen drama fandoms, and also the overwhelming heteronormativity of the groupie and fangirl discourses. Thus the fans quotes in this section help to reproduce a *quadruple devaluation* that is intimately tied up with teen drama fandom. Many of my adult respondents drew on these terms to deride the show’s younger and mostly female fans, thereby legitimising their own

subject positions. Scholars such as Hills (2012), Busse (2013), and Stanfill (2013) have argued that fans shift such stereotypes onto others in order to maintain boundaries within fandoms. Stanfill (2013) calls this process intra-fan stereotyping, which considers how fans within the same fandom pathologise one another. Research of this kind marks a shift from a 'classic genre' of fan studies scholarship, which involved 'studying fan stereotypes in mass media coverage' (Hills, 2012, p.121), rather than within fandoms themselves (see also Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Lewis, 1992).

My research adds to these debates by arguing that this process of devaluation is central to my adult respondents' pleasures, as only by excluding other fans can their own pleasures be legitimised. This technique also represents the flexibility of inequalities such as sexism, to borrow from Gill (2011). Flexible or 'new' forms of sexism are, as Gill (2011) argues, perhaps even more troubling than their more traditional forms precisely because they perpetuated *within* fandoms through intra-fan dynamics. This makes them much harder to identify and perhaps normalises them; a deeply problematic trend. To make this argument, I examine three discursive formations of this gendered derision: the groupie, the fangirl, and the shipper fan.

### *The Groupie*

As I explained in Chapter Two, cultural anxieties about the fangirl's hysteria are not new. In the early 1990s, feminist scholars such as Cline (1992) and Ehrenreich et al (1992) critiqued discursive constructions of the groupie: a heteronormative term used to devalue female music fans who seemed to be more interested in pursuing sexual relations with male artists or bands than their musical talents. Although 'groupie' is a phrase that has long been used to describe and deride female music fans, she is also present in teen drama fans' articulations. Scholarly work on the groupie has mostly fallen out of fashion (for an exception, see Hill, 2016), yet she continues to exist as a loaded sexist discourse. In my research, the term was used by adult fans to disparage younger fans' behaviour, which resonates with Ehrenreich et al's

point that groupies' collective actions were seen as an 'epidemic', for which 'there appeared to be no cure except for *age*' (1992, p.87, emphasis added).

For example, one of my adult fans, Jessica, used this discourse in our interview to distinguish herself from young and female *Pretty Little Liars* fans. Jessica values Facebook fan Pages that facilitate educated discussions about the show, and attract 'other mothers' like herself and people of her age. In the quote below, she distinguishes these Pages from what she calls the 'teenybopper' ones:

Ysabel: What happens in those groups that you don't like?

Jessica: Just the postings and everything. Like, I'm obsessed with Lucy Hale type of thing. And I'm obsessed... You know, they're just like... You know, the typical groupies type of thing. I don't see much substance in it. They're not giving us much information. [...] They're more like groupies, like they're just obsessed with the people, with the actors, more than the storyline and the books.

Jessica explains that 'high-school [aged], fifteen and sixteen year old girls' - the 'typical groupies' - dominate Pages of this kind. She ostracises young and female fans who engage in certain acts; ones that she feels are obsessive and lacking in substance. This echoes Click (2009) and Busse's (2013) observations that fangirls - and therefore their predecessors, groupies - are portrayed in popular media as 'obsessing' over celebrities, such as the *Pretty Little Liars* actress Lucy Hale. Jessica employs this discourse to discredit this type of fandom, and to legitimise the seemingly substantive and informative fan spaces that she inhabits.

During our interview, Jessica also reproduced anxieties about collective expressions of female sexuality. As Stanfill notes, fans are often portrayed as being 'confused about the distinctions between fantasy and reality, which leads to connotations of insanity and lack of behavioural and affective boundaries (Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Kozinets, 2001; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b)' (2013, p.124). These behaviours are gendered, as it is groupies who are scorned for 'abandon[ing] control' of their sexual desires, and for 'scream[ing]' and 'faint[ing]'



(Ehrenreich et al, 1992, p.85) at the sight of their (typically male) objects of affection. Jessica rearticulates these discourses in the quote below:

You know, people idolise the-- The-- I don't even know what the One Direction people look like. But I'm thinking, you know, people idolise them just like they're obsessed with our guys. You know, Caleb and all those people. Toby, which, you know... \*Laughs\*. I'm indifferent because I'm an adult. But people really love them! [...] So many people are so emotionally invested in these characters. [...] Some people get so upset about it. [...] I'm an adult, and I'm married. And I watch it, and I'm like, oh, that's cute. But I don't fantasise my life in there. And I can think of myself maybe ten, fifteen years ago watching it and falling in love with these characters. [...] It's a different perspective. If I was watching this at seventeen years old, it would be completely different from the way I feel today. (Jessica)

Here, Jessica separates her enactments of fandom from those of younger groupies. She disassociates from younger fans by maintaining that she 'doesn't even know' what the members of the popular boy band One Direction look like, and she also reproduces the same language that was used to disparage groupies. For example, she uses intense affective terms such as 'idolise', 'obsessed', 'upset', 'fantasise' and 'falling in love', which renders younger fans' afflictions as unacceptable. Jessica is 'indifferent' to such extreme emotions because she is an adult, which resonates with Ehrenreich et al's argument that the only treatment for groupies' affliction was 'age' (1992, p.87). As a woman in her thirties, Jessica believes that she has been cured of the groupie 'epidemic' (Ehrenreich et al, 1992, p.87), which constructs her fan behaviour as unthreatening.

Jessica's articulations firstly illustrate the endurance of the groupie as a term that is used to 'deride women as a group' (Lewis, 1992, p.3) and to repress their sexual desires. They secondly demonstrate the problematic manifestation of sexism within teen drama fandoms, given that it is perpetuated through intra-fan dynamics. These dynamics represent a form of flexible sexism (Gill, 2011), as fans such as Jessica devalue younger fans' groupie-like behaviour to normalise their own fandom. In her work, Gill discourages readers from thinking about sexism as a 'single, unchanging "thing"' (e.g., a set of relatively stable stereotypes) (2011, p.62). While stereotypes about groupies are arguably fixed, as they have remained much the same since the term emerged in the 1960s, the emergence of this stereotype within teen drama fandoms signals the agility, dynamism and diversity of newer, more discrete and

potentially more insidious forms of sexism. I now analyse the contemporary manifestation of the groupie: the ‘fangirl’.

### *The Fangirl*

The fangirl is a discourse that is commonly used to devalue young and feminine fans, fandoms and behaviours (Click, 2009; Hills, 2012; Busse, 2013; Stanfill, 2013; Cann, 2015). She is one of the most dominant mediated images of fandom in contemporary culture, yet I argue that she does not symbolise an increased acceptance of fandom. Rather, as Click notes, fangirls are ‘ridiculed’ (2009, n.p.) in the popular press for their enactments of ‘uncontrolled, socially unacceptable desire’ (Stanfill, 2013, p.118). Their affection is typically directed at male popular cultural icons, which makes the term heteronormative (van der Graaf, 2014). Their behaviours are belittled by the news media and are labelled with ‘Victorian era gendered words like “fever,” “madness,” “hysteria,” and “obsession”’ (Click, 2009, n.p.). As Busse (2013) argues, the fangirl is the Other against which fans of more acceptable (masculine) cultures are measured. Yet such derisions do not only circulate in the popular press. To borrow from Stanfill (2013), they are also perpetuated through intra-fan dynamics. By repurposing the fangirl stereotype, adult teen drama fans benefit from sexism’s flexibility in order to facilitate their own objectionable *pleasures*.

In addition to administering social media fan accounts for *Pretty Little Liars*, Amanda also co-organises conventions for other television series. During our interview, she commented on the behaviour of some of the convention’s volunteers:

I mean, I’m not-- I’m not a fangirl. And I-- That’s why I’m one of the supervisors for the conventions that come through here because I’m not-- All of the-- Most of the volunteers are fans of the show, and if they get around celebrities they go all fangirl. Um... But I’m professional. (Amanda)

Here, Amanda juxtaposes her own ‘professional’ and therefore rational, mature, and acceptable behaviour against the convention volunteers’, many of whom ‘go all fangirl’ around celebrities.

I then asked Amanda to define the term ‘fangirl’, to which she replied:

Well, fangirling is, to me, is just the, oh my god! Oh my god! You know, people that can’t control themselves \*laughs\*. (Amanda)

This statement, punctuated with laughter, is an explicit derision of hyperfeminine (Cann, 2015) fangirl behaviours. For Amanda, fangirls are ‘hysterical’ (van der Graaf, 2014, p.38) - ‘oh my god!’ - and ‘out-of-control’ (Busse, 2013, p.74) - ‘people who can’t control themselves’. This less acceptable and ‘[un]professional’ behaviour undoes the fan identity that Amanda has carefully crafted through her Facebook fan Page and through her work as an events manager.

Although Amanda enacts the identity of her teenage child, she deliberately distances herself from the fangirl stereotype:

I think I have a little bit more of a selective fan base than other Pages. I think mine tend to be a little bit older and more mature, for the most part. I’ve got a lot of people between the ages of twenty and thirty, women. And they’re very loyal people. They’re on there every single week, waiting for every single post that I make. [...] I think that the people who actually understand the show are more on my Page. Because it’s more of a-- It’s a little bit of a higher level of intelligence type of Page. (Amanda)

Amanda explains that her Page attracts *Pretty Little Liars* fans who have a ‘higher level of intelligence’ than others, and who ‘actually understand the show’. By using terms such as ‘older’ and ‘mature’ to describe herself and her Page participants, Amanda constructs her enactments of fandom as more rational and acceptable than simply ‘fangirling’ over the show and its celebrity actors. This behaviour threatens to undermine Amanda’s carefully crafted fan identity, which she feels compelled to normalise because she recognises that it is unconventional. Amanda’s pleasures are only permissible if they are measured against those of imagined Others who engage in riskier behaviour, such as the fangirls.

The reproduction of the fan through intra-fan dynamics demonstrates sexism's increasingly flexibility, to use Gill's term (2011). I maintain that fans like Amanda are not being deliberately sexist but are instead invoking gendered stereotypes to defend their own subject positions. Sexism's perpetuation through intra-fan dynamics points to one of the ways it operates in contemporary (fan) cultures, and I now further this argument through my analysis of the shipper fan.

### *The Shipper*

The final gendered discourse that I examine in this section is the shipper fan. As Williams explains, the term is short for "Relationshipippers" (Scodari and Felder, 2000, p.240) and refers to fans' support for fictional romantic relationships in texts such as television shows, films, or novels' (2011, p.271). Shipping is also gendered, as it has 'often been perceived as a culturally feminised fan practice due to its associations with romance, love, and emotionality' (Bird, 2003 in Williams, 2010, p.271). As with fangirling, shipping is a term that has recently entered mainstream discourses (see Williams, 2010). Yet its popularisation should not be mistaken as a sign of the increased acceptance of fan cultures. Indeed, in my research, I found that adult teen drama fans articulate a divide between different 'kinds' of fans, and that the shipper fan is frequently Othered. When teenage fans use the word 'ship', it is used earnestly. Yet when older fans use it, they do so to deride younger fans.

For example, three of my teenage participants - Carrie, Kat and Vicky, who are all fans of *The Vampire Diaries* - discussed their preferred 'ships' in a literal and non-derisive way:

I am a huge Delena shipper. (Carrie, female, teenager, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Stefan and Caroline hooked up and that was just so forced and so... Ew. I don't like that ship. (Kat, female, teenager, *The Vampire Diaries* fan).

Let's admit it, even Stelena shippers can say by now that Damon is Elena's one true love. (Vicky, female, teenager, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Carrie, Kat and Vicky were three of my online interviewees, thus their articulations were less detailed and should therefore be read differently to those of my Skype participants. All three self-identify as female and teenage fans of *The Vampire Diaries*, and there is a striking difference between their articulations of shipping and my adult fans'. Amanda, Taylor, Kate and Emily explain that shipping is an activity that younger fans engage in, and this is precisely what makes it unacceptable. For Amanda, there is a 'fan of the show, and then a shipper fan', which reflects Hadas' argument that shippers are guilty of focussing on relationships 'to the exclusion of all else' (2013, p.336). Amanda explains that young and female fans of the show 'get pleasure out of' shipping, yet she does not 'get the same satisfaction' from it:

That's not why I'm watching the show. I'm watching the show to figure stuff out, and I'm not watching to watch them mack on each other all the time. But that's a teenage thing that people wanna see, and they have to incorporate it in there to make the younger viewers happy too. (Amanda)

She later told me that the fans of her Page are 'generally fans of the show and fans of intelligent theory, and not shipper fans'. She condemned shipper fans for their dependency on the show's romantic pairings and not with other, more 'intelligent' aspects of its narrative. For Amanda, the purpose of the characters' relationships is to 'make the younger viewers happy', but because she is an adult shipping is a less acceptable pleasure. Taylor also explained that *Pretty Little Liars* fans are not 'the shipper kind of fans', but *The Vampire Diaries* fans are. This is because, in her view, the latter show's narrative is more focussed on 'romance' whereas the former prioritises 'female friendships'. Both Amanda and Taylor's articulations imply that there are hierarchies of acceptability within fandoms, which they themselves perpetuated during the interview by devaluing shipper fans.

Indeed, one of my adult and female participants, Kate, constructs shipping as a disruptive force within fan Pages. Kate self-identifies as a Brazilian, twenty-something and heterosexual woman who is a fan of *Revenge*. With the help of another fan, she administers a website and Facebook fan Page for the show. Kate explains that her fan Page is generally 'peaceful' and that the participants are:

Most[ly] interested in the storyline. Most of the time, actually, they're interested in the storyline. But sometimes they say something about the characters and the development of the characters. But it's mostly about the storyline. [...] Some fans argue about shipping, which is about the show's couples. They like to talk about the couples they like and the couples they don't really like. (Kate)

Like Amanda and Taylor, Kate suggests that there are two kinds of *Revenge* fan: those who are interested in the show's narrative and those who are interested in characters' relationships. For Kate, the latter fans - the shippers - disrupt the 'peaceful[ness]' of her fan Pages, which she consciously works to maintain. She also creates a boundary between her fan identity and the shippers by stating that '*they* argue about shipping', yet she does not. As Hadas notes, the shipper is a '(female) fan whose interest in the show is dependent on and limited to a single romantic pairing portrayed therein' (2013, pp. 336-337), yet fans like Kate are more interested in the storyline. This sets up an 'us vs. them rhetoric' (Ross, 2008, p.48) between fans within the same fandom - intra-fan dynamics (see Stanfill, 2013) - and in this case the 'them' is the emotionally and intellectually under-developed shipper fan.

Fellow adult and female *Revenge* fan, Emily, distinguishes the *Revenge* fandom from *The Vampire Diaries* and *Reign* (2013-present) fandoms. *Reign* is a historical teen drama series that follows the romantic life of Mary, Queen of Scots, and is popular amongst several of my participants. She imagines the *Revenge* fan base to be older, whereas teenagers dominate the latter two. This dynamic is known as inter-fandom, whereby fans pathologise people from other fandoms (see Hills, 2012). Emily raises concerns about the role that social media plays in contemporary fandoms, particularly when shipper fans abuse it:

With the ships and with the actors and whatnot, they're not afraid to um.... Send hate or bash or-- It gets very defensive and a bit of a battleground. And I know with *The Vampire Diaries* it's, you know, it's the big ship, it's Delena! It's Delena! And it's all-- It drives the fandom. And while it's really really great to see, it's also a bit of a downside sometimes, and every fandom has that. Every fandom has a ship war that's going to-- To separate fans or bring them together or whatnot, and-- sigh. Yeah. I think it can get very overwhelming for a lot of fans and-- And for fan page owners, I mean a lot of them a very young themselves, and they just jump into it like oh this is going to be great! They're not-- They're naive and they're not expecting it. And when it comes, they don't know how to handle it because of how crazy it can get. (Emily)

Although Emily celebrates visible enactments of fandom, perhaps because she is aware that the activity is stigmatised, she derides the ‘young’, ‘crazy’, and ‘naïve’ shipper fans. This reinforces all sorts of stereotypes about fans, and sets her identity apart from dominant and problematic mediated images of young and female fans. It is particularly interesting that Emily frames shipping as a ‘battleground’ and a ‘war’, as both terms denote violence. Kate’s articulations were very similar, as she framed shipping as a disruptive activity. This discourse has been recently popularised alongside shippers and fangirls, and is popularly defined as:

When two groups of shippers fight over whose romantic duo is destined to be. It is especially fractious if the head writer for the show publicly disses one coupling. These fights happen on the forum board for the show and lead to lots of trolling, ship vids, shipped pics and out right hatred. The only positive is they bring much lulz. (Urban Dictionary, 2009)

According to both Emily and the above definition, shipping and ship wars are linked to hate-fuelled online practices like trolling (see also Bergstrom, 2011). This negative representation is especially concerning as shipping is linked to female fans. Derisions of shipping, which emerge both within and outside of fan spaces, thus help to perpetuate sexist stigmas of young and female fans.

This section has argued that groupies, fangirls and shippers are *not* embodiments of the increased societal acceptance of fan cultures, despite their popularity. Each of these terms operates in a slightly different way, as I have illustrated, but are centrally used as tools to discredit young and female-centred fans, fandoms and behaviours. This means that they are intrinsically ageist, classist, sexist and heteronormative. They might actually represent a worsening progression of sexism, as they are deployed *flexibly, subtly, and dynamically* through intra-fan dynamics. Not only have sexist derisions of young and female fans endured, but they might actually have worsened, given that teen drama fans themselves use loaded terms like groupie, fangirl and shipper to ostracise other fans. I contend that the fans quoted in this section are not being consciously sexist, but that they invoke gendered stereotypes to normalise their own fandom. Sexism therefore operates through intra-fan dynamics as well as through the ‘relatively stable’ (2011, p.62) stereotypes of groupies, fangirls and shipper fans.

### **Conclusions: Derision as Intrinsic to Pleasure**

This chapter has identified three main pleasures that are negotiated by adult fans of teen drama series: (1) their recognition of series' intertextual references to objects of high culture, (2) enacting the role of a fan educator, and (3) articulating a primary interest in the series' narratives rather than in characters' relationships. I have shown that fans enjoy occupying these subject positions, but that they only do so because these forms of pleasure are conducive to an acceptable adult identity. The negotiations discussed in this chapter are driven by broader cultural stereotypes, as adults struggle to occupy the subject position of a 'teen drama fan'. As Stanfill similarly notes, 'being a fan means being pulled between personal and subcultural pleasure and desire, on the one hand, and the socially appropriate, on the other. When the two diverge, it makes fandom a difficult subject position to inhabit' (2013, p.118). As a fellow fan, I too find myself normalising not only my fandom of teen drama series, but also my decision to research seemingly unworthy and feminised media objects. My negotiations vary according to the space I inhabit, for example I feel comfortable discussing my research with colleagues whose research interests are similar to mine, or at feminist and fan studies academic conferences. Yet I change the way I talk about my research when I am in less comfortable spaces, and might emphasise its focus on digital cultures and social media rather than on fandom. Not only is my fan identity problematic, but I frequently feel that my academic one is as well.

My own subject position partly motivates my claim that my adult respondents are not being deliberately discriminatory. Rather, they invoke already circulating discourses about age, gender, sexual orientation and social class - the quadruple devaluation - to defend their problematic fan identities. I note that a number of fan studies scholars have already made a similar argument (Hills, 2012; Busse, 2013; Stanfill, 2013), but I add to this work by showing how inequalities such as sexism are being perpetuated and naturalised through intra- and inter-fan dynamics, which illustrates the flexibility of newer forms of sexism. I propose that longstanding sexist and other derisions are intrinsic to adult teen drama fans' pleasures, as their



fandom *must* resonate with masculinity, rationality and maturity to be aligned with notions of appropriate adulthood. Tensions between pleasure and derision clearly lie at the heart of my adult respondents' negotiations, which means that they cannot always be understood separately. I now turn to a discussion of another set of discourses - social media and the digital - to explore their role in teen drama fandoms.

## Chapter Five: Discourses of the Digital: Privacy, Participation and Labour

### Introduction

Teen drama fans articulate stigmas about feminised popular cultures that are almost identical to those discussed by fan studies and feminist media scholars between the late 1980s to the early 2000s, yet few authors have reconsidered these ideas in what Marwick (2013) and others refer to as a ‘social media age’. Rather than suggesting that technology transparently sits behind the shifts I note in this chapter, I am interested in exploring how social media and its accompanying discourses and technical capabilities shape the ways teen drama fans navigate derision. ‘Social media’ should be understood as *both* a technology and as an ‘ongoing discourse’, to borrow from Marwick (2013, p.6). A discourse refers to the sense in which language (in addition to images and other forms of communication) is not neutral, and instead reveals important ways of thinking about the world (for example, Gill, 1995; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Gill, 2000; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). It is a form of knowledge that is ‘structured’ (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p.6) and ‘socially consequential’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p.258), which means that people bring certain biases to their imaginings of social media. Marwick (2013) amongst other digital media scholars encourage us to think about the ways people make social media meaningful, and to consider their imagined *as well as technical* possibilities and constraints. This chapter examines how three main discourses relating to social media - privacy, participation, and labour - are entangled with fans’ negotiations. These discourses are the three most commonly articulated by my research participants, and I argue that some of social media’s discourses play a central role in the ways fans experience the relationship between guilt, pleasure, and cultural derisions of their fan object.

Although my research examines fandom and social media, I call this chapter ‘Discourses of the Digital’ because the concepts I discuss are not exclusive to social media. Social media are part of a longer list of digital media technologies, but some of their discourses pre-date the rise of Web 2.0 in the mid-2000s. I first discuss the meaningfulness of privacy to

fans, and examine how they understand and make use of this complex term. I argue that their negotiations of their own privacy are tied up with gendered derisions of teen drama series, not least because they strategically try to maintain their acts of fandom as ‘secret[s]’, to borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Oscar. Second, I address the forms of Web 2.0 participation that are considered ‘acceptable’ within teen drama fandoms, such as the Like function on Facebook. I argue that social media participation is gendered not least because teen drama fandom is always and already devalued as *feminine*. This assumption might be extendable to social media itself, which is often imagined as an intimate and therefore feminine space. I finally examine how the discourse of digital labour emerges through fans’ articulations. Many of my respondents imagine their activities to be forms of labour, though without using this exact term, describing their fandom as a ‘part-time job’, ‘full-time job’, and ‘work’. I argue that they draw on labour’s connotations of rationality in order to adopt a more masculinised and therefore *acceptable* subject position (van Zoonen, 1994; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008).

My respondents enact their fandom in a radically different context to the fans of, for example, Bacon-Smith (1992) and even Baym’s (2000) studies, which means they negotiate and talk about their fandom in a different way. However, there remains a clear message that young and feminised popular cultures are derisible. Given the changes brought about by social media - technologically, textually, socially, culturally, discursively, and so on - it is striking to see such continuity in terms of sexist derision.

### **‘That’s My Private Thing’: Articulating Privacy and the Politics of Control**

Although scholars have long discussed questions of privacy in online spaces, the emergence of social media platforms in the mid-2000s has sparked fresh debate. Social media’s reliance on user-generated content (UGC) has raised new questions about how privacy - and in turn publicness (for example, boyd, 2010; Baym and boyd, 2012) - should be defined, and about its meaningfulness to users. It has prompted some commentators to ask whether privacy still matters in a social media age, given users’ willingness to contribute personal data to platforms.

Platform owners are also redefining privacy (Bergstrom, 2011; boyd and Marwick, 2011; H. Kennedy, 2016), and various scholars and cultural critics argue that this move is intended to encourage users to ‘share’ content, generating even more profit for platforms (John, 2012; J. Kennedy, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). Despite these pushes towards a redefinition of privacy in a social media age, my research shows that the discourse of privacy is valuable to teen drama fans. For my respondents, privacy works on two levels: (1) they seek out private spaces on social media to enact their fandom because various people in their lives devalue their fan pleasures, and (2) they invoke the discourse of privacy as a way of talking about pleasure. For example, they frame their fandom as their ‘private thing’ (Reesa), their ‘secret thing’ (Oscar), and other similar terms.

There are various ways of thinking about privacy, and in what follows I draw on empirical data from five teen drama fans - Felix, Oscar, Reesa, Emily, and Amanda - to explore how they make it meaningful, both discursively and technologically. Although as suggested above privacy is important to fans, their attitudes towards privacy are articulated in diverse ways. For example, their fandom might be referred to as their ‘secret’ (Oscar), ‘anonymous’ (Emily, Gioia, and Taylor), ‘hidden’ (Kat), or ‘private thing’ (Reesa). Nissenbaum suggests that ‘privacy and anonymity’, ‘privacy and secrecy’ and ‘privacy and solitude’ (2010, p.2) should not necessarily be aligned. However phrases of this kind demonstrate privacy’s *value* to fans, and their desire to separate their fandom from other parts of their lives and identities. My participants’ attempts to control their privacy are very similar. For example, the majority of fans carefully control the sharing of PII (personally identifiable information) (boyd, 2010) in online fan spaces, though some engage in particularly ‘subversive practices’ (Raynes-Goldie, 2010, n.p.) to prevent a connection between their fan and non-fan identities: a worrying source of ‘PEI’ (potentially embarrassing information) (boyd, 2010). As I note in Chapter Two, H. Kennedy (2016) has written about the ways certain platforms facilitate a *feeling* of privacy for their users. For teen drama fans, it is their *own* negotiations and control of social media that facilitate their feelings of privacy. I also address how users’ negotiations of privacy differ according to the platform in question. This is partly because platforms’ norms and rules around

user identity vary, and because fans use certain platforms for different purposes. Social media seemingly provides fans with a ‘secret’ (Oscar), ‘anonymous’ (Emily), ‘private’ (Reesa) and therefore *valuable* space to engage in fandom, even if it actually offers none of those benefits (see also Marwick and boyd, 2014). Although I focus on five fans, it is important to note that the findings discussed in this section resonate with the majority of my research participants.

During our interview, *Pretty Little Liars* fans Felix and Oscar articulated their fandom as their ‘secret thing’. This is centrally because their identities as adult and male fans of a feminised teen drama series are perceived by them as unacceptable. Although Felix and Oscar are forthcoming about their ages and genders within the fandom, they hide their ‘secret’ identities from other people in their lives, such as their parents, family members, and work colleagues. Only their respective girlfriends and ‘some friends’ are aware of their fandom, as they note in the exchange below:

Oscar: It’s sort of, like, a secret thing. I’ll be honest, like, my parents don’t know that I do this podcast, you know. Some of my friends in real life do, but not all of them. Nobody I work with knows about it. So, it is kind of just this... Not totally secret, but quasi-secret thing that we do online.

Felix: I mean, like, my girlfriend knows. But also our notes and our process and our time commitment is so extensive that there’s no way-- Even if I wanted to keep it a secret from her, like, that would be a lot to keep secret from her \*laughs\*.

The desire to maintain their fandom as a ‘secret’, however this may be articulated and maintained, was one of the most common trends across my research participants. To achieve this goal, Felix and Oscar do not tell the people listed above that they administer *Pretty Little Liars* fan accounts. Whilst they are forthcoming about certain aspects of their identities within the fandom (e.g., their ages and genders), they do not disclose their legal names, places of work or geographical locations to other fans. Felix and Oscar do, however, record a weekly iTunes podcast about the show where they refer to each other by their legal first names. They also do not edit their voices, which means that the podcast could potentially make them identifiable to the same people they hide their fandom from. Yet Felix and Oscar are willing to take this risk because no one in what they call their ‘real life’ watches *Pretty Little Liars*, which means they

are unlikely to listen to the podcast. Their attempts to control the flow of PII (boyd, 2010) opens up an important, secret, and *private* space for them to adopt pleasurable fan identities. This resonates with Nissenbaum's argument that 'what people care about most is not simply *restricting* the flow of information but ensuring that it flows *appropriately*' (2010, p.2, emphases in original). That is, Felix and Oscar try to ensure that information about their fan identities does not flow outside of the secret spaces for which it is intended.

Reesa's articulations of privacy are very similar to Felix and Oscar's. She 'role-plays' as one of *Pretty Little Liars*' female characters, Mona Vanderwaal, and does so through her Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter fan accounts. Reesa explains that only her mother knows about the extent of her fandom:

I mean, my mother for example, she knows I have a page. Um... But sh-- I didn't tell her which one it was, I mean I didn't show it to her. (Reesa)

She claims that her *Pretty Little Liars* fandom is her 'private thing', which she hides from various people in her life:

I guess I just like to be private when it comes to these things. Probably because it's very um... It's connected to bullying, and that's an aspect of myself that I like to keep private. Because I feel like I need to-- You know, if somebody asks me oh, well why Mona? You know, I'm not going to tell them well, you know, I have these episodes of depression \*laughs\* and so on. Um... That's just something I don't like to talk about to, you know, my actual friends. I mean, I've noticed that a lot of them don't really understand because they're not in that situation [...] I worry that people will think I'm just some kind of a-- a couch potato \*laughs\*, that I have no life, and that I'm just hiding online, or something like that. (Reesa)

Reesa's repetition of the term 'private' is perhaps the most striking indication of its complex meaningfulness to her. In the quote, she explains that her desire for privacy is partly connected to stereotypes of fandom itself, as she worries that people will think that she is a 'couch potato', but that it mostly derives from her experiences of bullying and her mental health. Reesa's posts about bullying and mental health are fairly frequent, and mostly take place on her Twitter account. This perhaps because she imagines this space differently to other platforms, and she also uses Twitter the most frequently.

Although Reesa ‘role-plays’ the part of Mona, there are slippages between her role-playing and her other identities. Reesa alternates between two voices when she posts to her fan accounts: her own and the character Mona’s. Indeed, the connection between the character Mona’s experiences and her own explain why she chose to ‘role-play’ this part:

I’m kind of obsessed with Mona, the character. Um... Probably because I can relate to her so much. And um... I kind of wanted to express my feelings through her. [...] She was bullied, I was bullied. She has a personality disorder, I have a personality disorder. So um... You know, I never really found a character until Mona showed up, you know, that I could use for myself to express my own emotions and stuff. [...] So that was kind of therapeutic for me. (Reesa)

Reesa clearly likes that she can discuss these experiences away from her ‘actual friends’ in ‘real life’, and so she limits her disclosure of PII (boyd, 2010) in fan spaces to prevent a connection between her fan and non-fan identities. She perceives details such as her legal name to be ‘threats’ (Nissenbaum, 2010, p.2) to her privacy, and so she adopts a fan identity that is free from PII (boyd, 2010). Reesa includes hyperlinks to all of her fan accounts in all of her respective ‘bios’, ‘profiles’, and other such spaces on social media, yet she does not include hyperlinks to any of her fan accounts on her Facebook Profile (which I did not observe). This is because:

That’s the only place where I interact with the friends I have here, in real life, basically. Uh, they don’t-- None of them have Twitter, none of them have Instagram. It’s actually funny because here, in Central Europe-- I don’t know if it’s a Central European thing or an Austrian/Slovenian thing, but I don’t know that many people who actually own Instagram and Twitter. Most people actually have Facebook and that’s it. A lot of people haven’t even heard of Tumblr, for example. [...] So the stuff I post on Instagram and Twitter, I guess that’s kind of for the people who I’ve met through my page. (Reesa)

Reesa’s Facebook Profile serves a different purpose to her social media fan accounts. Because her friends in her ‘real life’ do not have Instagram, Twitter, or Tumblr, these spaces *feel* more private to her. The disassociation between her fan and non-fan lives and relationships creates an important feeling of privacy for her. Privacy thus works on two levels for Reesa: (1) certain social media platforms provide her with a private space to enact her fandom, and (2) the *feeling* of privacy is itself a form of pleasure.

Emily's identity negotiations are very similar to Reesa's, as she also 'role-plays' the parts of female *Revenge* characters on social media. She frames her fan identities as 'anonymous' because she makes a conscious decision to separate them from what she calls her 'personal' one. Emily administers several social media fan accounts for *Revenge*'s characters and actors, and runs similar accounts for other television series. During our interview, Emily predominantly discussed her fandom of two female *Revenge* characters, Emily Thorne (after whom she chose her pseudonym for my research) and Victoria Grayson. She administers Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter fan accounts for these two characters, which is particularly controversial as the show's narrative revolves around tensions between the two women. This means that she must 'role-play', to borrow her term, the parts of two rival characters.

For Emily, the perceived anonymity afforded to her through social media enables her to adopt these different identities without facing backlash from other fans:

I prefer being anonymous because I can share my opinions a little bit more, and that's why I have the separate profiles. [...] When I'm on Emily, I will say, you know, I do not agree with that. But certain opinions I do find-- Because of the ways fans act, I do have to say it elsewhere, like I have to go on-- If I'm gonna be pro-Victoria, like that doesn't go over on the Emily page very well usually \*laughs\*. [...] I think that's how I kind of stay sane, because if I had to reveal myself every time it would... I mean my opinions change throughout you know situations and whatnot, and so I think it would be really difficult to still maintain-- It is a business, and I still have the voice that I do in the fandom, and fans respond to it because I'm not overly personal. (Emily)

Here, Emily frames her fan identities as 'anonymous' because social media enables her to enact two opposing identities without other fans' knowledge. Other teen drama fans articulate the value of anonymity, for example:

I care about my privacy, especially because I have a family. So for me it's very important to remain anonymous. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I don't display my age or my identity on there. [...] I just keep it kind of anonymous. (Taylor, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)



Although the fans quoted above use the terms ‘anonymity’ and ‘privacy’ interchangeably, they are discussed separately in scholarly circles. Hogan describes anonymity as a ‘*state* implying the absence of personally identifying qualities’ (2013, p.4, emphasis in original), whereas privacy can be understood in various ways and not strictly as a technical state (see Nissenbaum, 2010). Indeed, given the threat of platforms’ ‘surveillance, information leakage, or data-mining’ (Marwick and boyd, 2014, p.1064), it could be argued that they do not facilitate true anonymity. Emily and the others are instead enacting pseudonymous identities, defined by Hogan as a ‘*practice*’ employed by social media users to ‘facilitate nonidentifiable content’ (2013, p.4, emphasis in original). Yet the discourse of anonymity is evidently valuable to Emily because it helps her to maintain a distinction between her fan and non-fan identities, and to avoid ‘personal’ conflicts with other *Revenge* fans. Emily labels her fan accounts as a ‘business’ and so tries to maintain her credibility - her ‘voice’ - within the fandom. This can also be read as an attempt to normalise her fandom, and nods to the discourse of labour that I address later in this chapter. Emily’s seemingly anonymous identity reduces the threat of PEI exposure (boyd, 2010): that is, the fact she administers both fan accounts. While Felix, Oscar, and Reesa try to conceal their identities from people outside of the fandom, Emily’s privacy negotiations are more complex, as she must also manage the visibility of her roles *within* the fandom.

What is particularly interesting about Emily’s articulations is that she uses the term ‘personal’ to make a distinction between her fan and non-fan social media accounts. Emily has fan accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter, and also has a ‘personal’ Facebook Profile. She claims that she does not ‘reveal’ her legal name or geographical location to other fans, and instead ‘operates as the handle’ when she engages in *Revenge* fandoms. Of course, she has multiple ‘handles’ as she role-plays as various characters. Emily also tells fans that she is Canadian: ‘every now and then I’ll drop in-- Like I’m celebrating Canadian Thanksgiving, or little things here and there’. Nissenbaum’s (2010) notion of ‘contextual integrity’ is particularly useful here, as it explains how ‘the norms that govern “the flow of personal information in a given context” (p.127) are dependent on the type of information being shared; the social roles of the sender, subject, and recipient; and how information is transmitted’ (Marwick and boyd,

2014, p.1054). Although Emily has multiple accounts on the same social media platform (e.g., a Facebook Page and Profile), she imagines her privacy differently according the account's purpose. To borrow from Nissenbaum (2010), Emily's feelings towards privacy are *context-dependent*; a theme echoed across other fans' negotiations.

Most of my research participants carefully control the sharing of PII (boyd, 2010) in online fan spaces, however Amanda engages in a particularly 'subversive' (Raynes-Goldie, 2010, n.p.) practice to prevent a connection between her fan and non-fan identities. As I explained in the previous chapter, she deliberately fabricates information about herself on her Facebook Page and other social media fan accounts (see also Young and Quan-Hasse, 2013). She consciously enacts the identity of her teenage child and uses their identity markers, such as their gender, age, and sexual orientation instead of her own. She explained that she created her fan accounts in response to harassment from other fans:

Before I had the Page, *Pretty Little Liars* had started and my friends and I were, you know, just talking on the regular *Pretty Little Liars* Page. And I, first of all, I got harassed because of my age. [...] It was quite obvious by my photo that I was forty, and I didn't think that was a big deal! I mean, I like all kinds of shows. Um... And-- But I got relentlessly harassed. (Amanda)

Amanda's Facebook Profile disclosed PII (boyd, 2010), such as her legal name, age, and a photograph of herself. Yet this led to harassment, and so Amanda benefitted from Facebook Page's differing norms and rules around their users' identity, which I discuss in greater depth in the next chapter. For Amanda, Facebook Pages facilitate a greater degree of privacy than Profiles do. This is because she does not need to disclose any of her identity markers and so other fans can judge her fan participation differently. Indeed, she adopts what she perceives to be a more acceptable fan identity - that of her teenage child - for this very reason.

Although Facebook Pages do not encourage or require users to provide the same volume of PII (boyd, 2010) as Profiles, Amanda must still strategically decide how much information to share with other fans, as she explains below:

A lot of people say oh, well, what's your this? And what's your that? And I have a Twitter, but I don't really use it that much. I tell them that I'm not allowed to give out my personal information, because I'm using the persona of my sixteen-year-old child. And I'm like, guys, I've had a stalker before, and I'm just not comfortable giving our personal information. Because they're like, join my group! Or, let's be friends! I'm more than happy for you to come on my page whenever you want, ask me questions, participate in any of my discussions, but I just can't give out any of my private information. (Amanda)

Amanda does not disclose 'private information' such as her personal social media accounts to other fans, as this risks making her sixteen-year-old child identifiable. Of course, what she defines as 'personal' and 'private' information does not apply to her own privacy, but to her child's. This is a particularly complex negotiation of privacy's context (see Nissenbaum, 2010), and is perhaps the most 'subversive' (Raynes-Goldie, 2010, n.p) and controversial privacy negotiation that I found during my data collection.

Emily also articulated concerns about privacy and harassment on social media, though with reference to one of the actresses she represents through her fan accounts rather than her own privacy. Emily explains that two of the actors from *Revenge* have what she calls 'personal' Facebook Profiles and Instagram accounts. She does not think that Facebook or Instagram adequately protect the actresses' privacy, and so the responsibility is partially placed on her:

I know Emily has a Facebook, and people were coming to me and asking if they could send photos, you know, can I do this? Can I do that? So I contacted-- Like I have contact with her sister, and I was like hey, just a heads up, people are tunnelling in through-- They were tunnelling in through her Facebook page to get to her sister's. So I was like hey, you know, I know Facebook needs to change its settings, but here's how you can do that. People are trying to get into her Facebook, just so you know. [...] And I know with Madeleine-- Because Madeleine doesn't social network, or she didn't, but she recently joined Instagram and that was a big thing there. People wanted information, or they wanted private details or other things. I find that Instagram is the worst social media site for that because there isn't-- You know, you can block people but it doesn't stop them. It's not like Twitter, it's not like Facebook. So Madeleine has to deal with a lot of it, and it actually got to the point where she had to leave her profile because people were so overwhelming. (Emily)

For Emily, Facebook and Instagram - platforms that are under dual-ownership (see Constine and Cutler, 2012) - have privacy settings that are particularly problematic. boyd and Hargittai echo this sentiment, and note that whenever Facebook updates its privacy policy, the default is to 'share broadly' (2010, n.p.). This means that users must navigate the platform's notoriously complex privacy settings (Marwick and boyd, 2014). Less academic research has been

conducted on Instagram's privacy policy, however it is clear from Emily's articulations that its methods to protect users' privacy are problematic for her.

As Marwick and boyd note, social media privacy controls 'imply that individuals should be held responsible for how they manage their privacy settings regardless of how well they understand those settings or how frequently those settings change' (2014, p.1062). Emily rearticulates this discourse by explaining that it was *her* responsibility to protect the actress Emily's privacy on Facebook, and that Madeleine had to 'deal with' the 'overwhelming' attention on Instagram. However discourses of this kind, where responsibilities are located with individuals rather than platforms, are troubling. This is because it is difficult for people to be fully cognisant of aspects of digital environments that are beyond their control and yet affect their privacy, such as 'surveillance, information leakage, or data-mining' (to reiterate, Marwick and boyd, 2014, p.1064), all of which put teen drama fans at risk. For Marwick and boyd, this is precisely why a model of 'networked privacy' (2014) should be developed to replace Nissenbaum's (2010) 'contextual integrity'. That is, individuals cannot wholly control social media privacy or be fully aware of the context in which they are participating, as both are 'determined through a combination of audience, technical mechanisms, and social norms' (Marwick and boyd, 2014, p.1062). Although this section has been primarily concerned with the enduring meaningfulness of privacy to fans and on the ways they contextually manage their privacy on social media, it is also important to raise questions about the extent to which this can actually be achieved.

In the above, I have argued that gendered derision is a primary motivating factor in fans' privacy negotiations. This echoes research by Nissenbaum (2010) who maintains that privacy should be understood *in context*. Teen drama fans value their privacy because their identities and practices are derisible, and so they navigate platforms in a way that reduces the risk of PEI (boyd, 2010) exposure. Although I have discussed their strategies to achieve privacy in great depth, what underpins their actions is a desire to *hide* their fandom from people who might deride it. If Amanda, Emily, Felix, Oscar, and Reesa were fans of different, perhaps more

masculine media cultures, they might navigate social media in different ways. Of course, I have also argued that the *feeling* of privacy is itself a form of pleasure for fans, and I say more about this in Chapter Seven. This is not a wholly new argument, as fans have long sought out secret spaces to engage with feminised media texts. For example, Radway's (1984) female participants organised their romance reading around their solitude, and A. Gray's (1987) would watch soap operas when their husbands were out of the house. Yet the findings discussed above illustrate a shift, as the perceived affordances of social media are embedded in fans' privacy negotiations and therefore in their *pleasures*. In the next section, I examine the forms of Web 2.0 participation that are considered 'acceptable' within teen drama fandoms.

### **'Acceptable' Forms of Fan Participation**

I now examine another pervasive discourse of digital, networked, Web 2.0 technologies: participation. In the mid-2000s, fan studies scholar Jenkins coined the term 'participatory culture' to describe a shift, both technologically and culturally, towards the increased production and circulation of 'bottom up' rather than 'top-down' media content (2006a,b). Jenkins and others argued that Web 2.0 technologies enabled 'media consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content' (2006b, p.1) in seemingly powerful new ways (see also Bruns, 2008). Indeed, the 2006 edition of *TIME* magazine named 'You' its Person of the Year, which illustrated the discourse's pervasiveness beyond academia (see van Dijck, 2009; Marwick, 2013). Numerous scholars have since debated whether Web 2.0 technologies are truly participatory, and object to the deterministic claim that they naturally 'stimulate a democratic culture dominated by creative amateurs (Lessig, 2004)' (van Dijck, 2009, p.53). For example, in 2011 Carpentier and Dahlgren co-edited a special issue of the journal *Communication Management Quarterly*, which intended to 'deepen the theorisations of participation' (p.9). In their introduction, the authors problematised the term's 'conceptual broadness', as:

Denominating all social process as participatory makes it impossible to distinguish between different social practices, different loci and contexts, and different types of power relations and (im)balances. (Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011, p.8; p.9)

Research of this kind suggested that just because users *can* participate does not mean they *do*, and nor does it mean their participation is unshaped by social norms, contexts, power relations and inequalities (see also van Dijck, 2009; Delwiche and Henderson, 2013).

Recent scholarship has turned away from debates around user participation. As Zimmer (2008), Mozorov (2011), Marwick (2013) and others note, this is likely because the utopian promises of Web 2.0 have not entirely materialised. It is also because the digital media scholars cited in this section (e.g., Bruns, Marwick, and van Dijck) have turned their attention to forms of ‘invisible participation’ (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013, p.1353). That is, users’ monetised contributions to platforms that are hidden from view, such as tracking and data mining. Yet social media platforms can still be characterised as ‘participatory cultures’, though in a way that is not lost in ‘celebratory frenzies’ (Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011, p.8). Although fans participate, the extent, form, context, and worthiness of their participation vary. Put simply, certain kinds of participation are *worth* more than others.

I now turn to a discussion of two cultures of acceptability in teen drama fandoms. I show how the socio-technical affordances of social media platforms are implicated in what fans think of as being acceptable and unacceptable participation. For example, it is unacceptable to abuse the pseudonymous nature of Twitter to harass actors and other teen drama fans, and there are conflicting pleasures in ‘Likes’ and other quantified measurements on social media, as fans must attract a (subjectively) large quantity of Likes yet they must not show that they value these metrics to other fans. Although my respondents do not use the term ‘participation’, they describe a complex, socio-technical relationship between social media and the context within which they participate. Thus participation is still a useful lens through which to explore teen drama fandom.

*Un/acceptability and the Affordances of Social Media*

Social media platforms have various affordances. Scholars such as Baym (2010), McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015), and Nagy and Neff (2015) have written about affordance theory, and broadly claim that communication technologies must be examined from a socio-technical perspective. This work ‘stakes out a middle ground between social constructivism and technological determinism’ (McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015, p.1), considering how the affordances of digital media can be imagined beyond their technological infrastructure. Baym calls this middle ground a ‘social shaping’ approach: a perspective that accounts for a combination of ‘the social capabilities technological qualities enable’ and the ‘unexpected and emergent ways’ (2010, p.39) that people make sense of them. McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015) are two of the few scholars to consider how social media *users* understand affordances. In what follows, I examine how teen drama fans imagine the affordances of social media, and how this is tied up with their views on what constitute ‘acceptable’ fan practices and pleasures. I argue that their views on social media’s affordances are *gendered*, as teen drama fans’ participation is always and already devalued as feminine.

*Revenge* fan Emily, for example, derides fans who engage in fangirl-like behaviour such as ‘shipping’, a gendered term that I unpacked in the previous chapter. She explains that fandoms for teen drama series like *The Vampire Diaries* and *Reign* are dominated by younger fans who ‘send hate’, ‘bash’, and ‘war’ with other young fans on social media. For Emily, fans of this kind are not only problematic because they are young, but because they belong to a generation of ‘digital natives’ (boyd, 2014). That is, young people who have grown up with social media technologies. For boyd, this rhetoric is dangerous as many adults unquestionably ‘assume that youth automatically understand new technologies’ (2014, p.176). Emily draws on this problematic rhetoric to argue that young fans are ‘used to being able to say what they feel like right away’, creating a divide between them and older fans like herself. The immediacy of social media is an issue for Emily as she feels that it has created a type of fan who will ‘jump

[to post] very quickly', leading to the formation of 'battleground[s]' within teen drama fandoms. She claims that behaviour of this kind:

Is spurred on quite a bit by social media. [...] I-- Actually, and I hate-- I do hate to say it, but you know with Twitter and with social media, it has greatened the power of fandom but it has also made it a very very aggressive... \*Sigh\* I don't know. [...] Because of the power of the Internet and the anonymous button, it gives them the power to say what they want without thinking about, you know, a repercussion. (Emily)

Emily argues that social media enables 'aggressive' fan behaviour, as fans are able to create 'anonymous' identities and therefore face fewer 'repercussion[s]' than if they were to behave in the same way elsewhere. Although Emily uses the term 'social media' in the above quote, she predominantly refers to Twitter in her articulations. As I noted in Chapter Two, Twitter is not governed by a real-name policy and so is characterised by different norms around identity than, for example, Facebook Profiles. For Emily, it is the technical capabilities of Twitter and similar platforms - their 'power' to facilitate anonymity - that has led to the rise of 'aggressive' and problematic fan behaviours. Her own understanding of social media's technical capabilities is therefore tied up with her outlook on what unacceptable (and gendered) fan behaviour looks like.

Twitter is a particularly problematic platform for some teen drama fans as its technical infrastructure is seen to enable, and perhaps encourage unacceptable enactments of fandom. *Revenge* fan Kate both celebrates and problematises Twitter in her articulations. For example, she values the platform because it allows her to 'interact with the actors and stuff' (Kate). Communication of this kind is important to Kate, as she believes that her fan accounts play an important role in the success of the show in Brazil. All of her fan accounts are dedicated to translating the show's promotional materials and news updates from English to Portuguese. To quote Kate: 'if you don't do your job, then people won't watch the show'. She explains that other *Revenge* fans value Twitter for the same reason:

They like to know that they can sometimes talk to the writers on Twitter, and that they can talk to them about where the story is going, and what they don't like and what they do like and stuff like that. (Kate)



This sentiment is echoed in other research on Twitter and celebrity cultures. Marwick and boyd argue that Twitter has changed that ways that people relate to celebrities, and that part of its appeal is ‘the perception of direct access to a famous person’ (2011, p.142). For example, people can ‘follow’ celebrities and receive ““insider” information, first-person pictures, and opinionated statements’, yet ‘there is neither a technical requirement nor social expectation of reciprocity (particularly with famous people)’ (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p.142). In other words, celebrities are unlikely to follow you back.

However Kate explains that fans do not always recognise this lack of reciprocity, leading to problematic fan behaviours:

People can-- How do I say it? They don't really understand that actors aren't the characters, and they can't make that distinction. And it can be really really bad for us, because sometimes they keep posting on the Twitter page of the actors, and it's not something that we really want because it messes up the image of our country, and it's not a nice thing to see people doing.  
(Kate)

Here, Kate rearticulates the longstanding stereotype that fans are ‘confused about the distinctions between fantasy and reality’ (Stanfill, 2013, p.124). Fans’ misguided perceptions of Twitter are implicated in her concerns, as they ‘keep posting’ to actors’ Twitter accounts without understanding that the platform does not technically or normatively facilitate reciprocity (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Emily is similarly concerned about the ease with which fans can approach actors from teen drama series:

I've seen how Twitter and whatnot have-- Have changed everything, and how easy it is to contact people now. So... It's been interesting, and a little terrifying sometimes \*laughs\*.  
(Emily)

For Emily, the emergence of Twitter ‘changed’ the ways that fans relate to celebrities, thus social media are directly implicated in her fears about the rise of unacceptable and sometimes ‘terrifying’ enactments of fandom.

Yet Twitter is not the only platforms that figures in fans' discussions about acceptability. Reesa, for example, praises the ways Facebook algorithmically organises users' posts on what it calls their 'news feeds':

I can't remember the last time I got a hateful comment. Maybe-- Maybe it's because Facebook started limiting posts, and um... Only a certain percentage of people sees what you post. So maybe it's because of this. [...] So only the people who actually engage-- You know, people who like or comment regularly that, you know-- Only those kinds of people see what you're posting and so on. So I'm guessing if all the trolls and haters \*laughs\* don't see your posts, they won't be tempted to hate. [...] It's actually kind of frustrating. A lot of the time I post something that a lot of people might want to see and, you know, they just won't \*laughs\*. Maybe a hundred people will see it out of the forty-something thousand that I have. (Reesa)

Facebook rewards certain kinds of participation by algorithmically prioritising this content in people's news feeds (for example, Bucher, 2012; Gillespie, 2014). Facebook's algorithm 'approximates "relevance"', and presents users with information that 'will best satisfy a specific user and his presumed aims' (Gillespie, 2014, p.175). As Bucher explains, Facebook's news feed algorithm is 'based on the assumption that users are not equally connected', and so it shows users posts from people who 'count more': 'those with whom a user interacts on a frequent basis or on a more "intimate" level' (2012, p.1168). Although scholars are increasingly problematising the accuracy of algorithmic assumptions (for example, Bucher, 2017), they are important to Reesa because her Facebook news feed limits the visibility of 'hateful' behaviour from 'trolls' and 'haters'.

It is clear from these interviews that social media's affordances are intricately tied up with fans' judgements about acceptable fan participation. While fandom has always been stereotypically aligned with inappropriate and even dangerous expressions, especially celebrity fandom (see Jenson, 1992, and more recently Stanfill, 2013), some of my participants feel that social media *worsens* these acts. This is because people can 'hide behind a screen', to borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Reesa, and cannot be held accountable for their actions. This means the discourse of participation is implicated in my respondents' *pleasures*, as platforms like Twitter and Facebook are seen to variously encourage, discourage, allow, and prevent other fans from behaving inappropriately. The discourse is gendered, as teen drama fans' participation is

always and already devalued as feminine. Fans also frame behaviours like shipping, trolling, fan hate, and contacting celebrities as things that *other*, typically younger fans do. This finding adds to a broader theme of my research, which is concerned with the ways teen drama fans try to legitimise their devalued pleasures. I now examine another form of fan participation - 'Liking' - and consider how this metric-based form of engagement is valued by fans.

### *The Conflicting Pleasures of Likes*

Social media platforms are underpinned by the rhetorics of participation and collaboration between users. Gerlitz and Helmond explain that one of the key features creating such connections are 'social buttons, [...] which allow users to share, recommend, like or bookmark content, posts, and pages across various social media platforms' (2013, p.1351). Platforms offer a range of social buttons, such as 'like', 'react', 'tweet', 'retweet', 'reblog', 'mention', 'pin', 'share' and others, though my participants use 'Liking' as a broad term to refer to participatory terms of this kind. These pre-defined and platform-specific forms of user engagement commonly feature 'button counters', which 'show the total number of activities performed on the object' (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013, p.1351). This means that users' participation in social media is transformed into *metrics* (see Beer, 2016). Although 'metrics have had an ordering role in the social world for quite some time', Beer argues that their importance is 'intensifying' (2016, p.3). Gerlitz and Helmond problematise the quantification afforded by social buttons, as they argue that they 'create an infrastructure in which social interactivity and user affects are instantly turned into valuable consumer data' (2013, p.1349). They also consider how the metrification of user engagement transforms users' affective responses, which in turn makes Like and other buttons' counts 'comparable' (2013, p.1358).

Comparable social media metrics produce conflicting pleasures for fans, who compare and measure their follower and other counts against a subjective, imagined and individualised ideal. Despite its omnipresence across the Web and in everyday parlance, the social aspects of the Like button have not been studied extensively (Eranti and Lonkila, 2015) (for an exception,

see Sumner et al, 2017). I add to this emerging body of work by examining how the comparable metrics of Liking are implicated in what gets valued as ‘acceptable’ participation by fans. That is, I argue that the number of Likes a fan’s page, post, and so on attracts is integral to their pleasures, yet it is unacceptable for fans to seem like they value these metrics. It was clear that they did not want me, the researcher, to know exactly how much they value Likes. During the interviews, fans oscillated between emphasising and de-emphasising the importance of Likes. They did this by criticising people who try to earn Likes (e.g., through activities such as ‘promos’, advertising, and following), yet they also celebrated and valued their own metrics. I now explore how my respondents distance themselves from participation that might be *unacceptable* to other fans, such as the value of metrics above ‘quality’, ‘originality’, and ‘content’. This, I propose, is an attempt to legitimise their uncomfortable subject positions.

Although my participants self-identify as fans, some explain that they have attracted their *own* fans through their participation in teen drama fandoms. For example, Amanda told me that ‘I call my followers fans now because I think I’ve earned them’, and Felix and Oscar said that they ‘have a lot of fans and followers’. The pleasures of fandom are partly tied to fans’ perceptions of their own reputation, which Hearn defines as a ‘personal attribute generated entirely by the perception, attention and approval of others’ (2010, p.423). Social media metrics play a role in fans’ reputations, as they often judge the success of their own and other people’s fan accounts based on the number of Likes that their pages and posts attract. For example, Reesa explains that posting content on the official *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook Page was integral to attaining ‘most of’ her Likes:

Reesa: A lot of times I would post things on the main PLL page and they would share my edits. So that’s pretty much how I got most of my Likes, I would say. Um... I would get up to, say, a thousand Likes when I got shared. So yeah, that was it mainly. But lately I haven’t been doing things like sharings anymore.

Ysabel: Is there a reason for that?

Reesa: Um... I dunno. I guess maybe when you reach a certain number, you don’t really care that much about, you know, how many people Like your page. I would much rather see people--more people commenting on the things I post and having conversations with me and stuff like that, than to get more Likes.

Reesa explains that she now prioritises more substantive social media content such as comments and conversations over her Like and share counts, yet she needed to ‘reach a certain number’ of Likes before her perspective changed. Amassing a particular (and subjective) amount of Likes is a key form of pleasure for Reesa, despite her disavowal of metrics. Her use of the word ‘quality’ to normalise her own participation resonates with Williams’ point that the television industry draws on the notion of ‘quality television’ to ‘accord them value’ (2015, p.41) (see also Hills, 2004). Although these authors do not focus on social media participation, they discuss the discursive work of the term ‘quality’, which clearly resonates with Reesa’s and other fans’ articulations.

Nina also told me that the original owner of the fan accounts she administers ‘got her start’ by following other fans of *The Vampire Diaries* on Twitter and hoping that they would follow her back. Once she gained her first thousand followers, she began to unfollow accounts because: ‘generally speaking, when you have a low follower to following ratio, people um... They tend to follow you back a little bit quicker than if you were the opposite’ (Nina). Once the former owner was satisfied with her follower count, both she and Nina began to prioritise the ‘content’ and ‘quality of the posts’, as Nina explains below:

I personally have always tried to treat-- Especially with our Twitter being our largest account, in terms of what I would want to see. If I was following the account, what would I want to see? Particularly with me, I like to keep up with the news and some spoilers. So sometimes we’ll do trivia and we’ll do quotes, and that brings people in as well because now you have people retweeting it and getting involved and, you know, spreading out. (Nina)

Here, Nina articulates a slightly more complex relationship between metrics and quality than Reesa does. She recognises that higher quality posts will attract even more retweets and involvement from other fans. This means that metrics are still of value to her, but are earned in a different way as a fan’s reputation grows. Although their perspectives on metrics are clearly similar, it is interesting to note that Reesa and Nina’s follower counts are very different. Whilst I do not disclose exact follower and other such counts in this thesis to preserve my participants’ anonymity, this distinction shows how fans value social media metrics differently. The number

of followers that you ‘reach’, to borrow from Reesa, before you no longer ‘care’ about Likes is subjective and varies between fans.

*Pretty Little Liars* fan Amanda articulates a similarly complex relationship between quantity and quality, though her disavowal of ‘other’ fans who value metrics is more explicit. For example, she claims that:

I’m pretty strict. You know, I don’t allow people to advertise on my Page. Most pages do promoting and advertising, I have never. Nope, I don’t do it, because it junks up your Page. I want content on my Page. I’m not in there to get fans. I don’t advertise, I don’t do any of that. So I’m not out there trying to work for the fans, you know, work for getting Likes like everybody else-- I need 200 Likes a day! Or whatever. I’m like, I don’t care. (Amanda)

‘Content’ is a discourse about what gets valued as acceptable fan participation. Central to questions about discourse are issues of *power*, to borrow from Fairclough and Wodak (1997). Discursive practices can help to ‘produce and reproduce unequal power relations’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p.258), and my research participants use the term, both in the interviews and in fan spaces, to describe fan participation that is worthier than others. ‘Content’ can take various forms, but is known by fans like Amanda to be more substantive than metric-based engagement. Reesa and Nina refer to the same discourse, though they use other terms to describe this form of fan participation, such as *originality*: ‘If I find a good page or something original, like an original idea I will share it’ (Reesa). Amanda explains that she does not engage in promotional activities; the purpose of which is to generate a greater number of Likes. She derides other fans who value such activities: ‘I need 200 Likes a day!’ and distances herself from this unacceptable behaviour by claiming that she does not ‘care’.

During the observation stage of my research, however, Amanda asked her own fans to promote her Facebook fan Page because she was close to achieving a certain number of Likes. I raise this issue not to accuse Amanda of being untruthful, but to show how fans’ articulations of pleasure often differ from their enactments of fandom. This contradiction demonstrates the usefulness of using multiple methods in research of this kind. While the social media

observations were not intended to catch fans out, they played an important role in revealing differences between what fans *say* and what they *do*. These differences, I propose, are linked to both the performative nature of the interview scenario (see Skeggs et al, 2008), and also to the difficulties of articulating pleasure. It might be because fans feel more comfortable admitting to certain pleasures above others. For example, ‘Liking’ is clearly an important participatory discourse within digital teen drama fandoms, yet it is clear from the quotes above that fans’ fetishisation of metrics is mostly viewed as unacceptable. Reesa, Nina, and Amanda stigmatise fan activities that are intended to generate ‘Likes’, even though they have all done this at some point. They also have subjective and individualised ideals about their own social media metrics, which demonstrates the importance of metrics despite their articulations.

In this section, I have argued that discourses of the digital partially dictate what get valued as acceptable forms of participation within teen drama fandoms. I have followed Baym (2010), McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015), and Nagy and Neff (2015) to argue that social media’s affordances are socio-technical. The norms and values discussed by participants are therefore influenced by both the ‘materiality of technological artifacts and the lived practices of communication’ (McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015, p.1). Different kinds of participation are judged less kindly than others, and include: (1) abusing the perceived anonymity of social media to harass or troll other users, and (2) valuing Likes and metrics above other, more substantive forms of fan engagement. Entangled in these norms and values are my respondents’ uncomfortable subject positions as teen drama fans. As their pleasures already face harsh denigration, they understandably avoid fan participation that might *worsen* such stigmas. To borrow from Carpentier and Dahlgren, social media participation is always and already shaped by ‘power relations and (im)balances’ (2011, p.9). In the case of teen drama fandom, I argue that these power imbalances are *gendered*. I now turn to the final section, which examines how fans draw on the discourse of digital labour to construct a more acceptable fan subject position.

### **'It's Pretty Much a Full-Time Job': Fan Labour and the Rationalisation of Pleasure**

So I think overall in a week... You know, it's easily thirty to forty hours a week between all of my sites, which is pretty much a full-time job \*laughs\*. Yep. (Emily, *Revenge* fan)

During my interviews, my respondents frequently drew on the discourse of 'labour' to describe their enactments of fandom. This concept pre-dates the current social media age, however various scholars are questioning whether users' often unpaid, time-intensive and immaterial participation might be described as a new form of labour (see for example Baym and Burnett, 2009; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Scholz, 2013; Andrejevic et al., 2014; Jarrett, 2014; Duffy, 2015a,b). Although this thesis does not measure the extent to which teen drama fandom might represent new labour relations (though it certainly inspires these discussions), it does investigate how the discourse of social media labour emerges through fans' articulations. That is, fans described their activities using terms like 'part-time job', 'full-time job', 'work', and 'effort', foregrounding a masculinised image of acceptable productive labour. However they did not describe their fandom in these ways on social media, which suggests they were performing a certain identity in the interview scenario. I draw on feminist literature to consider how articulations of this kind are *gendered*, as they resonate with a longstanding distinction between public (paid, masculine) and private (unpaid, feminine) spheres of labour (see Gregg, 2009). Domestic labour, so-called 'women's work' (see Jarrett, 2014) is often deemed marginal to masculine forms of production, and I explore how female fans in particular adopt a masculine subject position to produce a less problematic fan identity. They emphasise masculine qualities like 'rationality' (van Zoonen, 1992, p.16; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008, p.231) above those that are usually ascribed to women, like 'emotionality' (van Zoonen, 1992, p.16). In exploring this discourse in my research participants' interviews, I propose that the gendered nature of labour - and, indeed, of all social relations - is entangled with fans' pleasures, as they struggle to imagine their activities as acceptable until they are aligned with a dominant male subjectivity.

The overwhelming majority of my research participants in some way spoke about the amount of time that they dedicate to their social media fan accounts. The amounts are diverse,



ranging from fifteen minutes per day (Virginie, *The Vampire Diaries* fan) to forty hours per week (Emily, *Revenge* fan). Some of the fans listed below were responding to a direct question. For example, I asked my email respondents: ‘can you tell me what your typical daily engagement with the page looks like?’ and asked some of my Skype interviewees a similar question. Some of their responses are as follows:

On school days, I was looking for new stuff for the Page for like two hours a day, but there were weekends when all I did was that. (Carrie, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I spend about six hours a day [on it] [...]. From the second I wake up I log into my Facebook Page and start working on it. (Elena, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

It’s easily thirty to forty hours a week between all of my sites. (Emily, *Revenge* fan)

I work on it every night for at least three hours. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I check my Page randomly, maybe once a day when I remember. Less now it’s summer. (Kat, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I check all the social media pages hourly. (Kate, *Revenge* fan)

I would say it’s a part-time job. So maybe about twenty to thirty hours a week, depending, fluctuating. (Nina, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I figure I probably do maybe five hours total of prep-work, and then the podcast itself usually runs around two hours, and another half hour to edit it and put it online. (Oscar, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

I would say like three to four hours a night when I am on, but then the checking and the commenting back with people, then that could be an additional hour here or there during the week, you know. (Taylor, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

I spend about five hours on the Page per day, and I access it using my mobile and laptop. I mostly post in the afternoon. (Vicky, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I can spend between fifteen minutes and one hour every day. (Virginie, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Although I asked many of these fans to tell me about or quantify their engagement with their social media fan accounts, I did not ask or expect them to frame their fandom as, for example, a ‘part-time job’ (Felix and Nina). Articulations of this kind were common across my respondents and arguably help to facilitate their pleasures, as this vocabulary resonates with masculinity and therefore rationality, objectivity, and acceptability (see for example van Zoonen, 1992; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). At the same time, fans frame their activities as time-intensive: a factor that might be understood as disruptive to their pleasures. Simply put, it might be a *displeasure*. Social media plays an important role here, as fans imagine it as being instantly and immediately

accessible throughout the day. For example, Elena logs-in ‘the second’ she wakes up, Gioia checks her accounts ‘on a night’, Vicky in an ‘afternoon’, while Kat, Kate, and Virginie check their accounts over the course of the day. Whilst I do not seek to undermine or contradict my participants’ own responses, I suggest that they can also be read as attempts to normalise their fan pleasures and to align their identities with a more acceptable gendered subject position. I therefore consider two of my participants’ perhaps contradictory negotiations: (1) the use of a gendered vocabulary (labour, rationality) to normalise their pleasures in the face of derision, and (2) their unpleasurable time-intensive commitment to their activities on social media.

At the time of our interview, *Revenge* fan Emily was working on twelve different social media fan accounts and managed one actor’s ‘official’ social media presence, to borrow her term. She also had what she referred to as a ‘day job’ where she worked typical full-time hours. Emily’s fan accounts are slightly different to my other participants’, both because she manages a greater number and because she manages actors’ official social media presence. When Emily represents someone officially, she considers that to be ‘a job’, though she told me that she does not get paid for this work. Whereas her accounts for *Revenge* characters Emily and Madeleine became ‘like a job’ as soon as she had ‘interaction’ with the actors:

So once I had met them or once-- You know, once they reached out and contacted me or supported me, then a protective kind of boundary set in. Like I felt the need to protect their privacy. (Emily)

Emily discussed her relationship with actors such as Emily VanCamp and Madeleine Stowe in great depth during our interview, and to other actors and employees at various American film and television companies, such as ABC, Marvel, and Universal Studios. She explained that her social media fan activities, which began when she moderated a *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012) fan forum, have led to ‘recognition’ from people working at these corporations:

I was invited to Universal Studios. They were having a charity event, a block party. That was what it was called, the Wysteria Lane Block Party and-- So I got to go and the cast was there, and some of them knew who I was! Like, you know, because of the work I’d been doing previously with the fan sites for some of the actors on the show and whatnot. [...] And um... Doing that and, you know, being able to go to Comic Con. You know, the San Diego Comic

Con, and to do things that were associated with the fan sites and the networking and with meeting people at ABC, and meeting people at Marvel and stuff. [...] So I have made friends at ABC and I have made friends at Marvel and um... [...] We network, and they've been really eager to say, you know, when you're ready or if this is something you wanna do then, you know, let us know and we'll see what we can do kind of thing. It's been kind of crazy to see that the things I've been doing for fun are, you know, are being recognised on such a bigger scale. (Emily)

As Hesmondhalgh (2010) notes, deciding whether or not a person is undertaking 'free labour' rests on more than whether they are being financially rewarded. It is also beyond the scope of my thesis to judge whether fans like Emily are engaging in free labour. However it is clear that her relationship to the actors and employees at ABC, Marvel, and Universal Studios, which she has developed through almost five years of unpaid work, constitute an important part of her pleasure. This is both because there is a chance that her connections might lead to a change in vocation from her current 'day job' - 'if this is something you wanna do' - and perhaps because the recognition that she has earned from these people and companies helps her to rationalise her typically devalued fan activities. That her fandom is being 'recognised on such a bigger scale' is important to Emily because of the amount of time she dedicates to her fandom, and also because she knows that teen drama fandom is derided.

Emily's understanding of *Revenge* and similar shows' devalued status is evident through her claim that some of her friends draw on stereotypes to judge her activities. For example, that she is a 'creepy stalker kind of person' or 'really crazily obsessed with Hollywood'. She also demonstrates her knowledge by drawing on a masculine, rational vocabulary of labour to describe her fan activities. For example:

Ysabel: So how much of your time does it take up, roughly?

Emily: Um... \*Sigh\*. For *Revenge* alone, um... Sunday nights, I'm usually there for about half an hour before the east coastal start, and then until you know one or two in the morning. So... And that's just for *Revenge*. I mean when *Desperate Housewives* was still on, I was actually covering four or five different shows on Sunday nights. So it was like eight or nine hours just on Sunday. And then when I was doing stuff with *Castle*, it was another, you know... Monday! So I think overall, in a week... You know, it's easily thirty to forty hours between all of my sites, which is pretty much a full-time job \*laughs\*. Yep.

Although Emily told me that she has a full-time ‘day job’, she also refers to her fan activities as a ‘full-time job’; an assertion that she punctuates with laughter. As I explain in Chapter Two, the public domain of paid labour has historically been associated with masculinity, whilst the private, domestic sphere of the home gets gendered as feminine (for example, Fortunati, 2007; Gill, 2007; Gregg, 2009; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Jarrett, 2014; Duffy, 2015a,b). Emily recognises that her fandom is *not* the same as her paid ‘day job’, thus drawing on terms such as ‘full-time job’ and ‘work’ suggests that Emily is constructing a masculinised, rational, and therefore more *acceptable* subject position for herself. This contrasts with the derided, overly emotional, feminised and unacceptable stereotype that has historically been targeted at fans, especially fans of feminised popular cultures (for example, Jenson, 1992; Baym, 2000; Busse, 2013). Although Emily is unlikely to have consciously and instrumentally used this gendered discourse, her articulations reflect the enduringly gendered nature of labour relations, and the connotations of terms such as ‘full-time job’.

Other teen drama fans frame their activities in similar ways. For example:

I see it as work because I need to take care of it and get new photos and work on the Page every day, as a real job. [...] So it’s like my own job. (Elena, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

It’s basically a part-time job. That’s the time commitment I guess \*laughs\*. (Felix, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

It’s not always easy to be original to avoid making my page boring [...]. Sometimes it’s tiring because I have to think of everything myself. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

In the beginning, I was just a kid who made the Page and didn’t know what to do except for posting pictures. But no one Liked or commented ‘cause I had no Likes. So then the promos started and it was a lot of work. I guess I was online two hours a day then. (Kat, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Like my mum supports me, but I don’t think she understands all that I do on the website and stuff. People think that you just sit around and watch the show. But if you don’t do your job, then people won’t watch the show! They won’t know what’s happening and stuff, you know. (Kate, *Revenge* fan)

The competition with other Pages is way too high. [...] Fan Pages need to stay a hobby, not a job. (Vicky, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

During the season, I would say that it’s more like a part-time job. I mean, there are times when I’ve treated it like a part-time job, but I would say-- I would say it’s a part-time job. (Nina, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

The fans cited above use strikingly similar terms to describe their fan activities, such as ‘work’, ‘real job’, ‘part-time job’, and ‘tiring’. Social media’s underpinning logic of participation is tied up with this trend, as platforms’ insistence that fans’ contribute content and data becomes implicated in how they measure their own and each other’s reputation. Fandoms also have their own unique cultures about what counts as ‘acceptable’ participation, and the quotes above reflect some fans’ compulsion to post ‘every day’ (Elena), avoid being ‘[un]original’ (Gioia), spend excessive amounts of time on ‘promos’ (Kat), and avoid competing with other fans (Vicky). These pressures might actually disrupt fans’ pleasures, as their fandom becomes imagined as ‘work’.

These phrases also evoke the forms of paid, material, and productive labour that have historically been aligned with men and masculinity. *The Vampire Diaries* fan Vicky even made a distinction between a ‘job’ and a ‘hobby’, by arguing that the competitiveness between other fans, especially those who strive to increase their Likes, is transforming fandom into a place of work. This might reproduce gendered assumptions about what gets valued as productive labour, particularly because some of the teen drama fans cited above imagine fandom to be a *feminine* activity. For example, *Revenge* fan Kate claims that: ‘men don’t really reach out to websites like women do’, and *Pretty Little Liars* fan Jessica assumes that: ‘as far as being so invested in it, and to run a Page, and to do that, um... I wouldn’t think that-- I would think more of a girl would do that’. If Kate and Jessica align social media fandom with a young and feminine subjectivity, the articulations discussed above - ‘work’, ‘real job’, and ‘tiring’ - might be read as fans’ attempts to legitimise and rationalise a distinctly feminine and therefore *derided* form of pleasure.

These quotes might also represent fans’ displeasures. Felix and Nina, for example, produced identical responses when I asked them to quantify the amount of time they spend on their respective social media fan accounts:

Oh boy. (Felix, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

Oh boy. A lot of time \*laughs\*. A lot of time \*laughs\*. (Nina, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Their exasperations resonate with the majority of my respondents, who are seemingly navigating a complex relationship between fandom-as-fun and fandom-as-work. For Felix and Oscar, their time commitment increased as their podcast and social media accounts became more successful (if ‘success’ is to be defined by a quantifiable number of Likes, views, etc):

Oscar: Our original prep was we would re-watch an episode and make notes while we did it. It might take us an hour and a half to get through an episode, and then we would just go podcast for maybe forty-five minutes to an hour. That was pretty quick, but the longer we did it, it just kind of seemed necessary to get more and more detailed, until now where it takes us a long time. And plus we have a lot of fans and followers on Twitter now so we try to respond to them somewhat, and kind of keep involved in the conversation so we’re not like ignoring people.

Felix: Yeah, I think my notes for the pilot were maybe three pages long. My notes for an average episode now could be fifteen to twenty pages long. [...]

Oscar: I mean, it can be a little bit of a grind on a Tuesday night when the episode airs, and you kind of digest it immediately and, you know, start doing all of your analysis. But actually recording it is still really fun.

Here, Oscar tries to balance the relationship between the ‘grind’ of fandom and the ‘fun’ of recording the podcast. Kate’s articulations are very similar:

Ysabel: And do you-- Is it-- Do you feel like you have time to do it?

Kate: \*Laughs\* I don’t have enough time sometimes! I’m always-- at my job, I’ll always-- sometimes at my job I have free time, so I’m always on my iPhone searching for stuff. I have a partner too, on the website, and he always helps. And I keep sending him things for him to do when I’m at work, and sometimes I’m searching for things too, in the middle of my class \*laughs\*. But I-- I don’t have enough time. But it’s fun to try to do everything at the same time \*laughs\*. [...] It’s something that I really like to do, and I always like to search for things, and translate things for our website. And-- I don’t know, it’s really fun for me to do this stuff.

Kate, Felix, Oscar, and several other teen drama fans have limited amounts of time to dedicate to their fan activities, given their other commitments such as paid part- and full-time employment, their studies, motherhood, and other typical day-to-day activities. As their fan commitments grow, typically alongside their follower or Like counts, as do tensions between their pleasures and displeasures. For example, although fandom is something that Kate ‘really like[s] to do’, she does not ‘have enough time’ for it. There is a point at which the labour involved with fandom becomes *disruptive* to fans’ pleasures, if their activities can indeed be

referred to as 'labour' (see Hesmondhalgh, 2010 and De Kosnik, 2013 for contrasting perspectives on this debate).

Although the discourse of labour pre-dates social media, it is taking on several new meanings in a digital age, both academically and for my respondents. The extensive time commitment that teen drama fandom seemingly requires is tied up with my participants' imaginings of social media. In a so-called 'participatory culture' (see for example Jenkins, 2006a,b), users' willingness to participate is contingent on platforms' success. Fans reflect this demand to participate by explaining that they search, comment, and post to social media to such an extent that their formerly 'fun' participation becomes 'work', 'tiring', and a 'grind'. These quotes can be interpreted in multiple ways, but might signify fans' efforts to normalise their pleasures. Describing their fandom in this way - especially during an interview with an academic researcher - might itself be pleasurable. This is because the discourse of labour offers fans a more 'rational' (for example, Jenson, 1992; van Zoonen, 1992; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008) and therefore acceptable vocabulary to discuss their pleasures. This, of course, reproduces longstanding gendered assumptions around labour, as fans unconsciously adopt a masculine subject position to produce a less problematic fan identity. Although may not be a deliberate act, its resonance across my interviews illustrates the endurance of gendered labour relations, and the role that social media now plays within them.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have examined three discourses that are commonly attached to digital technologies, especially social media: privacy, participation, and labour. Although these terms - particularly privacy and labour - are not unique to a social media age, several scholars and other commentators argue that they are currently being reimagined. I have identified a number of unique fan pleasures and negotiations in this section, such as: how platforms have their own cultures of acceptability (e.g., not using Twitter to harass teen drama series' actors), the rising value of metrics and the conflicting pleasures of 'Likes', and norms around how much time fans

should dedicate to their social media accounts. However I have also argued that, although these discourses are being rethought in a social media age, their meaningfulness to fans resonates with older debates about gender. For example, although social media introduces new possibilities and risks for achieving and maintaining privacy, fans seek out private spaces online because their fandom is devalued. Similarly, even though platforms have their own politics amongst users, what gets valued as 'acceptable' fan participation is typically gendered, and linked to teen drama fans' desire to avoid further derision. User-led platforms have also reorganised how, where, and when fandom is enacted, imagined by fans as flexible, mobile, and 'always-on'. However my respondents use a gendered vocabulary, drawing on masculinised terms like 'part-time job', 'full-time job' and 'work' to normalise their pleasures. In short, longstanding devaluations of feminised fandoms drive fans' negotiations of these three discourses: privacy, participation, and labour. I now discuss a particularly subversive practice that fans use to maintain their acts of fandom as secrets: what I call 'disembedding' from social media.



## Chapter Six: Digital Disembedding Through Online Teen Drama Fandom

### Introduction: 'It's a Secret Thing'

Oscar: It's sort of, like, a secret thing. I'll be honest, like, my parents don't know that I do this podcast, you know. Some of my friends in real life do, but not all of them. Nobody I work with knows about it. So, it is kind of just this... Not totally secret, but quasi-secret thing that we do online.

Felix: I mean, like, my girlfriend knows. But also our notes and our process and our time commitment is so extensive that there's no way-- Even if I wanted to keep it a secret from her, like, that would be a lot to keep secret from her \*laughs\*.

The teen drama fans quoted in my study recognise that their pleasures are devalued. This raises new and important questions about how they negotiate their fandom in a social media age. The most popular fan platform amongst my respondents was Facebook Pages (sixteen participants), followed by Twitter (eight), Instagram (five), and Tumblr (four). Each social media platform is characterised by its own unique norms, values and cultures about its users' identities. This means fans' online negotiations are, as Baym (2010) and others note, shaped by certain socio-technical affordances (see Chapter Five for a closer discussion of this term). For my participants, one of the perceived benefits of social media is its ability to facilitate *secrecy*, as reflected in the quote above. Felix and Oscar both self-identify as adult, heterosexual and male *Pretty Little Liars* fans: a subject position that they think is unacceptable. For this reason, they hide their fandom from their parents, family members, work colleagues, and some of their friends. The platforms that Felix and Oscar use - Facebook Pages, Instagram, Twitter, and iTunes Podcasts - can be negotiated in a way that aids secrecy, in their view.<sup>5</sup> They feel that they can hide their fandom from certain people by navigating platforms in careful and strategic ways. Of course, the extent to which social media affords users with true 'secrecy' is debatable, though fans like Felix and Oscar are either unaware or are not deterred by this issue.

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<sup>5</sup> iTunes is arguably not a social media platform but belongs within the same ecosystem, to borrow from van Dijck (2013).

Arguments of this kind echo debates from the Internet's early years, where academics and cultural critics alike celebrated its ability to facilitate flexible identity negotiations (Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1996; Plant, 1997). In this body of work, online/offline and virtual/real lives, spaces and selves were understood to be mutually exclusive. Oscar returns to these discourses in his claim that his 'real life' and 'online' identities are different, demonstrating the enduring value of these binary terms. Indeed, calling his fandom a 'secret' implies that it exists separately from his everyday life. Despite their meaningfulness to fans like Oscar, claims of this kind have since been disputed. Scholars now write about how digital technologies like social media are *embedded* (or enmeshed, entangled, interwoven) within everyday life; a notion that I discussed in Chapter Two (Pink, 2012; Hine, 2015; Pink et al, 2016). This shift is also encouraged by platforms themselves, as many have moved towards an embrace of 'real' (i.e., legal) identities instead of 'virtual' (i.e., fake) ones. As Patelis notes, 'the virtual as distinct and different from the real' is understood as 'fake' in an age of social media, within which 'the default is social' (2013, p.122), to borrow Facebook CEO Zuckerberg's words. Hine argues that the Internet's embeddedness in everyday life has now become 'obvious' (2015, p.33), as scholarly and popular discourses no longer frame the Internet as a distinct and separate space. Yet users' lived experiences are far more complex than claims like Hine's (2015) permit, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

Motivated by my respondents' articulations, I now return to earlier debates about the Internet and identity by arguing that fans often try to *disembed*, or detach from some of the 'logics' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) of social media. Users like Felix and Oscar try to separate their online fandom from other parts of their lives and identities, in the hope that people will not discover their secret. But at the same time, they remain firmly entrenched in other social media logics through their personal and other accounts. This suggests that embeddedness is a complex process, which fans can perhaps only partly resist. To maintain their acts of fandom as secrets, fans like Felix and Oscar must disembed from three of social media's core logics: (1) its increasing normalisation of authentic identities through 'real name' policies, particularly through Facebook Profiles, (2) the naturalisation of its own embeddedness in everyday life,

through which ‘virtual’, online-only identities get devalued by certain platforms, and (3) its demand that users engage in practices of sharing, an act that must be done with great care for fans like Felix and Oscar who wish to maintain their acts of fandom as *secrets*. I now deal with each of these logics in turn, and centrally argue that fans disembed because they feel that their pleasures are unworthy. Although my respondents use various social media platforms, I mostly examine their use of Facebook Pages in this chapter, though I note broader trends and norms across other popular platforms throughout.

### **Facebook Pages and the Benefits of Inauthenticity**

Some social media platforms try to naturalise their own embeddedness within everyday life by enforcing real-name policies, and Facebook is particularly well known for this. Its policy applies to users’ Profiles rather than their Pages (an important distinction that I will return to), and requires people to use ‘the name that they go by in everyday life’ (Facebook, 2016c) and present their ‘authentic identity’ (Facebook, 2016a), which must be verifiable by identity documentation if necessary (Facebook, 2016d). Facebook’s real-name policy is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it is exclusionary and is linked to the way the platform seeks to naturalise the mining of a ‘sea of data’ (Patelis, 2013, p.122). Facebook’s ‘enforced authenticity’, a term borrowed from Haimson and Hoffman (2016), contradicts the agentic discourses of Web 2.0 as it imposes restrictions on the identities with which users can and cannot share. Web 2.0 promised social media users that they could participate freely and ‘archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content’ (2006b, p.1) in seemingly powerful new ways (see also Bruns, 2008). But as McNicol puts it, ‘we can be who we want to be, but only as long as it falls within the boundaries set and influenced by the system’ (2013, p.201).

The looming threat of a real-name Internet, as discussed academically by authors like boyd (2011), Hogan (2013), and van der Nagel and Frith (2015) and also in popular tech publications like *Wired* (see Donath, 2014) opens up important questions about its constraints

and the reasons why some people might try to resist it. As yet, this logic does not govern all social media platforms. Only Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn have actively sought to maintain consistency between users' social media and 'physical world identities' (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.), though to varying degrees of success (boyd, 2011). Another popular platform amongst my respondents is Twitter, which is allowing more of its users to verify their identities with personal and legal details (see Burgess, 2016). Similar to Facebook, it requires 'a copy of your official government-issued photo identification (e.g. passport or driver's license)' (Twitter, 2017) to confirm verification requests. Instagram's policies on real names are slightly more complex. While the image-sharing platform does not have such a policy, it is currently owned by Facebook (Constine and Cutler, 2012) and encourages users to link their Facebook and Instagram accounts. The other platform popularly used by my respondents is Tumblr, which does not enforce a real-name policy and has different, perhaps more flexible norms around its users' identities. For example, to create a Tumblr account, users only need to provide a working email address and a password.

Facebook, then, is the only platform on which my respondents are asked to provide their 'real-name'. But Facebook is split into Profiles and Pages (and other functions, like Groups), and while its Profiles are dictated by a real-name policy, its Pages are not. These rules are far more difficult to enforce through Pages as they have their own Terms of Use and norms around identity (Facebook, 2016b). In what follows, I argue that Facebook Pages facilitate the enactment of *inauthentic* identities, to adopt Facebook's term. I show how fans benefit from Pages' naturalisation of inauthenticity, both by using pseudonyms and by enacting identities that differ from the ones that they 'go by in everyday life' (Facebook, 2016c). As Hogan explains, pseudonymity is a '*practice*' employed by social media users to 'facilitate nonidentifiable content', whereas anonymity is defined as a '*state* implying the absence of personally identifiable information' (2013, p.4, emphases in original). Whilst I acknowledge that there are various consequences of anonymity and pseudonymity in certain contexts (for example, Bergstrom, 2011; Phillips, 2011; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), its affordances are

extremely valuable to teen drama fans, as the practice enables them to engage in derided activities and enact seemingly unacceptable fan identities.

As I explained in Chapter Four, Amanda administers three *Pretty Little Liars* fan accounts, and one of them is a Facebook Page. Through the accounts, she enacts the identity of her teenage child. To do so, she uses her child's identity markers such as their gender and age, falsifying information that might make either or both of them identifiable, such as her child's legal name, instead using a pseudonym. Her child's gender, race, and to a large extent age can be assumed through the Page's profile picture, and her child's sexual orientation is communicated through her behaviour on the Page. Of course, Amanda may even be falsifying these details, as the identity she enacts on the Page may differ from her child's. But she still makes use of Facebook Pages' less restrictive norms around identity when compared to its Profiles. For example, on Facebook's Pages Terms there are no references to 'authenticity', 'authentic identities', or the platform's real-name policy (Facebook, 2016b). As Pages are intended for users to 'create a presence for your pet, organisation, favourite film, games character or another purpose' (Facebook, 2016a), inauthentic identity enactments - that is, those which differ from Facebook's understanding of authenticity - are normalised within these spaces. One of Facebook's most dominant 'logics' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) is its increasing naturalisation of users' authentic identities (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016). Yet it could be argued that Facebook is enabling inauthenticity via Pages, while insisting on authenticity through Profiles. The logic of the platform is therefore split between Pages and Profiles, just as users' practices are.

In her explanation of her decision to enact her child's identity, Amanda drew on her past experiences of harassment and derision when she participated in the official *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook Page using her personal account:

Before I had the Page, my friends and I were, you know, just talking on the regular *Pretty Little Liars* Page, and I-- First of all, I got harassed, because of my age. [...] It was quite obvious by my photo that I was forty, and I didn't think that was a big deal. I mean, I like all kinds of shows.

But I got relentlessly harassed by-- Any time anybody would disagree with me, instead of disagreeing based on the topic, they would throw in that I was an old lady. And that's what made me have to disguise my identity. [...] So people think I'm a teenager, pretty much. (Amanda)

Amanda's personal account featured a number of identity markers, such as a real image of herself as her profile picture, her legal name, her age, and her country of residence. From this image and other data, the Page participants deduced that Amanda was a woman in her forties: a seemingly unacceptable *Pretty Little Liars* fan identity. She therefore created a separate Facebook fan Page to prevent sexism and ageist criticisms of her pleasures. The teenage identity she now portrays through her own Page is, in her view, less derisible. Facebook Pages thus enable Amanda's fan practices, as their discourses and policies around the enforcement of authentic identities differ to those of Profiles. By creating a Facebook Page to dodge Profiles' naturalisation of authenticity, I argue that Amanda is disembedding her social media fan identity from her other identities.

Other teen drama fans like Reesa also benefit from Pages' rules around inauthenticity. Reesa administers three fan accounts on Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter in order to 'role-play' as one of *Pretty Little Liars*' female characters: Mona Vanderwaal.<sup>6</sup> Mona is not one of the show's main characters - the 'Liars' - and is instead the show's villain, to borrow Reesa's term. She told me that she chose to role-play Mona's character because she can 'relate' to her, as 'she was bullied, I was bullied, [...] and I used her story to express my own'. Reesa centrally enacts Mona's identity through her three fan accounts, although there are occasional slippages between the two. Similar to Amanda, only a few people in what Reesa calls her 'real life' - an important discourse that I discuss later - are aware that she administers fan accounts:

Reesa: Nobody from my group of friends watches the show.

Ysabel: Do your friends know that you have the fan Pages?

Reesa: Um... I mentioned it, but that's just it \*laughs\*.

Ysabel: Is there a reason that you only mentioned it to them?

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<sup>6</sup> Reesa also writes fan fiction and publishes her stories on Wattpad, which exists within the same social media ecosystem, as van Dijck (2013) would argue.

Reesa: Probably because nobody I know has a Page like this. So I thought it would-- they would probably think I'm weird or, you know \*laughs\* something like that.

Reesa worries that her fandom might be seen as 'weird', which partly explains why she enacts Mona's identity instead of her own. Given that Facebook Pages can be used to 'create a presence for your pet, organisation, favourite film, games character or another purpose' (Facebook, 2016a), they do not require users to provide any identity markers (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, geographical location, nationality, or others). By enacting Mona's identity instead of her own, Reesa *feels* that certain people in her life cannot trace the fan account back to her. She said that she just 'mentioned' the fan accounts to her friends, and later told me that the only person in her real life who knows the extent of her fandom is her mother. Her complex and strategic enactments of fandom are, I argue, fuelled by the devalued status of teen drama fandom.

By Facebook Profiles' standards, Amanda and Reesa's identity negotiations are inauthentic, yet they are not on its Pages. But as Haimson and Hoffman note, 'just what constitutes an "authentic" or "real" identity - both online and off - is a point of contention' (2016, n.p.), and also varies according to the spaces in which identities are enacted. Authenticity is a notoriously slippery term (see for example Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013), but platforms like Facebook use it to denote a distinction between so-called 'real' identities and "fake" or fraudulent ones' (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). Although Amanda adopts the identity of her teenage child and Reesa 'role-plays' as a *Pretty Little Liars* character, it could be argued that their identities on Facebook Pages are more authentic than they might be on their Profiles. This is because users whose identities are stigmatised, like teen drama fans, feel more comfortable discussing their pleasures on Facebook Pages than they do on their Profiles. As van der Nagel and Frith note, the embrace of pseudonymous identities is important as it allows for certain practices 'that could be lost as sites increasingly attempt to tie all online activities to a singular "real" identity' (2015, n.p.). Platforms that foster or actively encourage pseudonymity are valuable to many social media users, and it is becoming increasingly important that people have spaces online where they do not have to endure a real-name Internet. There are, of course,

those who would disagree with this perspective. van der Nagel and Frith discuss some of the harmful practices that arise from anonymity and pseudonymity, such as ‘flaming’ (hostile and harmful online comments) and ‘trolling’ (posting deliberately antagonistic content to social media and similar online spaces), noting that:

As many people have argued (see Zhuo, 2010; Postmes et al, 1998; Christopherson, 2007), the ability to comment under disposable identities, or even under no identity in the case of anonymous comment sections, can encourage people to act in uncivil ways. (2015, n.p.)

However tying all online activities together - or, to borrow Hine’s (2015) term, *embedding* them - might harm people like my participants and other people who do not engage in these harmful practices, as they would lose a space in which they could enact their secret fandom. Amanda, for example, wanted to engage in *Pretty Little Liars* fandoms on Facebook without outing herself as a woman in her forties, and Pages facilitate this practice.

The fans who agreed to be interviewed online - predominantly through Facebook Messenger but also via email - all administer Facebook Pages. Given that I did not speak to them on Skype and they were not asked to provide their identity markers, it was difficult for me to understand whether they navigate their Pages in a similar way to Amanda and Reesa. However I observed their Pages to see whether they discussed their non-fan identities in any way, and analysed this data alongside their interview transcripts. Carrie, Elena, Gioia, Kat, Vicky, and Virginie are fans of *The Vampire Diaries*, and Margaux is a *Revenge* fan. Unlike my Skype respondents, my knowledge about their identities is fairly limited, although this was a reasonable trade to ensure they felt comfortable enough to participate in my research. For example, I only know that Carrie and Vicky are female teenagers, and that Elena self-identifies as female. I have more demographic details about Gioia, Kat, Margaux and Virginie, as detailed in table 3 and discussed in my other empirical chapters. Apart from Margaux and Vicky, all of my online respondents emphasised the importance of their ‘anonymity’ on their fan Pages. For example:



The thing that I remain anonymous to the world is very important. I'm very shy, so the fact that I could express my opinion and not be judged for who I am remains one of the coolest thing[s] about having a fanpage. (Carrie)

I want everyone to see and like the Page for the show, not for me as the real me. I made this Page for the show, not for me to show myself. (Elena)

I care about my privacy, especially because I have a family. So for me it's very important to remain anonymous. (Gioia)

I keep my identity hidden for the fans. (Kat)

On this Page I am anonymous but on my other Pages I am not and the people know who I am. (Virginie)

The fans quoted above did not discuss their own identity markers on their Pages during the three-month observation period. Gioia even partly falsified her gender at the time, listing it as 'mixed' in the 'About' section of her Page, yet she self-identified as female in her written interview response. None of the other fans quoted above listed their genders on the Page (which is an option, unlike on Facebook Profiles where users must choose a gender but can hide it from their Friends). Margaux is far more open about her identity and links her Facebook Page to her personal Profile. She also asks that her Page participants refer to her by her first (and legal) name. Her fan Page is dedicated to a male *Revenge* character, Nolan Ross, though she does not 'role-play' as his character. Instead she shares updates about the actor, posts images and videos of Nolan (and of the actor who plays this character, Barry Sloane), and encourages discussions about the character's role in *Revenge*'s narrative. Vicky also told me that it is 'not important' to her that she remains anonymous on her Page, however she did not discuss her own identity markers on her Page when I observed it, though her comments suggest that she has done so in the past. For the majority of my online respondents, Facebook Pages' normalisation of inauthenticity is extremely valuable. Ordinary social media users would struggle if not fail to ascertain the fans' 'real' (i.e. legal) identity markers, which is precisely what Carrie, Elena, Gioia, Kate and Virginie intended. Although Facebook Pages might not afford fans with a true state of anonymity (Hogan, 2013), their users *feel* as though their identities are hidden.

For my respondents, practices of disembedding - such as separating some of their social media identities from others - are entangled with gendered derision. Teen drama fans only

benefit from Pages' norms and rules around identity because their 'real' identities are not, in their view, aligned with acceptable teen drama fandom. Of course, it must be noted that Facebook's Pages can never afford users with a true state of anonymity, as they are connected to users' Profiles. To create a Facebook Page, users must first have a Profile and provide the required identifying information. Users can also be made identifiable through the mining of their social media data and metadata, and through more malicious practices such as hacking, surveillance, or information leakage (Marwick and boyd, 2014; H. Kennedy, 2016). Yet I have shown how some fans strategically separate - or *disembed* - some of their online identities from others, and some of their social media accounts from others. This careful and deliberate practice suggests that fans can disembed some parts of social media from others, and that they do so with good reason. Yet Hine's (2015) argument that the Internet and social media are embedded within everyday life offers a limited view of users' complex practices. I now discuss the salience of binary terms such as online/offline to teen drama fans, despite scholarly and other turns away from them.

### **Digital Disembedding and a Return to Binaries**

The binary terms that accompanied the discourse of cyberspace in the early 1990s, such as online/offline and real/virtual, are enduringly meaningful to teen drama fans. Although Hine (2015) and others (for example, Pink, 2012; Pink et al, 2016) argue that online and offline are now interwoven, the fans of my research *want* them to be distinct. Hine (2015) has argued that the Internet's embeddedness within everyday life has become 'obvious' (2015, p.33), as scholarly and popular discourses no longer frame the Internet as a distinct and separate space set apart from other facets of life. Pink et al similarly claim that 'digital technologies and media (and the things that people do with them) are interdependent with the infrastructures of everyday life' (2016, p.8), and van Dijck and Poell argue that the various logics of social media platforms have 'penetrated deeply into the mechanics of everyday life' (2013, p.3). The term 'cyberspace' has arguably fallen out of fashion, academically and otherwise. This shift is compounded - and indeed actively encouraged - by social media platforms themselves, on

which ‘fluidity and experimentation with identity eventually gave way to an expectation that people should represent an established, rather than experimental, identity (Marwick, 2013)’ (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p.). As Patelis (2013) notes, platforms’ attempts to tie users’ identity enactments together is partly driven by their economic imperatives. Yet my findings suggest that users’ lived experiences of social media are far more complex, and that terms like online/offline and real/virtual are still meaningful to teen drama fans, and perhaps to other ordinary social media users.

I now explore how my respondents’ articulations are reminiscent of the discourses that accompanied the birth of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s. For early Internet researchers, the Internet represented a discrete, online space - a *cyberspace* - which existed separately from offline and therefore ‘real’ life (Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1996; Plant, 1997). As I noted in Chapter Two, the discourse embodied hopes about the potentialities of Internet communication, by suggesting that it ‘freed people from their earthly bodies, allowing for pure communication unfettered from discrimination’ (Marwick, 2013, p.25). During this time, binary terms such as online/offline and virtual/real were popularised, capturing the perceived separation of the Internet from other spheres of everyday life. Although this distinction has been disputed, I argue that the promises of cyberspace are enduringly seductive, especially to teen drama fans whose identities are derided from various angles: within and outside of the home, in public and popular discourses, and even within fan spaces themselves. These binary terms play a crucial role in the act of disembedding, as fans draw on these powerful discourses to open up a space in which their pleasures can be felt and imagined differently, and as more *acceptable* than they would be elsewhere. I now make this argument with reference to empirical data from five teen drama fans: Reesa, Felix, Oscar, Margaux and Emily.

*Pretty Little Liars* fan Reesa, for example, is careful to make limited visible connections between her Facebook Profile and her other social media fan accounts. In addition to her fan accounts, Reesa also has what she calls ‘personal’ Instagram and Twitter profiles, which I did not observe for the ethical reasons discussed in Chapter Three. However it is interesting to note

that she provides a link to her personal Twitter account on her Facebook fan Page, on which she uses her legal name, and also uses Instagram to share images to her Twitter fan account. Reesa's personal and fan accounts are thus technically connected, despite her discursive separation of them, which I discuss below. The only social media account that Reesa keeps completely separate from all of her others is her personal Facebook Profile, and she explained that this is:

Because that's the only place where I interact with the friends that I have here, in real life, basically. None of them have Twitter, none of them have Instagram. It's actually funny, because here, in Central Europe-- I don't know if it's a Central European thing, or an Austrian/Slovenian thing, but I don't know that many people who actually own Instagram and Twitter. Most people actually have Facebook and that's it. A lot of people haven't heard of Tumblr, for example. [...] So the stuff I post on Instagram and Twitter, I guess that's kind of for the people I've met through my page. I've made quite a lot of friends through that page, so I guess the stuff I post on Instagram and Twitter is really just to show them what I'm up to, if that makes sense. (Reesa)

Reesa's personal Facebook Profile is a space where she interacts with her friends in her 'real life', whereas her fan Page is something that she perceives to be:

Something that's my private thing. [...] I guess I just like to be private when it comes to these things. Probably because it's very, um... It's connected to bullying, and that's an aspect of myself that I like to keep private. [...] I worry that people will think I'm just some kind of a-- a couch potato \*laughs\*, that I have no life and that I'm just hiding online, or something like that. (Reesa)

Reesa makes a conscious attempt to separate her Facebook Profile from her other social media fan accounts, even though her Page and her Profile are technically linked. She hides her fan accounts from her friends in what she calls her 'real life' because they might think it is 'weird', and because her fan identity is 'connected to bullying', an aspect of herself that she shares with *Pretty Little Liars* fans but not with her other friends. Indeed, Reesa talks extensively about her experiences of bullying across her fan accounts, particularly on Twitter.

In the quote above, Reesa distinguishes her online and private enactments of fandom from her real life, even though recent digital media scholarship has argued towards the entanglement of such spaces. To Reesa, it is clearly important that some social media spaces can be detached from others. As Patelis notes, 'the virtual as distinct and different from the real' is understood as 'fake' (2013, p.122) in an age of social media, but Reesa's articulations inspire a

number of questions about online identities. For example, is Reesa's fan identity any less real than the one(s) she portrays on her other social media accounts? Indeed, are her pseudonymous fan accounts not integral to her identity? I suggest that distinctions of this kind should not be understood as 'fake' (Patelis, 2013, p.122) in a social media age, given the importance of Reesa and similar fans' pseudonymous personae to their identities and pleasures. Although the salience of a virtual/real binary has been disputed, it clearly plays a powerful role in Reesa's attempts to balance her different identities. Her articulations also illustrate how stereotypes of fans - as 'couch potato[es]' who have 'no life' and are 'hiding online' - demonstrate a clear link between practices of disembedding and gendered derisions of teen drama fandom.

Felix and Oscar are similarly seduced by binary discourses. This is likely because, to borrow from Oscar, their *Pretty Little Liars* fandom is a 'secret'. The fans present a weekly podcast about the show, run their own website and administer *Pretty Little Liars* fan accounts on Facebook Pages, Instagram and Twitter. They also have what they call 'personal' accounts on various social media platforms. Felix and Oscar are forthcoming about certain aspects of their identities within fan spaces (e.g., their genders and ages), but they do not disclose their legal names, places of work, or geographical locations to other fans. Oscar's claim that his and Felix's fandom of the show is 'sort of, like, a secret thing' suggests that social media can help fans to conceal their enactments from certain people, as they explain in the following exchange:

Oscar: I'll be honest, like, my parents don't know that I do this podcast, you know, and some of my friends in real life do, but not all of them. Nobody I work with knows about it. So, it is kind of just this... Not totally secret, but quasi-secret thing that we do online.

Felix: I mean, like, my girlfriend knows. But also our notes, and our process, and our time commitment is so extensive that there's no way-- Even if I wanted to keep it a secret from her, like, that would be a lot to keep secret from her \*laughs\*.

Felix and Oscar try to maintain their acts of fandom as 'secrets' because they recognise that *Pretty Little Liars* is culturally devalued, and also because their fan identities - as adult and heterosexual men - might be unacceptable to certain people in their lives. Like Reesa, Felix and Oscar hide their fandom from many of their friends in their so-called real lives and worry about

being outed as fans of the show. By using the term ‘quasi-secrecy’, it could be argued that Oscar recognises the difficulties of achieving absolute secrecy - or, anonymity - on social media. For example, both his and Felix’s voices would be recognisable from their iTunes podcast, which could threaten to unmask their secret. Yet they likely anticipate that none of their friends in their real lives will discover the podcast because they do not watch the show (though they might watch it in secret, if Felix and Oscar’s experiences are anything to go by). In the quote above, Oscar distinguishes his online fandom from his real non-fan life, in which he has plenty of other social media accounts. By separating their fandom from the rest of their online/offline identities, it could be argued that Felix and Oscar are strategically disembedding *some* parts of social media from others.

Fans like Felix and Oscar likely do not want all social media spaces to be entangled, nor do they want social media to be embedded in other parts of their lives. This is because their fan pleasures depend on the secrecy that the Internet seemingly affords; a notion that an embedded approach to Internet research might miss. By seeking to maintain consistency between users’ social media and ‘physical world identities’ (Haimson and Hoffman, 2016, n.p), platforms like Facebook create difficulties for fans like Reesa, Felix and Oscar, as they threaten to erase their secretive and pleasurable fan spaces. Not only are fans disembedding from some parts of social media - contrary to claims that such spaces have become firmly embedded within everyday life (see Hine, 2015) - but this practice might become necessary if platforms move towards ‘a totalizing embrace of the real-name Internet’ (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015, n.p.).

Some other teen drama fans like Margaux and Emily also juxtaposed their ‘real lives’ against their fandom. This, I propose, signals a nuanced practice rather than a straightforward and clear-cut binary between online/offline and virtual/real spaces. That is, they use the term ‘real life’ to navigate their identities, but this is very a complex process, especially because their fan activities are arguably located *within* their ‘real’ and everyday lives. As I noted in Chapter Two, the rise of fan studies as a separate academic field threatens to de-situate it, to borrow from Pink (2012), from other forms of media engagement and audiencehood. My participants’

fandom, including their acts of disembedding, are still located within the everyday, yet social media is often *imagined* by fans as a space that is separate from the real. Although these two issues may be counterintuitive, we nevertheless need to conceptualise them together to understand how ‘the virtual’ and other such spaces are being evoked, and why they are meaningful to fans. For example, *Revenge* fan Margaux explains that she made a number of new friends through her fan Page, which is dedicated to an actor from the show. However she later stopped speaking to these new friends because:

They were too caught up with the Page things and I felt like I needed to call myself out a bit and think about my real life. (Margaux)

Here, Margaux makes a distinction between her ‘real life’ and the friendships associated with her fan Page. By telling me that she needed to call herself out and think about her real life, she was perhaps trying to disassociate from stereotypes of fans as being confused about ‘the distinctions between fantasy and reality, which leads to connotations of insanity and lack of behavioural and affective boundaries (Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Kozinets, 2001; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b)’ (Stanfill, 2013, p.124).

*Revenge* fan Emily also imagines social media fandoms as spaces that are distinct from the ‘real world’. She told me about a controversial incident within *The Vampire Diaries* fandom, during which she felt that fans behaved in inappropriate ways:

I know with my younger sister, she’s in *The Vampire Diaries* fandom, and um... I have friends who run fan sites and do work within The CW and whatnot, and I know that when Nina and Ian were dating, I guess there were stories about when they went to Paris and they had been ambushed by these young girls, and these young girls were trying to physically attack Nina because she was dating Ian. And it was like this big thing, and so it really-- it jumps from online into the real world, and that’s when it can get a little-- a little scary. (Emily)

Nina Dobrev and Ian Somerholder are actors from *The Vampire Diaries* and were, according to Emily, ‘dating’ for a brief period outside of the show. She explains that some fans ‘ambushed’ and ‘physically attack[ed]’ Nina because she was dating Ian, which reproduces stereotypes of the fangirls and groupies who are, to borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Heather:

All hysterical screaming girls who only fancy the guy, that's the only reason why they're there. And there's a lot more to it than just fancying the guy, they might not fancy them at all. [...] The idea of them being hysterical and losing control of their bodily functions is just insulting. They might be screaming, but like, ok, good! \*Laughs\* let them. I think it's an important part of... Yeah, it's important. They're allowed-- That they're expressing themselves. (Heather)

As I discussed in Chapter Five, Emily thinks that social media's technical infrastructure, especially Twitter, encourages negative fan behaviours. In the quote above, she explains that it is 'scary' when such acts jump 'from online into the real world', and there are two important issues at play here. The first is that *Revenge* fan Emily is deriding fans of other, seemingly less acceptable television shows like *The Vampire Diaries*, a process that Hills (2012) calls 'inter-fan dynamics'. She imagines this fan base to be younger than *Revenge*'s, which makes it especially problematic. The second issue is that she imagines social media fan spaces as distinct from the everyday, seemingly 'real' world. Although I argue that fandom is part of my participants' everyday lives, it is interesting that Emily *imagines* it as a space that is separate from the real.

The binary terms that accompanied the discourse of cyberspace in the early 1990s - such as online/offline and virtual/real - are clearly meaningful to teen drama fans. Although such divides have tended not to hold within academic circles, I have shown that their values remain to social media users, especially those whose identities are often devalued. Platforms like Facebook are encouraging their own embeddedness within everyday life through a number of socio-technical principles, like the enforcement of real-name policies discussed in the previous section. Such platforms devalue 'virtual' identities that are distinct from users' 'real' ones (Patelis, 2013), though it is difficult to discern the virtual from the real for users like my respondents, whose fandom is both *imagined* and *enacted* in complex ways. It is for this reason that users like teen drama fans, who often wish to maintain some of their social media activities as *secrets*, want to disembody their online fandom from other parts of their lives. That terms such as 'online', 'offline', 'real life' and 'real world' feature so heavily in my interview transcripts demonstrates their importance to fans. It might also be pleasurable for my respondents to



imagine their fandom as a separate, secret act: as something that is *theirs*. But the value of these terms also signals the troubling devaluation of teen drama fandom, as fans draw on these discourses to open up a space in which their pleasures can be felt and imagined differently, and as more acceptable than they would be elsewhere. I now discuss the strategies of sharing that teen drama fans have developed, to prevent other fans from connecting their fan and non-fan identities.

### **Social Media and Strategies of Sharing**

Although social media can offer teen drama fans an extent of secrecy, many of my respondents are aware that there are risks to ‘sharing’ with platforms. As H. Kennedy notes, despite the scholarly emphasis on social media participation (for example, Jenkins, 2006b; Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011; Delwiche and Henderson, 2013), platforms do not use this term and instead invite their users to ‘share’ (2016, p.23). In one of the few scholarly critiques of sharing, John argues that the term, which is ubiquitous across platforms, was chosen because it has ‘positive connotations of equality, selflessness and giving’ (2012, p.176). J. Kennedy similarly notes that social media platforms’ use of the term is ‘strategic’, as it masks platforms’ commercial imperatives (2013, p.128) (see also van Dijck, 2013). Sharing also masks the significant lack of agency that users actually have over their data, though this is not necessarily what concerns my respondents (see Raynes-Goldie (2010) for a similar argument about Facebook users’ privacy negotiations). I argue that my respondents’ fandom is partly driven by their concerns around the consequences of sharing, such as having their secret or inauthentic identities exposed by other users. For this reason, they have developed what I call ‘strategies of sharing’. That is, they share content in careful, deliberate and *strategic* ways to avoid identity exposure.

I make this argument in keeping with a wealth of other digital media scholars, particularly those concerned with users’ privacy. Raynes-Goldie (2010), for example, explores how young Facebook users protect and control their personal information by using aliases,

having multiple accounts, and engaging in other subversive identity negotiations. She argues that there is a 'discrepancy between the behaviour of Facebook users and the way the debate about online privacy is often framed' (Raynes-Goldie, 2010, n.p.) by media outlets, which often suggest that young social media users in particular do not care about their privacy. Marwick and boyd similarly argue that teens' 'frequent sharing of digital content does not suggest that they share indiscriminately' (2014, p.1052). In line with these arguments, I show how my respondents demonstrate an extent of awareness that sharing poses risks, as they lack control over its effects. What is particularly striking about my participants' negotiations is that they are motivated by gendered devaluations of their pleasures. Not only do we need to think more carefully about the lived experiences of digital embeddedness, but to also consider how these practices are tied up with sexism, ageism, classism and other intersecting 'isms'. Although social media seems to afford fans a level of secrecy through their pseudonymous profiles, they articulate a number of risks associated with sharing, particularly their fears of being harassed by other fans, hacking, and other invasive methods of identity exposure. I now discuss these risks with reference to three teen drama fans - Amanda, Taylor and Emily - and show how they disembed from what is perhaps social media's core logic by *not* sharing in all spaces equally, as this practice is done differently according to the purpose of the account. Put simply, sharing is strategic.

As I explained in Chapter Four, *Pretty Little Liars* fan Taylor administers Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter accounts that are dedicated to a fan theory about the identity of A: the show's anonymous villain. Taylor also has two teenage and female administrators for her fan accounts. Similar to many of my other respondents, the only people who know about Taylor's fandom are her husband, her two sisters, and one of her friends. Aside from her two administrators who she has 'friended' on her Facebook Profile, Taylor keeps her Profile separate from her Page (even though they are technically linked, as I have already noted). During our interview, she explained that she sometimes participates in *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook fan Groups using her personal Profile, but does not 'out' herself as the owner of the accounts. Indeed, on several occasions the Group participants have discussed Taylor's fan

theories, but she does not claim them as her own as this would risk linking her two social media identities. Taylor's fan activities were also once praised by the show's network, Freeform (formerly ABC Family). She holds weekly '*Pretty Little Liars* parties' where she watches the show with her sisters, decorates her home, and creates cakes and other *Pretty Little Liars* themed items. Yet Taylor chose not to provide the network with her legal name or discuss this on her personal Profile. These thoughtful negotiations are very similar to Amanda's, though Taylor does not pretend to have a different identity. Taylor actually makes few and very vague references to her identity markers on her fan Page, and has only uploaded one 'real' picture of herself to coincide with a *Pretty Little Liars* episode called 'UnmAsked'. Yet part of her face was covered in the image, making it difficult to assume any identity markers other than her gender, which her fans were already aware of. Part of the reason why Taylor hides her fandom from people on her Facebook Profile is because she thinks her fan identity is unacceptable. She worries that her fandom might be perceived as 'nerdy' and 'immature' given her age, but she also hides her fandom because she recognises that revealing her real identity poses various risks.

For example, during our Skype interview Taylor recalled an experience of harassment on her *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook fan Page:

Oh, gosh, dude! I get-- No. People can be rude. People can be pretty little liars. This one girl, I don't even know her name, and she has told me so many times that my theory is wrong, for a million different reasons. [...] So she'll just continue-- And go on my Page, and banter with people, telling them these stories! So she's a pretty little liar. Yeah. [...] She is a weird thing. Maybe she just likes to torture me, I don't know. [...] People can hack you and steal your Page. You have to be very careful. It's very scary. (Taylor)

It is partly because of this experience of harassment that, to quote Taylor, 'I don't display my age or my identity on there. [...] I just keep it kind of anonymous'. To an extent, Facebook Pages, Tumblr blogs and Twitter accounts help Taylor to *feel* anonymous, as she is able to carefully conceal her age and other aspects of her identity. Unlike Profiles, Facebook Pages do not request these details from users. But do Facebook Pages afford Taylor with a state of true anonymity? As Hogan explains, anonymity is defined as a '*state* implying the absence of personally identifiable information', whereas pseudonymity is a '*practice*' employed by social

media users to ‘facilitate nonidentifiable content’ (2013, p.4, emphases in original). It could be argued that Facebook Pages do not afford their users with a true state of anonymity because their accounts are connected to their Profiles, which are likely to feature various identity markers and also feel the effects of the platform’s real-name policy. There is also the threat of platforms’ ‘surveillance, information leakage, or data-mining’ (Marwick, and boyd, 2014, p.1064), though this is not necessarily what concerns Taylor. Instead, she worries that people, presumably other *Pretty Little Liars* fans, can ‘hack you and steal your Page’. This is an understandable concern for Taylor as her fan account is particularly successful (if ‘success’ is to be determined by number of Likes and other metrics). Her prominence within the fandom introduces a greater number of risks, and she has already experienced a ‘scary’ instance of harassment from a fellow fan.

My Skype interview with Taylor was particularly unique, as it was the first time that a non-interviewee joined in with our conversation. Taylor agreed to conduct a Skype video interview with me, and our discussion about her experiences of harassment occurred towards the end. As she was describing this event, her husband intervened and started to recall the ‘scary’ incident in his own words. He stepped into the frame, in front of Taylor, and expressed his anger that she had been harassed. He then took his and Taylor’s daughter out to a birthday party, and the two of us were left alone to talk. Although Taylor is partially able to navigate these ‘very scary’ instances of harassment on social media, she understands that she cannot fully prevent them. She is selective about what she shares as she does not entirely trust this social media logic, particularly where details about her identity - and also her family’s safety - are concerned. I argue that her actions signal a strategy of sharing, which is linked to her drive to disembed some parts of social media from others.

Amanda echoed Taylor’s experiences of harassment, describing numerous instances where other social media users have tried to figure out her identity:

I've had people try to figure out who I am. I've had somebody that actually figured it out, and posted my real name, and my children's names. [...] There was a guy that threatened to kill me. [...] He actually sent threats. It was really scary for someone to threaten you over comments about a TV show. [...] If you tell people who you are, you're going to get hacked. (Amanda)

For Amanda, there are significant and scary risks to sharing your real identity with other *Pretty Little Liars* fans. In the above quote, Amanda describes an instance where another fan 'figured [...] out' her real identity and where another user threatened her life. Similar to Taylor, she explains that revealing your real identity subjects you to the risk of being hacked. Her fan Pages have not attracted quite as many 'Likes', 'follows', and other metrics as Taylor's, but Amanda's persona is particularly well known within the fandom. As I explained in Chapter Four, Amanda started out by 'role playing' the part of a male *Pretty Little Liars* character, high school English teacher Ezra Fitz, and would correct other fans' grammar and play the role of a teacher on her Facebook fan Page. Although Amanda does not do this anymore, she became known for this within the show's fan circles.

Emily had a similar experience to Amanda's, where a fellow *Revenge* fan hacked her Facebook Page to find out details about the cast and crew's Facebook Pages and other social media accounts, as she explains in the quote below:

It actually got to the point where it was bothering me personally when people were wanting, you know, Facebook Pages and URLs of actors and were going out of their way to hack into mine to find... And I'm like... That's like, you know. And I-- I go and I find them for my own curiosity um... And I do it so that I know what to combat, like if fans are like hey, is that this person? I know what the thing is, I can be like no, they don't have it. Like a lot of the actors will say that they don't have, you know, Facebook or whatnot, because I have friends who are actors or whatnot and they're all in the same circles-- I obviously know better, like I know who they are, but I never give that away. I'd never-- I know who on *Revenge* has Facebook. (Emily)

Like Amanda and Taylor, Emily explains that her experiences of hacking affected her 'personally'. This implies that she tries to detach her fan identity from other aspects of her life, and that other fans' actions were causing these spaces and identities to merge. Emily explains that she informs herself about the actors' social media presence, especially their non-official Facebook Pages, so that she knows what to 'combat'. This strategy protects both Emily's Page from being hacked and also protects the actors' privacy; a responsibility that she feels is placed

on her as a Page owner, as I explained in Chapter Five. Unlike Amanda and Taylor, Emily is more maintaining the actors' privacy and safety than her own, though this might speak to the fan personae that she wanted to communicate through our interview. Emily was the participant who perhaps most frequently and strongly linked her fan activities to the rational and masculine discourse of 'labour', and frequently described her fandom as 'work' and other such terms. Perhaps she feels that it is her 'job' to protect the actors' Facebook Pages, to which she gave precedence during our interview.

As I noted in the previous section, where I examined the salience of binary terms like online/offline, my online interviewees placed great emphasis on their own 'anonymity'. Carrie, Elena, Gioia, Kat, and Virginie - all fans of *The Vampire Diaries* - have developed strategies of sharing on their Facebook fan Pages. These fans do not discuss their non-fan identities on their Pages, and typically only share their genders with other fans. As some of these accounts are for 'role-playing' and Facebook Pages do not require users to provide demographic details, they can share without the fear that their non-fan identities will be derided. This, I argue, is a deliberate act, and indicates a far more thoughtful, deliberate, and strategic negotiation of Facebook (and, by extension, other social media platforms) than Hine's (2015) notion of embeddedness allows for.

Fans' strategies of sharing suggest that they are engaging in practices of disembedding. Although the normalisation of inauthenticity on Facebook Pages and other social media platforms enables fans to conceal certain elements of their identity, this does not eliminate certain risks. Thus for many teen drama fans, particularly those who enact inauthentic identities, sharing must be done with great care. Fans like Taylor and Amanda, for example, do not want their secret identities to be exposed, given their concerns that their subject positions - as thirty- and forty-something year old fans of a teen show - are derisible. Their acts of disembedding some social media spaces and identities from others signal the importance of broader cultural discourses in users' decisions to share, or not to share. Fans also place the responsibility of negating these risks on to social media *users*, rather than the platforms. Taylor, for example,

explains that ‘*you* have to be careful’, and according to Amanda, ‘if *you* tell people who you are, you’re going to get hacked’. Teen drama fans’ strategies of sharing are therefore shaped by their conscious and deliberate negotiations of perceived and actual risks.

### **Conclusions: Towards a Disembedded Approach to Social Media Research**

I began this chapter with a quote, which showed how two male, adult and heterosexual *Pretty Little Liars* fans, Felix and Oscar, describe their fandom as a ‘secret thing’. In order to keep their secret, they carefully navigate three of social media’s core logics: (1) its increasing normalisation of authentic identities, (2) the naturalisation of its own embeddedness within everyday life, and (3) its demand that users engage in often-risky practices of sharing. At the time of our interview, Felix and Oscar had managed to keep their secret for several years, despite frequent and confusing changes to social media platforms’ infrastructures, and the emotional labour that their secrecy demands. To understand how fans like Felix and Oscar use social media, I argue towards a *disembedded* approach to social media research. That is, I have argued that Hine’s (2015) model of the ‘embeddedness’ of the Internet within everyday life fails to capture the tensions and negotiations of users’ social media activities. Fans like Felix, Oscar, and the others who I discuss in this chapter are never wholly embedded within, nor do they wish to completely disembed from social media. Instead they separate some social media spaces from parts of their other online/offline lives, and balance multiple identities across platforms, sometimes enacting distinct identities on the same platform (e.g., Facebook Pages and Profiles).

I have offered various explanations for *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge* and *The Vampire Diaries* fans’ acts of disembedding, primarily arguing that their negotiations of social media must be understood as a direct response to longstanding cultural devaluations of feminised popular cultures and behaviours. Their fandom is entrenched in what I have called a quadruple devaluation: gender, age, social class, and sexual orientation (see Chapter Four). Fans to maintain a degree of secrecy through social media, yet this practice also creates various uncontrollable risks, especially the exposure of their fan identities. If an embedded approach to

Internet research considers how ‘the Internet is embedded in everyday life’ (Hine, 2015, p.33), then a disembedded approach asks how social media users might also consciously use this technology to separate their different identities, for reasons not limited to the ones I propose. As more and more platforms embrace the logics of a real-name Internet, perhaps disembedding will become a necessary practice for some users.



## Chapter Seven: Guilty Pleasures, or Pleasurable Guilt?

I mean *Bear Grylls* isn't a guilty pleasure for men is it? But *Sex and the City* is considered a guilty pleasure. Like, there are very definite men's shows and women's shows. And personally I love *Bear Grylls*, so I watch that all the time. But, you know, you don't-- What is that-- There's a series... *Bro Code*! That's a series, right? Something like that. But it's very very based on men, and no one calls that a guilty pleasure. (Katrine, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

### Introduction

Media texts that are located at the bottom of an imagined cultural hierarchy, such as soap operas, romance novels, reality television shows and teen drama series are often referred to as 'guilty pleasures' in public and popular discourses (see for example Complex, 2014; Ranker, 2017). As I noted in Chapter Two, this phrase is gendered, as it is *women's* popular cultures that tend to provoke feelings of guilt in their audiences and fans, and that tend to occupy a position at the bottom of this hierarchy. This illustrates the pervasiveness and perseverance of what Cann calls a 'devaluation of the feminine' (2015, p.162) within contemporary society, and is echoed in the quote above. Here, *Pretty Little Liars* fan Katrine claims that typically masculine television series - like Bear Grylls' shows about wilderness survival such as *Man vs. Wild* (2006-2011), and *Guy Code* (2011-present), an American comedy television show based on men's humour - are not widely considered to be guilty pleasures. Yet pleasure in feminised media texts like *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), which chronicles the fictional romantic lives of four female New Yorkers, are seemingly far more troubling. These articulations are strikingly similar to those discussed by Coward (1984), Radway (1984), D. Morley (1986), A. Gray (1987, 1992), and other feminist scholars who identified a gender imbalance in people's perceptions of 'men's shows and women's shows', to borrow from Katrine. Although in the previous chapters I have explored how fans negotiate their pleasure in a social media age, I must also acknowledge the strong resonance with feminist scholarship published over three decades ago. Specifically, teen drama fans' pleasures continue to be entrenched in *guilt* due to enduring cultural devaluations of feminised popular cultures and behaviours, such as teen drama fandom. Only four of my participants - Katrine, Megan, Melody, and Parker - directly referred to their

fandom as a 'guilty pleasure', yet this chapter demonstrates the term's wider resonance beyond this precise articulation. It explores how guilt at, for example, being an adult fan of a teen show, dedicating time to fandom (an activity that has long been considered immature, inappropriate and unworthy (for example, Lewis, 1992; Jenkins, 1992)), and sacrificing domestic responsibilities to engage in fandom is entangled with my participants' pleasures.

Although 'guilty pleasure' is a popular discourse, it is not often discussed in media and communication, feminist, and fan studies literature: inter-related fields within which I position my research. When it *is* talked about, authors tend to emphasise its gendered nature (see Coward, 1984), its links to domesticity (D. Morley, 1988; A. Gray, 1987, 1992), or how it works to problematically dismiss people's (gendered) pleasures (Cann, 2015). My findings resonate with this earlier work, and I extend these discussions by arguing that, for teen drama fans, guilt and pleasure (and derision) work *together*, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for adult women. 'Guilty pleasure' is not simply a term that people, my respondents included, use to dismiss unworthy pleasures. Guilt and pleasure are entwined because of the cultural context my respondents are faced with; one in which their fandom gets devalued. But guilt might sometimes be a performance necessary to pleasure, especially in an interview scenario (Skeggs et al, 2008; Skeggs and Wood, 2012), and guilt might also *be* pleasurable in and of itself because it equates with resistance. The guilt that my respondents experience - for abandoning their (gendered) duties as partners, mothers, and so on to check their social media fan accounts, for setting time aside to watch teen drama series, and for concealing their fandom from certain people in their lives - implies that they are resisting something. In this chapter, I argue that they are resisting longstanding and gendered expectations of intensive mothering (Feasey, 2012), fairly recent pressures on young women to 'have it all' in a postfeminist age (Moseley and Read, 2002; Genz, 2010), and stigmas against women's seemingly unproductive 'leisure time' (van Zoonen, 1994). My respondents confront their resistance in various ways. For example, *Pretty Little Liars* fans Katrine argues through her blog series that she refuses to feel guilty about her fandom. I therefore argue in this chapter that there are lots of relations between guilt and pleasure, which occur for different people and

at different moments. But my main contribution to the small amount of literature on guilty pleasures is to develop an understanding of ‘guilty pleasures’ in a way that considers guilt and pleasure as entwined.

This chapter is divided into two main parts, and each offers its own approach to understanding guilty pleasures. The first examines the gender politics of guilty pleasures, drawing on empirical data to show how fans distinguish between guilty (feminised) and problematic (masculinised) pleasures. That is, feminised media texts provoke *guilty* pleasures whereas those promoting masculinity do not. However fans’ recognition of this gendered divide does not mean that their pleasures are experienced straightforwardly, and so I also explore how they oscillate between sporadic moments of ‘intense identification’ (H. Thornham, 2009, p.157) and critical distance, a concept borrowed from Radner’s research on women’s magazines (1995 in Thornham, 2009). This particular idea can be found in other research on female fans and audiences, such as Skeggs and Wood’s (2012) argument that critical distance can also be classed, as their respondents did not want the researchers to associate them with the reality television genre. I then focus on my three male participants, examining how their negotiations of pleasure are directly linked to their drive to enact a (hetero)normative version of masculinity. The second part examines the relationship between female fans’ guilt, pleasure, and domestic spaces. It considers the importance of ritualised pleasures within the home for mothers, and then explores how some female fans ‘carve out a solitary space’ (Radway, 1984, p.211) within the home to watch teen drama series and enact their fandom. I argue that this act is driven by pleasure, but then becomes wrapped up with guilt and embarrassment because of the status of both teen drama series and fandom. Their fandom also removes them from the (gendered) zones in which their fandom is unwelcome, and where they are expected to engage in laborious activities. As A. Gray (1987, 1992), Seiter (1999), Baym (2000) and later Jarrett (2016) argued, the home is often understood as a place of work for women and a space of leisure for men. Thus the act of creating a solitary space within the home might be understood as a form of resistance, as female fans are making time *for themselves* in a culture that demands otherwise.

### **‘Men’s Shows and Women’s Shows’: The Gender Politics of a Guilty Pleasure**

Something that you shouldn’t like, but like it anyway. (Urban Dictionary, 2005)

Something that you love to do, but just cannot admit that you do it. (Urban Dictionary, 2006)

Keeping a secret collection of ABBA or Carpentiers and listening to their albums when no one else is around. (Urban Dictionary, 2007)

The above three quotes have been taken from the Urban Dictionary, a web-based dictionary featuring slang and colloquial terms. They are three of the most popular definitions of the phrase ‘guilty pleasure’, as voted for by the site’s users, and all emphasise the troubling relationship between pleasure, cultural derision and guilt. They show that it is problematic to find pleasure in certain cultural objects, like the bands ABBA or The Carpentiers, as they are located at the bottom of an imagined cultural hierarchy and therefore provoke feelings of *guilt* amongst listeners. The same can be said for teen drama series: they are objects that people, especially adults ‘shouldn’t like’ (Urban Dictionary, 2005), should be kept a ‘secret’ (Urban Dictionary, 2007), and ‘cannot’ (Urban Dictionary, 2006) be admitted to. What is interesting about some cultural commentaries on guilty pleasures (Complex, 2014; Ranker, 2017), scholarly work (Coward, 1984; Cann, 2015), and my research participants’ own words is that they note how the discourse is *gendered*, as it tends to be directed at feminised media texts and cultures. To borrow from Modleski, the feminine has historically been ‘denigrated’ (1991, p.24), which makes certain pleasures more problematic than other, more masculine ones. In what follows, I explore how teen drama fans articulate the gendered distinction between problematic (feminine) and unproblematic (masculine) pleasures. I also suggest that the gendering of worthy and unworthy television series impacts everyone, across the gender spectrum, as my male participants associate their guilty pleasures with their failure to meet the requirements of (hetero)normative masculinity.

*Problematic/Feminine and Unproblematic/Masculine Pleasures*

Three of my female participants - Katrine, Megan and Melody - all talked about the gendered nature of 'guilty pleasures'. They have all written respective blog posts and/or online articles about the relationship between *Pretty Little Liars* and pleasure, and in all cases reflect on why they find their enjoyment of the series troubling. Katrine, for example, aligns guilty pleasure television series with a lack of 'content', a discourse that I discussed in Chapter Four. When asked to define 'guilty pleasures', Katrine explained that:

If it's a guilty pleasure that means there's no content and, you know, that can be associated with not having intelligence or not wanting to, you know, be part of an intelligence culture. But you can have people watching *Pretty Little Liars* and, on the other hand, they're spending the rest of their day on *The History Channel* or *The Discovery Channel*. And they can go watch *Made in Chelsea* and then go to work and write about, like, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* \*laughs\*. Like, you know, it doesn't make a difference! (Katrine)

For Katrine, guilty pleasure television cultures are associated with a lack of intelligence, though she contests this assumption and explains that people can have multiple pleasures that sit at different levels on an imagined cultural hierarchy. The television cultures that she aligns with intelligence and therefore with unproblematic pleasures are *The Discovery Channel* and *The History Channel*, both of which privilege factual programming and so resonate with masculine qualities like rationality and objectivity (van Zoonen, 1992; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). On the other hand, television shows that produce feelings of guilt in their viewers and fans include *Pretty Little Liars* and *Made in Chelsea*, both of which belong to feminised genres. *Made in Chelsea* is a British reality television series that follows the lives of a group of wealthy twenty-something Londoners. As Biressi and Nunn note, cultural 'responses to reality TV coalesce around several themes', and one of which is 'derision' (2005, p.146). The denigration of reality television is gendered, given the genre's:

Lexicon of emotion, intimacy, immediacy and the everyday (much of it derived from soap opera and confessional forms such as daytime chat shows) and its emphasis on the private, previously feminised, realm of the home, relationships and service industries. (Biressi and Nunn, 2005, p.24)

Biressi and Nunn explain that there has been ‘scepticism on the part of some scholars about the continuing value of reading culture in class terms’ (2013a, p.17), yet class relations are clearly present in Katrine’s articulations. She both recognises that certain television genres are valued in different ways, and her critical reading of genres like reality television and documentaries is *itself* classed (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). She understands that class and gender intersect to form ‘guilty pleasure’ programming, but her knowledge also demonstrates her own ‘cultural capital’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012, p.121).

*Pretty Little Liars* fan Megan also discusses a divide between guilty (feminine) and less problematic (masculine) television pleasures. She wrote a series of articles about feminism and *Pretty Little Liars* for a popular online publication, in which she argued that it should be understood as a ‘feminist’ text. She describes the show as feminist because the Liars’ romantic lives come second to their friendship, because it depicts teenage sexuality without judgement, and because it confronts society’s control and surveillance of women’s bodies and choices. Megan works as a freelance writer ‘on the topic of entertainment and television’, and so she watches television series that fall under multiple genres. Her boss assigns her with certain television series, which is how she came to watch *Pretty Little Liars* to begin with. Megan explains that some of the shows she is assigned are of a ‘questionable taste’, like *Pretty Little Liars*, *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), and *The O.C.* (2003-2007), whereas others are of a more ‘prestigious taste’, like *Breaking Bad* (2008-2015) and *True Detective* (2014-2015):

People are like, oh you’re into *Pretty Little Liars* but you also watch *Breaking Bad*? Like... Sometimes I will like sprinkle in *Breaking Bad* references into my *Pretty Little Liars* recaps, and I don’t really know what the overlap is with *Breaking Bad* and *Pretty Little Liars*. No one’s probably getting those references but me \*laughs\*. [...] So yeah, I guess there is kind of a level of me downplaying it. But I don’t really get like-- Like a lot of stuff about it from people. Like they’ll tease me, and they’ll be like, alright \*laughs\*. It’s pretty light-hearted. (Megan)

Both *Gossip Girl* and *The O.C.* are teen drama series, the former tells the story of privileged high-school teenagers living in Manhattan’s Upper East Side whose lives are documented online by the anonymous blogger ‘Gossip Girl’, and the latter follows the fictional and turbulent lives of three wealthy families in Newport Beach, Orange County. However *Breaking Bad* and

*True Detective* are not teen drama series and instead belong to the crime genre. *Breaking Bad* tells the fictional story of a high-school teacher who has been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, and *True Detective* is an anthology crime series focusing on a different crime each season. Megan positions these series at opposite ends of an imagined and gendered spectrum of cultural acceptability, and talks about people's surprise that she could be 'into' *both* teen drama series and crime shows. As Turnbull notes, there is a longstanding perception that the television crime drama is 'an inherently "masculine" genre' (2014, p.153), which Megan draws on in the quote above. She reflexively notes that 'sprinkling' *Breaking Bad* references into her *Pretty Little Liars* recaps might be a method of 'downplaying' her pleasures in the series and making them seem more acceptable, given that it is a 'guilty pleasure' and therefore gets devalued.

Megan does not refer to *Pretty Little Liars* as a 'guilty pleasure' in her blog posts, but did during our interview:

Everyone's got their guilty pleasure show where they're just like, I don't want anybody to know I watch this! [...] If it wasn't aimed at teenage girls and it wasn't called *Pretty Little Liars*, I'm sure there would be a much lower bar to like admitting that you watched it. But I-- I feel like-- I don't feel like a lot of people say that show on The CW, *Arrow*-- Like I don't feel like I see a lot of people going like, I'm so embarrassed I watch *Arrow*. I mean it's aimed at a younger crowd but it's about superheroes, so it's like-- I don't see people kind of whispering that they watch that show. They're like, oh yeah, yeah, I watch that! Like that's also not for you maybe, but...  
(Megan)

She recognises that *Pretty Little Liars* is not only understood as a guilty pleasure because it is aimed at teenagers, but because it is associated with teenage *girls*. She explains that other teen drama series such as *Arrow* are not derided to the same extent as *Pretty Little Liars*, and that this is because this particular show is 'about superheroes'. Like television crime dramas, the superhero genre is understood to be a form of 'masculinized media' (Hunting, 2015, p.132) meaning fandom of *Arrow* need not be whispered, to borrow from Megan. Katrine makes a similar distinction between what she calls 'men's shows and women's shows' in the following quote:

*Bear Grylls* isn't a guilty pleasure for men is it? But *Sex and the City* is considered a guilty pleasure. Like, there are very definite men's shows and women's shows. (Katrine)

Although many of my other participants did not use the term ‘guilty pleasure’ to describe (or deride) certain television shows, some of them articulate a gendered distinction like the one above. For example:

If it’s sci-fi, it’s automatically out for Emmys or, you know, Golden Globes or whatever because it’s in a sci-fi category. (Emily, *Revenge* fan)

[Teen drama series are] not lesser than *Star Trek* or something, that I would rather scratch my eyeballs out than watch \*laughs\*. [...] Like people might joke about the geeks that watch some kind of sci-fi thing, but it’s not as bad as being a fan of something that’s girly or young in some way. (Heather, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

Katrine, Megan, Emily, and Heather clearly recognise the gendered divide between worthy and unworthy media objects, which resonates with the work of Coward (1984), Cann (2015) and other feminist scholars. However, this does not mean that they experience their own pleasures unproblematically.

For example, Katrine criticises the ‘guilt’ of a guilty pleasure, yet is still hesitant to tell certain people in her life that she watches *Pretty Little Liars*: ‘Every once in a while it will come up where I’ll be like, I don’t really wanna tell people I watch that’. Her desire for secrecy resonates with the vast majority of my research participants, and so I asked Megan a similar question in our interview:

Ysabel: Do you tell people you watch the show?

Megan: People know I watch the show, I-- I mean I’m a writer and I recap the show on a daily basis, so people do know that I watch the show. I also usually live tweet it. [...] I’m pretty open about the fact that I watch it. I do find myself sometimes-- When I’m talking to people who don’t watch it and aren’t like into it, I do find myself going like yeah, you know-- I have a *Pretty Little Liars*-- Like ha ha! You know. Downplaying it, and being like, it’s my guilty pleasure. But it’s not. I love that show \*laughs\*.

People in Megan’s life are aware that she watches *Pretty Little Liars*, but perhaps associate this with her job as a freelance writer. When she does discuss it with people, she typically downplays it with laughter: ‘like ha ha!’ and frames it as a guilty pleasure.



This negotiation resonates with Melody's, a blogger who also identified *Pretty Little Liars* as a guilty pleasure in one of her posts. Melody is an entrepreneur who set up a beauty, fashion and lifestyle brand and also works as a social media consultant. She is in her late-thirties and is the mother of a teenage daughter, which perhaps partly explains why her pleasures are laced with guilt:

Melody: It's just my guilty little pleasure that people kind of tease me-- Like oh, you like PLL! I'm like, you're just jealous. Like if I tell people about it they kind of laugh. [...] I'm not supposed to like the show because I'm too old, but I just love it!

Ysabel: Why don't you think you're supposed to like the show?

Melody: Because the main characters-- Because it's based around high-school girls! Right? And so people are like-- Most of my friends will be like oh, my teenager loves that show. I think a lot of people just turn their noses up and think oh, it's a high school drama I can't watch it. And that's what I thought originally, before I watched it and got hooked.

Melody and Megan align guilty pleasures with age, and Melody explains that she is 'too old' to find *Pretty Little Liars* pleasurable. However embedded in her articulations are assumptions about gender, as the show is 'based around high school girls' which makes it an unacceptable media object. In Chapter Four, I argued that gender, age, social class and sexual orientation combine to form a quadruple devaluation that is levelled against teen drama fans like Melody. This intersection is also present in my participants' descriptions of guilty pleasures: media objects that are feminised, youthful, popular, and heteronormative.

Although Katrine, Megan, and Melody recognise the gendered divide between problematic and unproblematic pleasures, this does not mean that their pleasures are experienced straightforwardly. During the interviews, it was common for fans to oscillate between moments of 'sporadic and spasmodic intense identification' with teen drama series' narratives and critical distance, a process akin to what Radner calls 'scattering' (1995, pp. 131-133 in H. Thornham, 2009, p.157). For example, Katrine recounts the role that *Pretty Little Liars* played in the breakdown of her relationship:

At the same time-- It was a weird synchronicity thing-- At the same time that I was watching the series, my ex-boyfriend and I were kind of towards the end of our relationship. And, of course,

I'm not going to say that I broke up with him because of *Pretty Little Liars* because that would just be terrible \*laughs\*. But these high school girls being able to have healthy relationships and not waiting for their boyfriends to call, and when their boyfriends break a promise they're like, that was really horrible, you shouldn't have done that to me. It was kind of like, why am I not doing it? My life is real! I'm not a character! So I kind of... Yeah, it was just good to kind of have that-- Not that I'm comparing myself to high school girls, but I liked the fact that it was on TV, and you could watch it, and you could gather your own brain about situations. (Katrine)

*Pretty Little Liars* and its narrative are clearly intensely meaningful to Katrine, as the show's positive representations of heterosexual relationships inspired comparison between the characters' lives and her own. This is a clear example of 'intense identification' (H. Thornham, 2009, p.157) with a teen drama series' narrative, yet moments of this kind are fleeting, as Katrine typically maintained a critical distance during the interview:

But, at the same time, I think that where I'm at as a viewer-- Being a mid-twenties person, I can watch it without having to get-- Like obviously I'm emotionally invested to a point, because otherwise I wouldn't consider myself a fan. But I'm not going to get really really angry about anything, I'm just going to be like, oh, that was really cool! You know, you have some girls who are like -A had better not be whoever. And they'll just cry for weeks \*laughs\*. (Katrine)

Here, Katrine removes herself from the intense emotionality that is often associated with fandom: 'I'm not going to get really really angry about anything' or 'cry for weeks'. When asked whether she identifies as a fan of the show, Melody's response was very similar to Katrine's:

I'm someone who enjoys the show, I really like the show, so I guess that would make me a fan! \*Laughs\*. Because a fan is someone who likes the show and follows the show. Um... I'm not a fanatic though. I don't have PLL t-shirts \*laughs\*, I don't have PLL fan accounts. You know, some people open up Instagrams as a character! Or they put their pictures all over the place. I don't do that. I just follow the show. [...] So I like it, but I don't like it enough to make it part of my everyday life. Like I don't make accounts just for PLL. (Melody)

As I explain in Chapter Four, teen drama fans like Melody often distance themselves from images of extreme fandom: the 'fanatic[s]', the people who collect fan memorabilia, and those who make their fan object part of their 'everyday life'. Although Melody previously admitted that she 'love[s]' *Pretty Little Liars*, these moments of intense emotion were rare, given her recognition of the show's devalued status.

Several feminist scholars have discussed the gender politics of guilty pleasures (for example, Coward, 1984; Cann, 2015), though there are limited accounts of the ways people talk about the divide between guilty (feminised) and less problematic (masculinised) texts and cultures. My findings demonstrate the persistence of a broader cultural denigration of femininity and provide plentiful evidence of sexism's existence, contrary to what postfeminist discourses would have us believe (Gill, 2011; Biressi and Nunn, 2013b; Hill et al, 2016). Although some fans recognise the gendered division between worthy and unworthy media objects, their pleasures continue to be problematic, and so they find themselves fluctuating between intense identification and critical distance (Radner, 1995 in Thornham, 2009). In other words, they find themselves navigating a fraught relationship between *guilt* and *pleasure*. Stigmas of femininity are partly to blame for teen drama fans' guilt, which means that guilt is always tied up with their pleasures, as Coward (1984) argued over three decades ago, and as the fans of *Pretty Little Liars* make clear, in the twenty-first century these troubling assumptions have not gone away.

The next section explores how my male research participants discuss guilty pleasures, and how this is connected to broader anxieties around the changing ideals of masculinity.

#### *Masculinity and the Perils of 'Lady TV'*

Guilty pleasures are pleasures associated with the feminine. This assumption impacts everyone, across the gender spectrum, and I now discuss how my male respondents associate their guilty pleasures with their failure to meet the requirements of (hetero)normative masculinity (for example, Benwell, 2003; Gill, 2007b, 2009; Thornham, 2008; Robertson, 2014; García-Favaro and Gill, 2015; Gilbert, 2015). Only three of my twenty-two research participants - Felix, Oscar, and Parker - identified their genders as male, although I admittedly anticipated a complete absence of men's perspectives from my research. This gendered rhetoric is not only present in my participants' articulations, but also circulates in public and popular discourses. For example, a male *Huffington Post* blogger wrote about his enjoyment of television guilty pleasures, all of which fall under the genre of so-called 'Lady TV':

I am 28 and have a serious girlfriend which means I can't watch sports and man programming all the time [...]. I have recently been exposed to what some may call 'Lady TV.' And I have a revelation for all the men out there - it's not that bad. Seriously, you can survive some of it. Yeah, I know, you aren't going to record the whole season of *Project Runway*, but there are some television shows geared at women that are not only acceptable for men, but can actually be a guilty pleasure. (T. Morley, 2012, n.p.)

Confessional articles and blog posts like this are in line with the backlash against the rise of the so-called 'new man', broadly understood as 'the reinvention of masculinity along more gentle, emotional and communicative lines' (Gill, 2009, p.144). Gill amongst others has discussed examples of resistance to the 'new man' rhetoric, through which (hetero)normative masculinities are reinstated (for example, Benwell, 2003; Gill, 2009; García-Favaro and Gill, 2015). One technique, which also resonates with postfeminist sensibilities, is the use of ironic, humorous, or knowing language that aims to reinstate traditional masculine values (Gill, 2007b; Gill and Scharff, 2011). Although the author admits his (guilty) pleasures in women's shows like *Revenge*, the ironic and humorous tone of the article - 'yeah, I know, you aren't going to record the whole season of *Project Runway*' - affords him and his readers:

A strategic device to express their heteronormative masculinity while retaining deniability: it provides an avenue for criticism veiled in a jocular tone (Kendall, 2008, p.126). (In Robertson, 2014, p.27)

It seems that the writer can *only* admit to his feminised pleasures if they are veiled in humor. Although the article is partly intended to normalise women's television shows, it constructs a firm boundary between 'man programming' and 'Lady TV', through which the former are deemed acceptable and the latter are framed as guilty pleasures. Indeed, women's programming is explicitly presented as a threat to masculinity, something that male viewers can indeed 'survive' once they have been 'exposed' to it (T. Morley, 2012, n.p.).

These humorous articulations are similar to Felix and Oscar's, who consciously construct ironic fan identities in an effort to preserve their masculinity in the face of cultural derision. As I explained in Chapter Four, they also do this by aligning *Pretty Little Liars*' narrative with objects of 'high' and therefore more acceptable cultures, and by acknowledging

their genders and ages in the name of their fan accounts. Although Felix and Oscar adopt subversive subject positions as thirty-something, heterosexual and male teen drama fans, they do so in a way that minimises threats to their heteronormative masculinity (see also H. Thornham, 2008). These tactics are reflected in rhetoric around the ‘Brony’ fandom, a term that refers to adult and male fans of the *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic (FiM)* (2010-present) television cartoon. Fandom of this kind is particularly controversial because *FiM* is an ‘aggressively feminized text’ (Gilbert, 2015, n.p.). Gilbert, for example, notes that media coverage of Bronies ‘reassure[s] readers’ of the fans’ ‘heterosexuality’ (2015, n.p.). She argues that the language used to describe Bronies ‘reveals a pervasive discomfort with men who embrace a position of nonnormative masculinity and sexuality’ (Gilbert, 2015, n.p.). To be a fan of *FiM*, *Pretty Little Liars*, or another guilty pleasure television series, your fan identity must fall in line with a traditionally masculine subject position. Although Felix and Oscar do not explicitly refer to teen drama fandom as a ‘guilty pleasure’, unlike Katrine, Megan, Melody, and Parker, their negotiations reiterate a division between acceptable (masculine) and unacceptable (feminine) media texts, cultures, and behaviours.

This binary also resonates with *Pretty Little Liars* fan Parker’s discussions about teen drama fandom and masculinity. Parker self-identifies as a twenty-nine year old, gay, and married man who studies at a university in England. He refers to himself as a ‘passive fan’ of *Pretty Little Liars*, otherwise defined as a ‘lurker’ (Baym, 2000), like myself, who does not usually visibly participate in the show’s fandoms, though sometimes he throws in his ‘two cents’ on Facebook and Twitter. Parker discussed his experiences as a gay man at a North American University, where he was part of a fraternity:

When I was an undergrad in the States, I was in a fraternity, which... I mean that’s like a very masculine space. And we would all sit there on Thursday nights and watch *The O.C.* and pre-drink together before the party that night. But we would still be sat there watching *The O.C.*, together, as a group of guys [...] We watched it because everybody was talking about it. But the guys weren’t talking about it, it was the girls. But we were still watching it [...] I think for a lot of my brothers, it was like... This is a soap opera, I can’t be associated with that. That emasculates me. I have to be the, you know, bulky frat guy [...] If you watch these shows, you’re considered gay. And being gay is a form of emasculating a guy. (Parker)

Here, Parker observes the silence of men who watch teen drama series like *Pretty Little Liars* and *The O.C.* (2003-2007). He recognises that normative masculinity and guilty pleasures are incompatible, and re-articulates his friends' fears that their feminised pleasures might emasculate them. Parker's own fan pleasures are troubling, given his gender, but they are far more problematic for his fraternity brothers who must consciously enact 'masculine', 'bulky', and heteronormative identities: 'I always talked about it. I loved *The O.C.* and I never hid that'.

Although Parker does not align himself with heterosexuality, unlike his fraternity brothers, he still shares their uncomfortable guilt. For example, Parker does not 'out' himself as a fan of *Pretty Little Liars* on his personal Facebook account (which I did not observe) because he is:

An older guy who watches *Pretty Little Liars*, and I feel like that might be seen as a bit taboo. Um... 'Cause it's geared towards a very specific demographic and I don't fall in it. I mean I will post stuff because I do have other friends who watch *Pretty Little Liars*, but not as frequently as I would about shows like *True Blood* or *The Walking Dead* because those are more... Because *True Blood* and *The Walking Dead* have more of an adult audience. I mean I'm twenty-nine years old and most of my friends are about that age, so they're watching I guess what you would call more adult television shows. Like it's ok to watch those shows, whereas it might not be ok to watch the other shows. (Parker)

When I asked Parker what the other, more 'taboo' shows were, he listed them as *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), *The O.C.* (2003-2007), *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *Teen Wolf* (2011-present), and *The Vampire Diaries*. All of these shows are teen drama series, whereas *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) are not. *True Blood* falls under the fantasy/horror genre and is part of the recent resurgence of vampire-themed popular cultures (see Williamson, 2005 and Click et al, 2010 for scholarly discussions of this trend). *The Walking Dead* is a fictional portrayal of life after a zombie apocalypse and is classed as a horror series. I then asked Parker to explain why shows like *Dawson's Creek* are more 'taboo' than others, and he explained that:

Guilty pleasure is always the phrase that's thrown around. It's kind of... People don't take it as seriously because it's a teen show, and... Um... I think-- Even though I know a lot of people who watch these shows, they don't necessarily admit that they watch the shows, unless you're in a comfortable group. (Parker)

This was the first time a research participant used the phrase ‘guilty pleasure’ during my fieldwork, which fuelled my interest to interrogate it. I became interested in how the term seems to operate along a rigid gender divide, and how this compares to feminist research conducted over three decades ago. Like Katrine, Megan and Melody, Parker makes a clear distinction between guilty pleasure television shows (feminised teen drama series) and shows that belong to a more acceptable and therefore *masculine* genre (*The Walking Dead*, which has a horror/zombie narrative).

Despite technological progression in the way fandom is enacted and in how television series circulate and get discussed, guilty pleasure television shows are reservedly feminine. Although the men cited in this section admit to their guilty pleasures, their labelling of *Pretty Little Liars* and other teen drama series *as* guilty pleasures might work to further marginalise and devalue femininity, though this act is evidently not deliberate. Their identification with women’s television series can only be normalised if they are somehow connected to dominant versions of masculinity, be it through the use of irony, humour or other rhetorical tools. Whilst they all recognise the distinction between guilty and more acceptable pleasures, this gendered divide continues to dominate and affect their negotiations. I now examine guilty pleasures through a different lens, and consider how fans’ guilt is embedded in longstanding devaluations of women’s leisure time.

### **Guilty Pleasures and Domestic Relations**

My husband always laughs at everything. He’s like, I don’t know why you watch all that crap! You know, because I don’t watch much TV. He says I don’t know why you watch that! And I’m like, well, whatever. (Jessica, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

The ‘guilt’ of a guilty pleasure is gendered, not just because of a general societal disapproval of feminised pleasures like teen drama fandom, but because women in particular experience an ‘uneasiness’ about indulging in such ‘obviously pleasurable’ (Radway, 1984,

p.105) activities. As Radway argues, this is an ‘understandable result of their socialization within a culture that continues to value work above play’ (1984, p.105), and in which domestic spaces are imagined as places of work for women and of leisure for men (see also A. Gray, 1987, 1992; Seiter, 1999; Baym, 2000). Although some of these arguments were made over two decades ago, my findings illustrate the ongoing relevance of a gendered work/leisure binary in domestic spaces, given that my female respondents told me about their guilt at, for example, abandoning household duties to watch teen drama series, taking time away from their partners and children to update their social media fan accounts, and concealing their fandom from certain people in their lives. I suggest that the guilt felt by my female respondents might also *be* pleasurable in and of itself because it equates with resistance. The women I interviewed resist gendered expectations of intensive mothering (Feasey, 2012), fairly recent pressures on young women to ‘have it all’ in a postfeminist age (Moseley and Read, 2002; Genz, 2010), and stigmas against women’s seemingly unproductive ‘leisure time’ (van Zoonen, 1994). While still entangled with guilt, there is pleasure in resistance, and my female respondents experience a great deal of pleasure in having something *of their own*, which no one or very few people know about, even if it is derided. For example:

It was really important to me at that time in my life. (Heather, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

Sometimes there’s nobody else to listen to me. (Jessica, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

I watch it when I can just sit there and be like, this is all I’m doing! \*Laughs\*. (Katrine, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

It’s my fun little thing. (Melody, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

It’s my private thing. (Reesa, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

In this section, I explore how the fans of my research create spaces, through either rituals or solitude, in which their pleasures become more *permissible*. This is a different form of pleasure to those discussed so far, whereby certain acts facilitate pleasure (e.g., drawing on the discourse of labour to normalise your fandom), yet pleasure is not located in the act itself. I first consider how some fans develop what they call ‘rituals’ (or similar) where they engage with teen drama fandoms and watch the series, and then discuss how others ‘carve out a solitary



space' (1984, p.211), to borrow from Radway, to indulge their derided pleasures. Although the majority of my fans access their social media fan accounts through smartphones or other portable devices, or watch the series on tablets, laptops or similar, the spaces they create can usually be found in the domestic sphere of the home. For this reason, I argue alongside feminist scholars like Radway (1984), van Zoonen (1994) and Baym (2000) that these acts are *agentic*, as the women are making time for themselves in a gendered space where they are 'typically expected to care for others' (Baym, 2000, 15), such as their male partners or children. For some fans, the home is also a space where their spouses deride their fan pleasures, which makes their fandom particularly resistant. Yet the fans of my research do not simply feel guilty for creating such spaces. Indeed, the guilt that these acts provoke is itself a form of pleasure, as the fans enjoy forming spaces that are *theirs*, in which their pleasures are permissible. To borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Melody, fandom is *her* 'fun little thing'.

*'I Cannot Go Past Nine O'clock Without Watching It': Ritualised Pleasures and Mothers' Resistance.*

Although teen drama series like *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge* and *The Vampire Diaries* can be viewed through various on-demand streaming services (e.g., Netflix or Amazon Video), and can in theory be consumed at any time, the vast majority of my participants have formed ritualised viewing habits, a term that I borrow from *Pretty Little Liars* fan Melody: 'that was kind of our ritual every Tuesday'. Other fans' articulations are very similar. For example, Jessica claims that *Pretty Little Liars* is her 'religious programme' that she watches every Tuesday. My participants' social media fan accounts can be accessed through smartphones, tablets, laptops and other portable and 'always connected' (Emily, *Revenge* fan) devices, yet their social media habits are also heavily ritualised. This form of pleasure is particularly important for my adult and female fans who have children: Amanda, Gioia, Jessica, and Taylor (and also Melody, though I do not discuss her negotiations here). For these fans, the formation of rituals is partly linked to the gendered demands placed on them as mothers, as well as partners, friends, employees, students, and other roles. Motherhood has long structured ideals of

femininity, creating problematic pressures for women to be intensive and by extension *good* mothers (Feasey, 2012), which disrupts my respondents' fan pleasures. This section explores women's agentic resistance of these ideals, as they created ritualised, guilty, *and* pleasurable spaces to watch teen drama series and enact their fandom.

In Morley's 1994 research on household media dynamics, he found that women were often denied the opportunity to watch feminised television genres, as 'masculine power' tended to 'control viewing choices within the home' (van Zoonen, 1994, p.112). Although this study was conducted over two decades ago, *Pretty Little Liars* fan Jessica suggests that these gendered inequalities still exist. While Jessica did not say that her husband generally controls the television remote (or other devices) in her home, she explained that most of the television programmes she watches are for children, like *The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* (2006-2016), which is on in her house 'all the time':

I don't really watch much TV, especially now that my daughter's three years old. I went back to work, and now I'm actually pregnant and I'm probably going to stop working. So I'll probably start watching TV a little more. [...] There are only a few shows on TV that I watch religiously. And, you know, it's definitely-- other than what's on in my house all the time, *The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* and the things that my daughter watches-- Um... But definitely, you know, *Pretty Little Liars* is one of the shows I, since it started, I've been watching it. Like I have never missed an episode. (Jessica)

Jessica notes that it is *her* television viewing that is dominated by children's programming, rather than her husband's. It is partly for this reason that she sets valuable time aside for herself to watch *Pretty Little Liars*. Yet this time must be ritualised, given her domestic responsibilities as both a mother and wife, as she explains below:

Jessica: I just, you know, love to go on [Facebook] as soon as the episode is done to [...] read what everybody's thoughts were. Um... When the season's on, that's my Tuesday night regime.

Ysabel: And you'll do it like all in one night? Like you'll go straight on and--

Jessica: Yes. No, no, it's not-- I can't go to sleep until \*laughs\*. [...] I'm telling you, I have to record it because I never start at eight, and then if anybody texts me I'm like, hold on! I'm not there yet! I have to DVR it \*laughs\*. [...] I drop everything for *Pretty Little Liars* night. And it's hard because I have to put a toddler to bed, with my husband's help, but like I cannot go past nine o'clock without watching it. Like I have to watch it the same night, because there's no way to get on social media or anything without finding out what happened.

Jessica has a child, a husband, a full-time job, and presumably many other demands on her time, which is why she sets time aside, once a week, to watch *Pretty Little Liars* and check her Facebook account. She is staking ‘a claim to leisure time’ that might otherwise be denied to her, and her ritualised pleasures provide her with the possibility to withdraw from ‘the caring and self-sacrificing role’ (van Zoonen, 1994, p.112) that is expected of her. Put simply, this act is pleasurable for Jessica. She physically removes herself from the demands of motherhood, an act that is intensely pleasurable for her: ‘I can’t go to sleep until [I’ve watched it] \*laughs\*’ (Jessica).

Although *Pretty Little Liars* fan Amanda did not discuss her viewing habits to the same extent as Jessica, her comments about motherhood and domestic relations resonate with Jessica’s experiences and with other feminist research. I asked Amanda whether her fandom occupies a lot of her time, to which she replied:

It depends on whether there’s new content out there. I look for content every day. I go out and look to see if there are any new interviews or any new tweets that have like, you know, new titles or just, you know, good content. It doesn’t take up an awful lot of my time anymore. I have two children and I’m pretty busy with them too so... (Amanda)

Amanda’s motherhood plays a key role in her articulations about the time she spends on her fan accounts. Because Amanda is ‘pretty busy’ with her two children, she cannot spend a great deal of time searching for new content for her Facebook and other fan accounts. *Pretty Little Liars* fan Taylor foregrounded her motherwork (Feasey, 2013) in a very similar way:

Ysabel: In a day, how long do you spend doing this stuff?

Taylor: Well, honestly-- I’m a mom, so I have a daughter who is two. She’s been alive for as long as my fan page \*laughs\*. So-- No I kind of-- I don’t go on every single day, I kind of focus on the quality. So right now um... You know, I kind of go on after the show airs, so I can-- As quickly as I can, I can post theories about it before anyone else does. And um... But it’s very time-consuming, so if I were to say I did it three nights a week it could be like three to four hours just collecting screenshots.

Taylor suggests that she is unable to dedicate a lot of time to her fandom, such as updating her accounts ‘every single day’, because she is the mother of a two-year-old daughter. For this

reason, she sets aside some time ‘after the show airs’ each week to post her ‘theories’ about the show’s narrative to social media.

Amanda and Jessica’s articulations resonate with Gioia’s; a fan of *The Vampire Diaries* who administers a Facebook fan Page for one of the show’s male characters. Unlike Reesa and some others’ Pages, Gioia’s is not a role-playing account. That is, she does not pretend to be a character but instead uses the account to post photos of the actor (mostly from the series rather than his private life), still images and videos of the character, his memorable quotes from the show, amongst other media. As Gioia is Italian, most of the communication - both her own and the Page’s fans’ - is written in her native language, though she speaks fluent English. Gioia is a heterosexual woman in her late-twenties, work part-time in an administrative role, and is a single mother to a one-year-old daughter. Although Gioia speaks English fluently, she did not feel confident enough to talk to me on Skype, and so we arranged an online interview. She explained that she views her fandom as a ‘hobby’ rather than work, and that she accesses her social media fan accounts:

Whenever I have a free moment during the day, but I have a one-year-old daughter who keeps me busy during the day. I like to relax in the evening with my computer, and take care of my fans and make them happy. (Gioia)

Gioia explains that her fandom is ritualised as she usually engages with social media ‘in the evening’ after she has taken care of her child, and when she has presumably fulfilled her other domestic roles. Given that she self-identifies as a single mother, Gioia likely ‘takes sole responsibility’ (Feasey, 2013, p.27) for the care of her daughter, which might explain why she aligns her fandom with relaxation. Her fandom gives her a break from the responsibilities associated with the ‘busy’ role of motherhood, hence why this ritual is meaningful and pleasurable for her.

Jessica, Amanda, Taylor, and Gioia’s articulations reflect longstanding assumptions about motherhood, which has traditionally been imagined as a central facet of female identity.

For example, in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Steedman argues that there is a ‘huge and bland assumption that the wish for a child largely structures femininity’ (1968, p.84). This gendered and problematic assumption is noted in more recent feminist literature. For example, although the number of women joining the workforce has increased since Steedman’s book was published, especially in Western cultures, Cobb argues that:

A woman’s identity as a mother and as a working person are perceived to be mutually exclusive, as opposed to the masculine ideal in which having a job means being a good father; and [...] the mother continues to be seen as the proper primary caregiver and parent to children. (2008, p.128)

Amanda, Jessica, Taylor and Gioia all imply that they are the primary caregivers to their children, particularly Gioia because she is a single mother, and prioritise their children through their articulations. For example, Jessica’s child dominates her television screen time, Amanda reminded me that she has children to take care of in addition to her fan accounts, and both Taylor and Gioia foregrounded their motherwork in her response to my question. This reflects the longstanding ‘romanticised myth’ about the expectations of “‘good” motherhood’, through which intensive mothering is presented as the ideal:

After the baby is delivered, the woman takes sole responsibility for the care of her children; she is fully responsible for their emotional development and growth. Most importantly, however, she is a full time mother who is always present in the lives of her children (young and old), she remains home to cook for them after school, and if she works outside of the home she organises such responsibilities around their needs (Chase and Rogers, 2001, p.30). (Feasey, 2013, p.27)

Fans like Amanda, Jessica, Taylor and Gioia might also understand that they ‘should’ feel guilty for taking time away from their children, given the dominance of ideals around motherhood in contemporary society. In order to create these pleasurable spaces, these women might know that they need to label their pleasures as ‘guilty’ (though without always using this exact term), but they might not actually *feel* guilty for doing so. As Skeggs and Wood argue, ‘any research encounter encourages a mode of self-performance’ (2012, p.118), meaning the female fans might have foregrounded their motherwork because they thought they ‘should’.

Although it is difficult to know whether the fans feel guilty or are instead *performing* guilt, the act of creating a space is pleasurable for them. This is because they are resisting patriarchal norms, cultures, and pressures around intensive motherhood (Feasey, 2013), and resisting the unequal gender dynamics within their homes. Although teen drama fandom is culturally derided and is considered unworthy in popular discourses - and perhaps in academic circles, given the lack of scholarship on teen drama series and their fandom - it is evidently important to my female respondents, which mean that its longstanding devaluations should be understood as sexist and problematic. Female fans like Amanda, Jessica, Taylor and Gioia *enjoy* having something that is their own, and which removes them from domestic and gendered responsibilities within their homes. These demands are precisely why rituals are *pleasurable* for mothers, as they are entirely removed from their other responsibilities. While creating a ritual does not lead to unproblematic pleasures, it is the act itself, which is inextricable from guilt, which should be understood as resistant and therefore pleasurable.

*'Nobody Better Call at Seven!': The Pleasures of Solitude*

Given the demands that have historically been placed on women within the domestic sphere and the regulations placed on their behaviour in public spheres (see Biressi and Nunn, 2013b) (e.g., not 'fangirling' over fictional television series and their actors), I was unsurprised to find that many of my respondents 'carve out a solitary space' (Radway, 1984, p.211) within the home to indulge their fan pleasures. For example:

I watch it alone because sometimes I scream, laugh, smile, cry with it. (Elena, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

When it's time for *Revenge*, everything stops. (Emily, *Revenge* fan)

I watch *The Vampire Diaries* alone and live alone with my baby, but I'm in touch with some friends who follow the programme, and we keep up to date with the gossip. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

I watch it when I can just sit there and be like, this is all I'm doing! \*Laughs\*. (Katrine, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

I work hard and all day I've wanted to go home, eat that chocolate and watch *Pretty Little Liars*, because that's my time. [...] So nobody better call at seven! (Melody, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

This act is pleasurable for the mothers discussed in the previous section, but also resonates with some of my childless respondents like Emily and Katrine. I suggest that two main factors drive the pleasures of solitude for female fans. First, solitude provides fans with refuge from derisions of their pleasures, which manifest both within and outside of the home. Second, and related to this, creating a dedicated and solitary space physically removes female fans from domestic burdens and other responsibilities dominating their everyday lives, yet this act might also make them feel *guilty*. This response arguably derives from ‘their socialization within a culture that continues to value work above play’ (Radway, 1984, p.105), as female fans in particular feel guilty for retreating from the (gendered) burdens of everyday life, and from activities that they feel they *should* be doing. Although I discuss my childless respondents in this section, their experiences are not entirely different from those of the women who are parents. In both cases, the fans are withdrawing from labour and doing something for their own enjoyment.

Although Radway’s argument still resonates with findings, it has more recently become entangled with postfeminist media discourses, through which women are presented as freely choosing agents who can ‘have it all’ as ‘feminist goals have [supposedly] been achieved’ (Moseley and Read, 2002, p.231) (see also Genz, 2010; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Dobson, 2015). Given that women are subjected to intensified pressures in a postfeminist age (see Gill, 2016a), they have a new vocabulary through which to discuss their pleasures. This does not render Radway (1984) and other feminist scholars’ arguments obsolete, but rather justifies a scholarly re-examination of the importance of solitude for women. As Duffy and Hund (2015) note, images of women ‘having it all’ - a successful career, an actively sexual and stable relationship, strong female friendships, wealth (and therefore consumer power), and physical attractiveness - circulate not only through magazine pages and fictional characters, but also through seemingly ‘real’ women’s social media accounts. These ideals put pressure on women - especially young women, like myself - to select the right decisions from a seemingly unrestricted sea of ‘choices’, a term that I have deliberately emphasised. Unlike the Smithton women (Radway, 1984), the

fans of my research are presented with a far greater number of choices, which inevitably creates more pressure. Indeed:

At a time in which women are expected to juggle a successful family life with an equally successful professional career, the media both expose and help to construct panics about the lack of time women have to achieve these goals. (Nathanson, 2013, p.5)

For reasons that I have discussed throughout this thesis, teen drama fandom is the *wrong* choice for fans of all ages, particularly for female fans for whom the home continues to be a place of work, yet who are also increasingly expected to enter the paid (or sometimes unpaid) workforce. Indeed, ‘as the role of women in the workplace has become normalised, their role in the home has not decreased in compensation’ (Zeller-Jacques, 2014, p.881). This potentially robs women of guilt-free leisure spaces, which have arguably never existed, hence why solitude continues to be such a valuable yet guilty fan pleasure. Postfeminist discourses are also tied up with the idea of ‘productivity’. That is, the value of a person - particularly a woman - ‘is constructed on the basis of applying oneself as a productive subject in all spheres of life’ (Adamson, 2017, p.318). Although fans have always been distinguished from other media consumers (see Wirman, 2009), for the female fan, I wonder whether her drive to make fan sites is a response to the requirement that she needs to be productive, ‘individualistic, entrepreneurial and flexible, “compelled never to rest”, stretching herself beyond limits in order to self-improve (Archer, 2008; Davies and Petersen, 2005; Walkerdine and Bansel, 2010)’ (Adamson, 2017, p.318). This might also explain fans like Kate’s motivation to make her fans ‘happy’, and not simply unproductively watch television.

My research participants feel as though they are subjected to derision from all angles, especially from the people they live with, as Amanda and Jessica explain in the quotes below:

My husband thinks it’s hysterical. (Amanda, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

My husband always laughs at everything. He’s like, I don’t know why you watch all that crap! You know, because I don’t watch much TV. [He says,] I don’t know why you watch that! And I’m like well, whatever. (Jessica, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

My family laugh at me. (Marissa, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)



My female participants do not only face derision from their male partners, but from other members of their family too. For example, Emily explains that she has:

Two sets of parents, so one gets it quite a bit [...] and one doesn't get it because I spend so much time devoted to it. She's like well why do you do this? She watches shows too on Sunday night, so when it's time for *Revenge*, everything stops. I have to move over. I have to get everything set up and I'm incommunicato for that hour because I'm just doing everything, and she's like why do you do this? They don't pay you and you're making me miss *The Walking Dead*, and like all of these other things. (Emily)

There is one television in Emily's household, which means that her stepmother has to 'stop' watching it so that Emily can watch *Revenge* when it airs. She leaves Emily alone to watch *Revenge* because it involves pausing and rewinding at certain points, live tweeting from various devices and accounts, and also because she does not enjoy the series' narrative. Her stepmother's derision is aligned with discourses of labour: 'they don't pay you', and also with gendered assumptions about worthy and unworthy television cultures: 'you're making me miss *The Walking Dead*'. Although Emily's solitude might be understood as a necessary response to her stepmother's derision, I argue that this act is itself pleasurable. There are multiple pleasures at work here, not only of Emily's viewing of the show and her related fan practices, but also the pleasures of her solitude and her ritualised acts. This example also illustrates how television viewing is embedded in other relationships, such as between Emily and her stepmother (see also D. Morley, 1986).

For example, Melody told me that watches *Pretty Little Liars* alone at home on a Tuesday night when the show airs on Freeform (formerly ABC Family). Melody lives alone, though this does not mean that *all* of her viewing practices should be framed as 'solitary'. Although Melody and some of my other participants live alone, like Gioia and Katrine, this does not mean they are unaffected by the demands made of women in domestic spheres. Postfeminist discourses ruthlessly re-create images of single women (for example, Negra, 2004; Genz, 2010; Taylor, 2012), who are subjected to different yet equally troubling gendered demands (e.g., by pathologising them, as Negra (2004) notes). As Melody explains:

You know, it's just something I do on Tuesday nights! It's my little fun thing that I look forward to when it's on, and that's it! (Melody)

This ritualised activity is pleasurable for Melody because it forms part of her weekly routine, and is something that she 'look[s] forward to' each week. Yet it is also meaningful to her because she experiences it individually, at home, away from her friends, family, and work colleagues: 'it's my fun little thing'. As I explained previously, Melody has written a blog series about her 'guilty pleasure', *Pretty Little Liars*, a term that she defines below:

I think a guilty pleasure is something that you do just for yourself. That-- It's-- You're not really getting anything out of it apart from pleasure. Like-- Like having a piece of chocolate. You're like, you know, I probably shouldn't have this chocolate, but I work hard and all day I've wanted to go home, eat that chocolate and watch *Pretty Little Liars*, because that's my time. I feel like a guilty pleasure is something that you specifically set aside, for yourself, regardless of what other people think, but it's just something-- It's just for yourself, for your pure enjoyment of it. That's why it's my guilty pleasure! (Melody)

For Melody, a pleasure like *Pretty Little Liars* fandom is 'guilty' because women should not do things like this for themselves. Melody watches *Pretty Little Liars* alone after work on a Tuesday evening not only because she does not tell people that she is a fan of the show - 'I don't tell people up front, and if I do they'll kind of laugh' - but because she finds this act to be intensely pleasurable. However she frames this act a guilty pleasure because, to borrow from Radway (1984), she understands that work should be valued above play:

I work hard all day.

That's my time.

You specifically set time aside, for yourself.

It's just for yourself.

Women like Melody - who are mothers, part of the paid workforce, and have a myriad of other responsibilities - frame their leisure time as a *guilty* space, which resonates with postfeminist media discourses that present women attempting to 'have it all', in which there is no room for unproductive television viewing (Anderson, 2017). Melody arguably frames her fandom as a

guilty pleasure because it removes her from doing what she thinks she should be doing - from the correct 'choices', in other words - and because she know that women should not do things for themselves.

Leisure time does not factor into the postfeminist version of appropriate girlhood or womanhood, as Dobson explains below:

[Girls and women are] under pressure to live up to these prominent cultural narratives of girls as girl-powered, self-governing success stories, subjects of capacity and confidence who are able to navigate their way through new economic and social conditions with ease, despite intensified social inequalities. (2015, pp. 34-35)

By setting aside time for their fandom - an act that is necessary for many of my female respondents - they might fail to 'live up to' the expectations laid out by postfeminist media discourses, not only because 'teen drama fan' is an unacceptable subject position but because leisure time might not help them to become 'self-governing success stories' (Dobson, 2015, p.34). As Hollows (2003) notes, 'leisure time' is also a middle-class issue. She claims that this notion is part of 'new' middle class identities, especially for women, who:

Engage in paid work while the domestic division of labour proves relatively resistant to change. Not only does this result in a need for 'multitasking', but women may also find it more difficult than men to organize their time effectively because there is always the risk of interruption from competing domestic responsibilities and the demands of others (Southerton et al., 2001, p.9). While this may not seem class-specific, it may well be experienced as such: because the 'work' of consumption and (p.190) leisure is crucial to new middle-class identities, this is seen to produce a pressure on 'free time'. (Hollows, 2003, p.190)

The issue of 'time scarcity' (Probyn, 1993; Hollows, 2003; Nathanson, 2013) is also distinct to postfeminist cultures, as it is bound up with the notion of *choice*. Women are offered choices between 'paid work and domestic labour, between "work-work" and "leisure-work"' (Hollows, 2003, p.197), but for women the home is always understood as a space of labour, work, and productivity.

Katrine's articulations also nod to these postfeminist expectations. For example, when I asked her about her *Pretty Little Liars* viewing habits, she explained that:

Katrine: If I have nothing going on, I watch it on the night. But I-- I mean this isn't really related to the interview, but I have a publishing company, and I do Web design, and I'm a gallery manager, and \*laughs\*-- And I'm ghost writing a book. So when it comes to my evenings, I'm kind of jam-packed. But if there's just an evening when I can't work, I'll try to base it around *Pretty Little Liars*. But I do catch up on it, on weekends.

Ysabel: So it's something you do in your free-- Your leisure time?

Katrine: Yeah, yeah. When I can absolutely just sit there and be like, this is all I'm doing! \*Laughs\*.

Katrine explains that she watches *Pretty Little Liars* alone at home, when she has no other responsibilities or tasks to attend to, and can give the show her undivided attention. Again, the discourse of work is at play here, as both she and Melody foreground the value of paid employment: Katrine is 'kind of jam-packed' because of her multiple jobs, and Melody 'work[s] hard all day'. *Pretty Little Liars* is framed as a reward for working hard, which might work to devalue the fans' pleasurable leisure time. This echoes Nathanson's argument that:

In much coverage about the state of contemporary femininity is the overarching sense of time scarcity. The news media circulate stories about how women juggle their professional lives with their private family life, exposing and perpetuating anxieties about a time crunch. (2013, p.3)

Teen drama fandom is Katrine's 'guilty' pleasure because it is *not* work, and is not a choice that she should be making given the scarcity of her time. Yet this guilty act is also pleasurable for Katrine precisely because it removes her from her other responsibilities, burdens, and pressures. Put simply, 'sit[ting] there and be[ing] like, this is all I'm doing' is *pleasurable* and indulgent for fans like Katrine.

The act of carving out a 'solitary space' (1984, p.211), to borrow from Radway, is arguably being reimagined as women have a new language through which to articulate the politics of their time. The act of creating a solitary space is partly pleasurable to fans because it enables them to avoid derision, from both within and outside of the home and should still be understood as a resistant and political act. Yet it is also pleasurable because it removes them from the burdens placed on them by postfeminist discourses, as summarised by Genz:

The PFW wants to 'have it all' as she refuses to dichotomize and choose between her public and private, feminist, and feminine identities. She rearticulates and blurs the binary distinctions between feminism and femininity, between professionalism and domesticity, refuting monolithic and homogeneous definitions of postfeminist subjectivity. (2010, p.98)

Put simply, young women in particular are told that they can make choices about their lives because of their newfound *post*-feminist freedoms, yet they must also 'choose' an identity that falls in line with the dominant, accepted version of appropriate girlhood/womanhood. Teen drama fandom is always and inevitably the *wrong* choice: it is youthful, inappropriately feminised, and linked to popular forms of culture. Although my respondents' leisure time might be laced with guilt, the act of creating a solitary space within the home can be understood as a political, resistant, and pleasurable move as they are making time *for themselves* in a culture that demands otherwise.

My only respondent who did not frame their fandom in this way was Marissa. Marissa is a fan of *Pretty Little Liars* and administers a Facebook fan Page for one of the show's male characters, Caleb Rivers. At the time of our interview, Marissa was eighteen years old, making her my youngest research participant. Some of my online interviewees may have been even younger than this, but I do not have all of their demographic details for reasons discussed in Chapter Three. Marissa told me that she plays past episodes of the show on her television in her bedroom while she gets ready for University, studies, or does other activities. She told me that she does this because she enjoys watching re-runs of the show, and because hearing the characters' voices makes her feel less anxious. Although she might be able to watch the show on the family television (see D. Morley, 1986), there are certain reasons why she enjoys the solitude her bedroom affords (see McRobbie and Garber (1976) for a discussion of 'bedroom culture'). Marissa is clearly aware that her acts of fandom are devalued, and so she hides her fandom from everyone in her life apart from her mother, father, and three siblings, though she explained that her family 'laughs' at her fandom. Marissa enjoys watching the series alone for reasons that are different to other fans', perhaps because she is younger and faces different pressures to older fans like Emily, Melody and Katrine. Perhaps Marissa does not actually *feel* guilty about her fandom, though it certainly embarrasses her.

## Conclusions: Rethinking the ‘Guilt’ of a Guilty Pleasure

In this chapter, I have examined the term ‘guilty pleasure’ which, despite its popularity, is not often discussed academically (for exceptions, see Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1988; A. Gray, 1987, 1992; and more recently Cann, 2015). I began by arguing that the term itself is gendered, as it is *women’s* popular cultures that tend to provoke feelings of guilt in their audiences and fans, and which sit at the bottom of an imagined cultural hierarchy. These derisions resonate across the gender spectrum, as both my female and male respondents reproduced an acceptable/masculine and unacceptable/feminine binary.

I then pointed to *new* relations between guilt and pleasure, showing how many of my participants, particularly those who are mothers, frame their fandom as a ‘guilty’ act (though without always using this exact term). They do this, I suggest, because they do not think they should be engaging in such an ‘obviously pleasurable’ (Radway, 1984, p.105) activity. I argue that these articulations are unique to a postfeminist age, in which women face increasing pressures to ‘have it all’ (see Moseley and Read, 2002; Genz, 2010): a successful career, an actively sexual and stable relationship, the option to have a child, strong female friendships, wealth (and therefore consumer power), and physical attractiveness (see also Duffy and Hund, 2015). Women - especially those who are young, like myself and many of my research participants - are told that they can make choices about their lives because of their newfound *post-feminist* freedoms. But they must also ‘choose’ an identity that falls in line with the dominant, accepted version of appropriate girlhood and womanhood. But teen drama fandom - which is youthful, inappropriately feminised, and linked to popular forms of culture - is always and already the *wrong* choice. Guilt and pleasure (and derision) therefore work together, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for the majority of respondents, especially for adult women.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusions

It really winds me up that anything that's liked by young girls or women is seen as lesser than other kinds of things. Even when I was a teenager and I loved teenage things, it was sort of seen as a bit ridiculous. Like I was the biggest *Dawson's Creek* fan [...]. I was absolutely, completely obsessed. It was my life. And my friends at school would laugh about it. I was quite over the top about it, but it was really important to me. (Heather, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

The extract above is taken from my interview with *Pretty Little Liars* fan Heather, in which she bemoans stereotypes of youthful and feminised popular cultures and shares her own experiences as a lifelong teen drama fan. Heather was my first research participant, and she played a pivotal role in directing me to other fans of the show. My interview with her - particularly the quote above - represented a crucial moment in my fieldwork, as I learned that teen drama fans like Heather know that their pleasures are stigmatised. My respondents articulated their pleasures in diverse ways, but all shared an understanding that their fan objects and activities are often deemed unworthy, in contrast to more masculine and therefore acceptable pursuits. Brunsdon made an almost identical argument two decades ago, noting that she had 'always been conscious of the way in which what women and girls like is somehow *worse* than the equivalent masculine pleasures' (1997, p.2, emphasis in original). Only by returning to the kind of research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s - when women's experiences of feminised popular cultures began to be taken seriously - can I conclude that their pleasures are no less problematic over three decades on. Just like soap opera viewers (Hobson, 1982/1989, 2003; Ang, 1985; Seiter et al, 1989; Geraghty, 1991; Brown, 1994; Harrington and Bielby, 1995; Brunsdon, 1997) and romance readers (Radway, 1984; Modleski, 1990), teen drama fans face harsh derision, be it from certain people in their lives, within their homes, in public and popular discourses, and even within fan spaces themselves. Despite the changes brought about by social media - be they technological, cultural, discursive, and so on - it is striking to see such continuity in terms of sexist derision. This is also, I argue, a cause for concern.

The rise of social media platforms in the mid-2000s promised to create a wealth of spaces for fandom and other seemingly niche and user-led activities (for example, Jenkins, 2006a,b; Bruns, 2008). In some respects, social media has kept this early promise. This is reflected in my participants' celebrations that social media has helped them to connect with other fans, learn more about their chosen teen drama text, contribute to fan cultures, and in some cases become directly involved with series' cast and crew. Yet I have shown that the growth of social media has not been accompanied by increased societal acceptance of teen drama series or of fandom. Although Sandvoss (2005) and Gray et al (2007) celebrated fandom's partial entry into the mainstream, it is clear that young and feminised fans, fan behaviours, and fan cultures remain on the outskirts. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, and many others invite users to 'like', 'post', 'comment', 'tag' and 'share', but this act is risky for teen drama fans, myself included, who worry that their pleasures will be criticised. This is not to say that platforms like Facebook should be held accountable for this issue - a bigger question that scholars like Gillespie (2010) have been tackling - but that acts of derision have translated almost seamlessly to digital fan spaces. This, as Marwick (2013) and others (Zimmer, 2008; Mozorov, 2011) have argued, is further evidence that the early utopian promises of Web 2.0 technologies have not materialised. I have, however, outlined some fan pleasures that are specific to a social media age. For example, the conflicting pleasures of 'Likes' on social media, platforms' unique cultures of acceptable fan behaviour (as enforced and policed by fans themselves), and the act of disembedding from platforms. I discuss these findings and more below, showing how new *and* old negotiations of the relationship between derision, guilt and pleasure are working together in contemporary teen drama fandoms. This connection is reflected in each of my empirical chapters (Four, Five, Six, and Seven), and I now briefly synthesize my key findings and contributions below.

In addition to their more traditional forms, derisive discourses emerge *within* teen drama fandoms through participatory dynamics. I examined this trend in Chapter Four, and argued that adult fans use the 'fangirl', 'groupie' and 'shipper' discourses to deride other, typically younger fans. I maintain that the majority of my respondents were not being



deliberately discriminatory, but that they drew on these terms to normalise their fandom and to make their identities - as adult fans of teen shows - seem less derisible. The reproduction of these sexist discourses through intra-fan dynamics (Stanfill, 2013) arguably reflects the current postfeminist media moment in which my participants are situated. The prefix 'post' implies that the battles of feminism have been won, and that women are no longer limited by structural inequalities like sexism (Rottenberg, 2014). Postfeminism's longstanding denial of gender imbalance has arguably led to the emergence of newer, more dynamic, and *flexible* forms of sexism (Gill, 2011; Hill et al, 2016), and the fangirls, groupies, and shippers who are derided within fan spaces embody this new technique. Although these discourses have longer histories and are linked to the containment of women's (sexual) pleasures (Tarr, 1985; Geraghty, 2008), I argue that their role within teen drama fandoms offers new insight into how sexist derisions operate. This chapter examined two other techniques that fans use to normalise their pleasures: drawing on teen drama series' intertextual references to objects of 'high culture', and placing value on education (both in terms of being *educated* and *educating* other fans). Although my discussion of flexible sexism offers new insight into how inequalities are being reproduced in fan spaces, these other techniques resonate strongly with Jenson's (1992), Jenkins' (1992), and other fan scholars' much earlier arguments.

In Chapter Five, I asked what role social media's dominant discourses - privacy, participation and labour - play in teen drama fans' negotiations. Although these terms are not new to a social media age, their role in users' lives is the focus of much scholarly and popular debate. Participation, however, is a discourse that offers particularly new insight into teen drama fans' pleasures (and displeasures). 'Liking' and other socio-technical functions on platforms create new cultures of acceptability that fans must familiarise themselves with. I found that my respondents value certain forms of participation above others, which can be linked to: (1) the socio-technical affordances of social media. That is, platforms like Facebook and Twitter are seen to encourage, discourage, allow, and prevent other fans from behaving inappropriately. These value systems also alert us to: (2) the rising value of metrics within society (see for example Beer, 2016), as there are conflicting pleasures in 'Likes' and other quantified

measurements on social media. Teen drama fans feel compelled to attract a (subjectively) large quantity of Likes, yet they do not want to show that they value these metrics to other fans. Nor did they want to tell me, the interviewer, how much they value metrics, though they indicated this in other ways. As their pleasures already face harsh denigration, fans understandably try to avoid participation that might make things worse. Whilst their motivations nod to existing stigmas of fan cultures, these specific negotiations are unique to a social media age. I examined two more discourses of digital technologies in Chapter Five: privacy and labour. I found that fans seek out private - or 'secret' - spaces online to enact their fandom, away from certain people in their lives, and that fans imagine their activities to be forms of labour, describing their fandom as a 'part-time job', 'full-time job', and 'work'. Although these findings offer new insights into the lives of teen drama fans, they are linked to longstanding and well-discussed gender inequalities. That is, teen drama fans seek out private spaces because their feminised pleasures are devalued (Radway, 1984; A.Gray, 1987, 1992), and they likely frame their fandom as a form of labour - though without using this exact term - because it offers them a more masculine, rational and acceptable subject position (for example, van Zoonen, 1992).

As platforms increasingly move towards an embrace of a so-called real-name Internet (see for example Hogan, 2013), fans are afforded fewer opportunities to enact identities that differ from what platforms like Facebook refer to as their 'real' (i.e. legal) ones. In Chapter Six, I argued that this trend is deeply troubling for teen drama fans, given their desire to maintain their fandom as a private, *secret* act. I challenged claims made by Hine (2015) and others (see Pink, 2012; Pink et al, 2016) that digital media technologies have become embedded in people's everyday lives. Indeed, Hine maintains that this concept has become 'obvious' (2015, p.33), as the Internet is no longer thought of as a space that exists separately from everyday life: a so-called *cyberspace*. Yet the majority of my respondents deliberately and strategically try to *disembed* - or detach - some aspects of social media from others, and some of their online identities from others. Although fans never entirely disembed from social media - an act that might not be possible or desirable, given its centrality to contemporary teen drama fandoms - they navigate platforms in a more thoughtful and strategic way than claims like Hine's (2015)

permit. In this chapter, I also discussed the salience of binary terms like online/offline and real/virtual, despite a scholarly and popular move away from them. To borrow from Patelis, in an age of social media, the real as distinct from the virtual is understood as ‘fake’ (2013, p.122). Indeed, the mutual exclusivity of online and offline lives, spaces and selves is discouraged by some social media platforms, particularly Facebook Profiles and more recently Twitter (see Burgess, 2016b). In light of an academic and platform push towards embeddedness, it is vital to highlight the importance of secrecy to teen drama fans. I argue that it might actually be *necessary* for fans to have the opportunity to disembed from some aspects of social media, given the extent and perhaps worsening of the gendered derision they face.

The final chapter examined the term ‘guilty pleasure’, which, despite its popularity, is scarcely discussed academically (for exceptions, see Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984; D. Morley, 1988; A. Gray, 1987, 1992; and more recently Cann, 2015). I argued in this chapter that the term itself is gendered, as it is *women’s* popular cultures that tend to provoke feelings of guilt in their audiences and fans (across the gender spectrum), and which sit at the bottom of an imagined cultural hierarchy. Not only is the term itself produced through gender politics, but it also captures a complex and longstanding relationship between media cultures, guilt and *pleasure*, especially for women. In this chapter, I explored how women’s guilt at, for example, being an adult fan of a teen show, dedicating time to fandom (an activity that has long been considered immature, inappropriate and unworthy (for example, Lewis, 1992; Jenkins, 1992)), and sacrificing domestic responsibilities such as motherwork to engage in fandom is entangled with my participants’ pleasures. These themes have long been discussed by feminist scholars like Coward, who claimed in 1984 that:

There’s another emotion which comes with pleasure, like a faithful old dog that won’t be shaken off. Guilt. Women know all about guilt - it’s our speciality. Pleasure generates guilt, and that’s bad enough. But even worse is the guilt that is generated when other people discuss our pleasures critically [...]. Pleasure may be sacrosanct but guilt is remorseless. (p.14)

That my findings resonate so strongly with Coward's (1984) work, which she wrote over two decades ago, signals the endurance of gendered inequalities within and beyond the home, the devaluation of women's leisure time, and the value of work above play (especially for women).

However my research findings also point to *new* relations between guilt and pleasure, and I argued in Chapter Eight that guilt and pleasure (and derision) work together, because to have pleasure without guilt seems beyond reach for my respondents, especially for women. Many of my participants, particularly those who are mothers, seem to recognise that they need to frame their fandom as a 'guilty' act (though without always using this exact term) because they do not think they should be engaging in such an 'obviously pleasurable' (Radway, 1984, p.105) activity. These articulations signal my respondents' position within a postfeminist age, as women face increasing and perhaps impossible pressures to 'have it all' (see Moseley and Read, 2002; Genz, 2010): a successful career, an actively sexual and stable relationship, the option to have a child, strong female friendships, wealth (and therefore consumer power), and physical attractiveness (see also Duffy and Hund, 2015). Women - especially those who are young, like myself - are told that they can make choices about their lives because of their newfound *post-feminist* freedoms. But they must also 'choose' an identity that falls in line with the dominant, accepted version of appropriate girlhood/womanhood. Unfortunately for my respondents, teen drama fandom is always and inevitably the *wrong* choice: it is youthful, inappropriately feminised, and linked to popular forms of culture. For contemporary teen drama fans, this means that guilt and pleasure are always entangled.

### **Future Research Directions**

In this research I have argued that, to a certain extent, social media platforms are altering an already complex relationship between derision, guilt and pleasure for teen drama fans. I say 'to a certain extent' here because sexist denigrations of young and feminised fan behaviours, cultures, and objects have a long history. Social media platforms are integral to contemporary teen drama fandoms, yet their polices, technical infrastructures and norms are

constantly changing, as is the hierarchy of popular platforms. Although teen drama fans will need to adapt to these changes, they must do so in the face of steady - and perhaps worsening - stigmas of their activities. Teen drama series will likely continue to dominate Western popular cultures for many years to come, and it is important that future research attends to their fans' experiences. As such, I call for three main directions for future research: (1) how digital media scholars understand and discuss issues around fans' privacy, (2) the potential consequences of a full embrace of a real-name Internet, especially for users whose identities are stigmatised, and (3) a call for more frequent turns to pleasure, given the stubbornness and perhaps *worsening* of teen drama fandom's cultural status.

My respondents evidently feel that they are private in certain spaces, even though they are technically not. Raynes-Goldie (2010) nods to this paradox in her work, explaining that her research participants value social privacy above institutional privacy (the ways platforms like Facebook use your data). At present, there is a lack of public knowledge about what platforms do with users' data, yet the continued popularity of social media does not strictly suggest that users do not care. The increase of practices like 'surveillance, information leakage, or data-mining' (Marwick and boyd, 2014, p.1064) and the sophistication with which they are enacted raises important questions about fans' privacy in a social media age. At the time of writing, the popular press are voicing concerns about the use of people's social media data. For example, *The Guardian* has offered its view on social media platforms' control over users' data, arguing that 'the privacy of citizens is being eroded' (2016), and *Wired's* Burgess reported that 'Europe expresses "serious concerns" about WhatsApp giving Facebook your number' (2016a). Fandom is frequently being enacted on social media, meaning questions about fans' and other users' privacy will become increasingly important. Marwick and boyd (2014) amongst others have noted that platforms' privacy settings are notoriously (and perhaps deliberately) complicated, creating further difficulties for fans. This issue is particularly important for fans of young and feminised media texts, such as teen drama series, celebrity cultures, reality television series, soap operas, male popular cultural icons, and so on, as their pleasures are still stigmatised, and might actually have worsened since feminist scholars initially turned to pleasure in the 1980s.

Second, I urge digital media scholars to keep examining how some social media users ‘pushback against the system’, to borrow Haimson and Hoffman’s (2016, n.p.) term. It is important for users like teen drama fans to have the opportunity to enact their fandom in ‘secret’, but this chance is becoming increasingly limited as platforms move towards an embrace of a so-called ‘real name Internet’ (see Hogan, 2013). If teen drama fans face derision in their homes, from certain people in their lives, in the popular press, and in fan spaces, it is important to ask where they *can* enact their fandom without fear of exposure. And of course there are plenty of examples where the stakes are even higher. Social media platforms are almost constantly changing: technically, culturally, economically, politically, and so on, and their success (aside from Facebook, it would seem) is often short-lived. These changes present fans and other social media users with new conditions through which to navigate their identities, an issue that is becoming increasingly important as platforms like Facebook seek to align users’ ‘real’ (i.e. legal) and ‘online’ identities. It is vital that future research considers how fans are negotiating their identities in the face of these changes, wherein the possibilities for secrecy and privacy - both technically and emotionally - might become extremely limited.

The third and final call that I will make is for feminist media scholars - particularly those who are interested in digital media technologies - to continue to pay attention to the emergence of more ‘flexible’ (see Gill, 2011; Hill et al, 2016) forms of sexism. This kind of research needs to be done precisely because of the way flexible sexism operates: it is often difficult to spot because it is so subtle, which creates a risk that it will be normalised through media and other such discourses, and within social media spaces.

### **Final Thoughts**

As I was finalising this concluding chapter, the popular fashion, lifestyle and current affairs magazine *Vanity Fair* shared an article about *Pretty Little Liars* fandom to its Facebook Page. The article, entitled ‘The Underground World of Running Fan Accounts on Instagram’

(2017) was written by *Refinery 29* journalist Lindsay and explores her brief experience as a *Pretty Little Liars* Instagram fan account administrator. She also shares quotes from interviews with fans of other feminised media cultures, such as reality television family the Kardashians, pop singers Selena Gomez and Justin Bieber, and teen drama series *Riverdale* (2017-present). Although Lindsay (2017) self-identifies as a fan of the show *and* admits that she briefly administered a fan account, she refers to this act as ‘delightfully unhinged’ and admits that she treated like a ‘joke’, unlike the administrators she interviewed for her article. The comments on *Vanity Fair*’s Facebook post were equally derisive. Ordinary users - who I will not quote as I do not have their consent to do so - asked questions about the point of the article, derided the writer’s fandom, and claimed that they had wasted their time reading her work. Given my research findings *and* my own experiences as a teen drama fan, I was unsurprised by users’ reactions to Lindsay’s article, and perhaps to the way in which her ‘confessional’ style article was written.

I partly understand why Lindsay wrote her article in the way that she did, and why my research participants often derided other fans of the show and reproduced fan stereotypes. ‘Teen drama fan’ is a difficult subject position to embody, and I know this because I am a ‘fan’ myself. Implicated in the design of this research were my own hesitations to conduct such a project. I believed there to be far worthier objects of analysis, and spent much of the first year grappling with the uncertainty of conducting research into feminised popular cultures. Coming of age in a postfeminist era, I queried the existence of sexism, despite my own resistance to align my identity with feminised media texts and pleasures. I did not initially question my own resistance, and it was not until I conducted my fieldwork that I realised the extent and salience of sexist discourses, and of the importance of returning to pleasure. Only by returning to pleasure can we see that certain pleasures - the feminine, the popular, and the young - continue to be disavowed. The twenty-two teen drama fans who participated in my research - the bloggers, the lurkers, the role-players, the admins, the podcasters, the tweeters, and many more - are mocked by various people in their lives, including those they encounter within fan spaces. This makes their commitment to supporting shows like *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge*, and *The*

*Vampire Diaries* a political and resistant act, which is always, I contend, bound up with their pleasures.

In a postfeminist and social media age, the relationship between derision, guilt, and pleasure is taking on different forms, particularly because sexist derisions of teen drama fandom are emerging in subtler and more flexible ways (Gill, 2011; Hill et al, 2016). Yet my return to the kind of feminist research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, which was initially motivated by the dominance of social media to contemporary teen drama fandoms, has led me to conclude that my respondents' pleasures are no less problematic over three decades on. Indeed, they might actually have *worsened*, and so I urge feminist digital media scholars to keep returning to pleasure.



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**Teleography**

*Arrow*. (2012-present). The CW.

*Breaking Bad*. (2008-2013). AMC.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (1997-2003). United Paramount Network.

*Dawson's Creek*. (1998-2003). The WB.

*Desperate Housewives*. (2004-2012). ABC.

*Gossip Girl*. (2007-2012). The CW.

*Guy Code*. (2011-present). MTV2.

*The Hills*. (2006-2010). MTV.

*Made in Chelsea*. (2011-present). E4.

*Man vs. Wild*. (2006-2011). Discovery Channel.

*Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. (2006-2016). Disney Junior.

*My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. (2010-present). Discovery Family.

*The O.C.* (2003-2007). Fox.

*Once Upon a Time*. (2011-present). ABC.

*Pretty Little Liars*. (2010-present). Freeform.

*Reign*. (2013-present). The CW.

*Revenge*. (2011-2015). ABC.

*Riverdale*. (2017-present). The CW.

*Sex and the City*. (1998-2004). HBO.

*Supernanny*. (2004-2012). Channel 4/E4.

*Teen Wolf*. (2011-present). MTV.

*True Blood*. (2008-2014). HBO.

*True Detective*. (2014-2015). HBO.

*The Vampire Diaries*. (2009-2017). The CW.

*The Walking Dead*. (2010-present). AMC.

*Xena Warrior Princess*. (1995-2001). Syndication.

**INFORMATION SHEET****04.06.14****Inequalities in women's popular culture fandom: Online participation and teen television.**

*You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. You do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.*

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The study is part of a 3-4 year project investigating women's popular culture fandom and online participation in teen television. The project is for my PhD thesis, and this part of the study involves me organising a series of interviews and observations, for which I am hoping to recruit fans of *Pretty Little Liars/Revenge/The Vampire Diaries* [delete as appropriate]. I want to hear all about your experiences as a fan of [text], and to read what you have to say in the fan group.

**Do I have to take part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and you may decide to withdraw up to one week after the final interview has been conducted, without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

**Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been approached as a member of an online fan group. I am interested in you as a fan of [text], and so someone who can bring valuable experiences to my study.

**What will happen next if I take part?**

You are invited to take part in two Skype interviews. Each interview will last for around 60 minutes. I will also observe your activities in the fan group, and will begin observing you from the date that you agree to participate, and until one week after the final interview has taken place. I will be conducting the interviews with you, and will also be conducting the observation. In the interviews, I will ask you about your opinions and experiences of [text] fandom.

**Are there any risks or benefits in taking part?**

I do not foresee any risks or hazards for participants taking part in this research. However, if you should experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of the research, you should let me know immediately. The research offers no direct benefits for participants other than an opportunity to express your interests.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**

I hope that you will find the experience enjoyable and rewarding – there are no right or wrong answers and I welcome all comments.

**Will my participation be kept confidential?**

All data from the interviews and observations will be stored securely at the University of Leeds. Only I will have access to personal data and your contact details will be stored separately to ensure your anonymity. All personal data will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and will not be passed on to any third parties. In the write-up of the research, the data will be presented completely anonymously.

**Will I be recorded and how will the recordings be used?**

The interviews will be audio-recorded and your words will be transcribed for later use in my PhD thesis. The audio recordings and observation data will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings and observation data.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

Quotations from the interview may be used in publications, reports, and other research outputs, but your name will not be used and you will not be personally identifiable.

Quotations from the observation will not be used in publications, reports, and other research outputs, to protect your privacy.

If you would like me to let you know about future publications connected to this project, please tell me and I will inform you.

**Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

If you would like further information on this study, or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Ysabel Gerrard at [ed09yg@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ed09yg@leeds.ac.uk).

Thank you in advance for your invaluable contribution to the study!

**Appendix B: Participant Consent Form****UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**Title:** Inequalities in women's popular culture fandom: Online participation and teen television.

**Researcher:** Ms. Ysabel Gerrard

**Contact Details:** [ed09yg@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ed09yg@leeds.ac.uk) or [icsyg@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:icsyg@leeds.ac.uk)

If you would like to take part in my research, please read this form carefully, and put a tick (✓) next to the statements that you agree with.

	Tick next to the statements you agree with
I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the research project, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
It has been explained to me how the information I give will be used.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop taking part up to one week after the final interview has taken place, and that I do not have to give a reason for this.	
I understand that I do not have to answer all of the questions if I do not want to, and that I do not have to give a reason for this.	
I understand that my responses will be kept confidential, and that only the researcher (Ysabel) has access to this information.	
I give permission for my words to be used in a report, but understand that my real name/online username will not be mentioned.	
I agree to talk to the researcher (Ysabel) about my experiences as a fan.	

Name of participant	
Participant's Signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher(s)	Ysabel Gerrard
Signature	
Date	

The participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be kept in a safe location.

**Appendix C: Skype Interview Guide**

1	Have you been watching [text] from the very beginning?
2	How do you watch [text]? (Online/on television/both)
3	How many times do you usually watch each episode?
4	How would you describe the audience for [text]? (In terms of age, class, gender and sexuality)
5	How would you describe the characters in [text]? (In terms of age, class, gender and sexuality)
6	Have you been participating in the [text] [platform] fan group from the very beginning?
7	How many fan groups in do you participate in? If you participate in other fan groups, what are they?
8	Do you use other forms of social media for both non-fan and fan activities? If so, what are they?
9	In what ways do you access the fan group? (E.g. Desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet, smartphone, etc)
10	How often would you say you access the fan group? (Specific approximately hourly/daily)
11	What do you do when you access the fan group? (Post comments/replies/post original material (e.g., images, videos, etc)/create new discussions/etc)
12	Other than participating in the fan group, how else do you participate as a fan of [text]? (E.g. Fan art/fan fiction/making videos/attending conventions/other social events/etc)
13	What do you like about the fan group? (On both a technical and social level)
14	What do you dislike about the fan group? (On both a technical and social level)
15	What role do you occupy in the fan group? (E.g. are you an opinion leader, or do you prefer to let other people lead the discussion?)
16	Do you tell people in your 'offline' life (e.g. friends, family, etc) that you are a fan of [text]?
17	If you do tell people in your 'offline' life, what do they have to say about your fandom?
18	If you don't tell people in your 'offline' life, why don't you?
19	What other words do you associate with the word 'fan'?
20	For you personally, what qualities do you think a 'good' fan of [text] should have?
21	For you personally, what qualities do you think a 'bad' fan of [text] would have?
22	What is it that you like about [text]?
23	What is it that you dislike about [text]?
24	What do you think some of the main messages of [text] are? (E.g. about career, love, friendship, family, education, hobbies)
25	What kinds of pleasure do you get from watching [text]?
26	Have you ever come across feminism before? If so, where?
27	How would you describe a feminist?
28	Has another user ever said anything hurtful or judgemental to you in the fan group?
29	If yes (to Q.30), can you think of a specific example?
30	If yes (to Q.30), why do you think this happened/happens?
31	Have you ever said anything hurtful or judgemental to another user in the fan group?
32	If yes (to Q.33), can you think of a specific example, and do you do this regularly?
33	If yes (to Q.33), why do you think this happened/happens?

**Appendix D: Online Interview Guide**

1	Why did you set up your fan account?
2	Before you set up your fan page, had you ever run one before?
3	Is running a fan account what you expected it to be when you started? For example, is it easier/more difficult; is it more/less time-consuming; is it more/less fun than you thought it would be?
4	Can you tell me what your typical daily engagement with the account looks like? So, for example, how many hours do you spend on it? How do you access it (mobile, laptop, tablet, etc.)? And when do you access it (morning, lunchtime, afternoon, evening, etc.)?
5	How long do you think you'll continue to run the account for?
6	Have you made any friends through the account?
7	Do your friends/family watch [insert name of series] with you?
8	Can you tell me about who, in your 'offline' life (so friends, family, etc.) knows that you run the account?
9	Has your pleasure in running the fan account increased, decreased, or changed in any way? If so, why and how do you think it has changed?
10	Do you consider running a fan account to be like work or play, and why?
11	How important is it that your 'real life' identity remains anonymous on the account?
12	What has been your favourite storyline on [teen drama series] so far, and why?

## Appendix E: Interview Sample

Emily: I've been doing it since I was twelve. I've grown up with it. I've seen how Twitter and whatnot have-- Have changed everything, and how easy it is to contact people now. So... It's been interesting, and a little terrifying sometimes \*laughs\*.

Ysabel: Really? Why terrifying?

Emily: Uh... Just like-- With fandoms like *The Vampire Diaries* that are very teen-oriented, or *Reign* or, you know, *The Walking Dead* where it is such a-- A broad demographic, and with Twitter and Facebook and whatnot, fans are used to being able to say what they feel like right away, and it's a lot of younger versus older, and the younger fans aren't as understanding of-- Like they don't understand the character development and they're just seeing instead of listening to the underlying tones. So they're jumping. They jump very quickly and-- And with the ships and with the actors and whatnot, they're not afraid to um.... Send hate, or bash, or-- It gets very defensive and a bit of a battleground. And I know with *The Vampire Diaries* it's, you know, it's the big ship, it's Delena! It's Delena! And it's all-- It drives the fandom. And while it's really really great to see, it's also a bit of a downside sometimes, and every fandom has that. Every fandom has a ship war that's going to-- To separate fans, or bring them together or whatnot, and-- \*sigh\*. Yeah. I think it can get very overwhelming for a lot of fans and-- And for fan page owners, I mean a lot of them a very young themselves, and they just jump into it like oh this is going to be great! They're not-- They're naïve and they're not expecting it. And when it comes, they don't know how to handle it because of how crazy it can get. I mean I know um-- With the actors, fans can't always make the difference. They can't say, well this is a character and this is who the person is. And I know with my younger sister, she's in *The Vampire Diaries*' fandom, and um... I have friends who run fan sites and do work within The CW and whatnot, and I know that when Nina and Ian were dating, I guess there were stories about when they had gone to Paris and they had been ambushed by these young girls, and these

young girls were trying to physically attack Nina because she was dating Ian. And it was like this big thing, and so it really-- It jumps from online into the real world, and that's where it can get a little-- A little scary.

Ysabel: And do you think that's an age thing? That kind of behaviour, do you think it's an age thing?

Emily: Yeah, I think it's an age thing but I think it-- It is spurred on quite a bit by social media. I mean, even the older fans don't have that boundary either. Um... Like I don't only focus on *Revenge*, it's-- I've done many, many shows for ABC over the years but *Revenge*-- I'm doing four different sections for *Revenge*. I'm doing uh... Like emilythorne.org, and I'm the owner of madeleinstowe.org which I'm doing with Victoria's fans, I'm doing Charlotte and I'm doing like different characters and whatnot, so it's very-- You can see the divide very clearly between fans and ages and whatnot. And I'm finding with certain actors, with certain characters, even the older fans can be just as critical and mean and ready to jump and attack as the younger ones are. So that's always really interesting. It is very much a battle of fans and respect boundaries and it's-- It's incredible to watch but it's also just so-- So frustrating sometimes, because you're like I wish I could do something but they're not always going to listen. Um... With *Revenge*, I'm very fortunate to have been the first fan page, and I was cemented very early with my work with the crew and with the cast and whatnot, and I've been really fortunate with the respect and the support that I've gotten from everybody, and so people listen when I do say something, or when I do try and-- Try and calm it down and whatnot. But I know, as a Victoria fan and doing my work with Madeleine's websites and my fan sites and whatnot, I can't say that I'm the same person. Like I have-- For that one, when I'm emilythorne.org, madeleinstowe.org is a totally different person. That's not me. I have no control because of how rude and like-- Just abrasive fans get, especially between Emily and Victoria, it-- There's very much a divide where you can't be fans of both. And there are really quite a few people who are, and that's great to see! But I can't be quite as honest, and I can't say, you know, this is why this character is doing this when I'm on Emily, so I have to, you know, pretend to be a totally different person when I'm



doing it on my Madeleine stuff. That's what I'm writing about now on the Tumblr page. I had a question, you know, um... What were my feelings on Victoria, and I only ever usually answer it as Emily. But um... I think with everything that's been going on, it was finally time to say, hey, like, this is the thing. So I'm calling it Five Reasons Why Victoria Grayson is My Favourite Character. But I'm posting it on Emily, so hopefully that will knock some of the animosity off for a little while.

Ysabel: So do you do it from the voice of Emily, or do you do it from your voice?

Emily: I do it from both. It depends on the way that the question is worded. Some fans are fairly-- Really clear, and are asking Emily how she feels about Jack or whatnot, so that makes it easier, and I do my best to try and speak as Emily would. Um... But other times it is really clear that they're just asking me, as a person. Some people-- Some people do think that I work for ABC or that I actually am Emily VanCamp and whatnot, so I'm constantly having to be like no no, that's not the case.

Ysabel: You said that to me actually in your first message! You said, just to let you know that I am a fan page.

Emily: Yeah, I do spend a lot of time having to do that. Um... Especially on Twitter. It is so so surprising how often it happens. Especially-- Well, I mean, because-- Despite the fact Twitter has verification, there are fandoms where there are character profiles and they are run by the actor or whatnot, so it's not a very clear line. But I think-- With the characters having the same name, some people just automatically assume right away for Emily.

Ysabel: Yeah, that is confusing actually. I'd never thought about it like that. [...] So when you talk about the younger versus older fans, how do you know how old people are though? Because what I'm finding from fan pages is that I go on a fan page to try and, you know, recruit someone and ask if they want to be interviewed, and there's nothing about that person on the

page. I don't necessarily want to know anything about them because it is an anonymous study, but it's striking to me how anonymous it is.

Emily: Yes! Um... Well with things like Tumblr, um... A lot of people do put their ages on the pages, like on their fan pages and stuff, because some of them aren't just devoted just to *Revenge* or just to one thing. Some of them are-- A lot of the fans who do comment and whatnot and get into this stuff are personal pages, and so in that case they leave their name. But just-- Whenever I reply to someone, like unless it's anonymous, I always try to do a little bit of background work with it. Just because some younger fans-- You have to speak to them a little differently. So most of them are really capable of understanding, no matter how different we are in age and whatnot, and it's the same with older fans. But it takes me longer to form my words and thoughts and whatnot when I'm speaking with younger fans because they're-- They're just not there at the point where there's like a respect level, or-- Or a personal boundary you know, like where they shouldn't cross. A lot of Emily's fans are younger, but with *Revenge* they're quite a bit younger now, and because she's dating Josh um... That's fairly well publicised, and with everyone reading about it and whatnot all the time-- I find the older fans don't ask personal questions, whereas the younger fans do. So it's fairly-- There are little tip-offs here and there I find.

Ysabel: Yeah. I guess you've been doing it for that long you-- You develop a good sense of it.

Emily: Yeah, and I was really young when I started so I just have to try and remember what I was like, because I wasn't-- I was like that, you know, when I was younger because I didn't-- I wasn't as involved and I didn't know any better, and it was still new at the time and so-- As I grew up my ways of thinking changed, as did the way I spoke, and the way I dealt with situations, and the way I worked with actors and whatnot changed quite a bit.

Ysabel: So was it-- Did you say that you were twelve when you started?

Emily: Yeah, I was twelve when I started.

Ysabel: And do you-- How did it start? Like what did you used to do?

Emily: Well I started with *Desperate Housewives*, and-- Yeah. So it was a natural progression into *Revenge* there. So at the time I came across a forum that was-- It was the only dedicated page at the time for *Desperate Housewives*, and I got involved with that and it ran for the length of the show. And I-- Eventually I'd been there long enough, and I became a moderator and moved up, and I just continued to kind of move up. And then at one point the owner had to step down, and uh-- So she asked us whether anyone wanted to take over, and so I threw my name in there and it kind of just started from there. The website at that point, they had deleted it, so I got that back and started it from scratch. I just kind of tried to go back and catch up. Then Twitter was just starting to come out at that point, so I thought well let's-- Let's see what we can do to bring fans in who wouldn't have found the forum otherwise. So then we went there and then-- You know, @desperatefans was born and it became a huge thing on Twitter, and then, you know, ABC was interacting with the fans and interacting with the page and the cast was doing the same thing. Um... And so throughout all of my time with it, you know-- By 2012, we were at 13,000 followers on Twitter and the page had been online for eight to nine years, and I was invited to Universal Studios. They were having a charity event, a block party. That was what it was called, the Wysteria Lane block party, and-- So I got to go and the cast was there, and some of them knew who I was! Like, you know, because of the work that I'd been doing previously and the fan sites for some of the actors on the show and whatnot so-- And it was a weekend thing, so one night. But I mean it was such a nice way to connect with people. Um... And I've run so many other sites in the meantime that I couldn't imagine not doing it. Um... Because I, you know, you grow up with it. And I don't really veer out from ABC. I generally-- I stay with ABC quite a bit, but I've run actor's sites for The CW and for CBS and little thing. But I found that ABC was-- It was my calling, and I started there and they've been the most supportive I've found. For me. So yeah!

Ysabel: So did you ever intend for this to become... Two-fold question. Is it becoming your career? And if so, was that the intention?

Emily: Not in the beginning. In the beginning, it was just... Hey, let's have a great place for people to debate and to talk about the characters they love, and to share news and photos and stuff and... Then, as *Desperate Housewives* was coming to a finish, the last two years and-- And I had several side projects at the time, and I was looking for something to continue with because *Desperate Housewives* was finishing and when I fell into *Revenge*, you know, um... I had already-- By that point I had already learned so much and found that I was like-- They do announcements for shows in advance, like six to eight months in advance, and so I had found one that I, you know, I thought was going to be a nice like band aid, as it were, for *Desperate Housewives* finishing, and it was *Revenge*. So I said ok, we'll see how this goes, it sounds really great. You know I had already recognised some of the names that were attached to the project, and then it started from there. And over the last four years I've-- In total, to date, I have twenty different fan sites that I'm working with.

Ysabel: Wow.

Emily: Um... And one official actor site for an actress on The CW. And um... Doing that and, you know, being able to go to Comic-Con-- You know, the San Diego Comic-Con, and to do things that were associated with the fan sites and the networking and with meeting people at ABC and meeting people at Marvel and stuff um... It did become fairly clear in the last, you know, four of five years that this was something I wanted to do. So I have made friends at ABC and I have made friends at Marvel, and um... And they've been fairly, you know, really really great and really receptive. So we're, you know, we're Facebook friends and we, you know, chat and catch up and we-- We network, and they've been really eager to say, you know, when you're ready or if this is something you wanna do then, you know, let us know and we'll see what we can do kinda thing. So... Yeah. It's been really really amazing. I mean I don't go to Comic-Con as press, but because of my work and because I'm recognised by the actors and

stuff, I'm able to do the occasional press thing or get into a signing, or go to a party or whatnot. So it's been uh... It's been kind of crazy to see that the things I've been doing for fun are, you know, are being recognised on such a bigger scale.

Ysabel: So how much of your time does it take up? I mean I'm sure you've never sat and fully counted it, but...Roughly.

Emily: Um... \*Sigh\*. For *Revenge* alone, um... Sunday nights, I'm usually there for about half an hour before the east coastal start, and then until you know one or two in the morning. So... And that's just for *Revenge*. I mean when *Desperate Housewives* was still on, I was actually covering four or five different shows on Sunday nights. So it was like eight or nine hours just on Sunday. And then when I was doing stuff with *Castle*, it was another, you know... Monday! So I think overall, in a week... You know, it's easily thirty to forty hours a week between all of my sites. Which is pretty much a full-time job \*laughs\*. Yep.

Ysabel: Do you think of it as being a job then, or is it still fun? Or is it blurring that boundary?

Emily: You know, I think in the beginning it was just fun. I think now it is-- It is blurring a little bit more. Um... Some of the sites are a job. Like the official one is still very much out of love, and for fun! But I'm-- I'm representing someone officially, so that would be the job part. But for something like *Revenge* or um... You know, when I was doing *True Blood* or whatever, it only... I only found that it became a job once I had interaction with that person themselves. So once I had met them or once-- You know, once they reached out and contacted me or supported me, then a protective kind of boundary set in. Like I felt the need to protect their privacy. It's-- It's my big thing. Like the cast and the crew's privacy, that's my biggest thing, and it's-- It actually got to the point where it was bothering me personally when people were wanting, you know, Facebook pages and URLs of actors and were going out of their way to hack into mine to find... And I'm like... That's like, you know. And I-- I go and I find them for my own curiosity um... And I do it so that I know what to combat, like if fans are like hey, is that this person? I

know what the thing is, I can be like no, they don't have it. Like a lot of the actors will say that they don't have, you know, Facebook or whatnot, because I have friends who are actors or whatnot and they're all in the same circles-- I obviously know better, like I know who they are, but I never give that away. I'd never-- I know who on *Revenge* has Facebook and I don't-- Because my friends are their friends, or they are friends of my friends. So it's a very protective boundary, and I know there are groups like on Tumblr-- There are pages devoted to photos fans have hacked in and stolen from Facebook or Twitter or private Instagrams or whatever. So that's the dark side of fandom, I find. Um... And so with certain actors, I've been combating that. My official person-- You know, we have to do the takedowns and whatnot because it's hacking and that kind of thing. So that's what I've found. I find that the lines are blurring a little bit, but I think it's made me a much more respectful person. I realise now that there are boundaries, and I know where mine is and... I-- I wish some fans would learn it, and I do try to explain it when people ask. I don't post paparazzi photos on my website, I don't-- You know, I don't care what Josh and Emily are doing. Like I don't pay attention to that because it's not any of my business! So...

Ysabel: So that's their private life, and *Revenge* is like their public life.

Emily: Exactly. And I know-- I know Emily has a Facebook, and people were coming to me and asking if they could send photos, you know, can I do this? Can I do that? So I contacted-- Like I have contact with her sister, and I was like hey, just a heads up, people are tunnelling in through-- They were tunnelling in through her Facebook page to get to Emily's, so I was like hey, you know, I know Facebook needs to change its settings, but here's how you can do that. People are trying to get into Emily's Facebook, just so you know. They're always really appreciative that I am taking the time to look out for that kind of thing, so... Yeah, and I know with Madeleine-- Because Madeleine doesn't social network, or she didn't, but she recently joined Instagram and that was a big thing there. People wanted information, or they wanted private details or other things. I find that Instagram is the worst social media site for that because there isn't-- You know, you can block people but it doesn't stop them. It's not like

Twitter, it's not like Facebook. So Madeleine has to deal with a lot of it, and it actually got to the point where she had to leave her profile because people were so overwhelming. Her fans-- And I find that some of it is country-wise too like um... There's a bigger level of respect and um... They're not as intrusive in like Europe or North America than I find in like... Brazil is really very very excited about everything \*laughs\*. Like I don't want to say that they're crazy, but they're definitely not... \*laughs\*.

Ysabel: So you're noticing trends?

Emily: Yeah. I find that Brazil seems to be a big one, and yeah so she did-- Madeleine did come back eventually, but now she's being a little more cautious.

Ysabel: I guess she wouldn't have know what to expect though, if she hadn't been on social media.

Emily: Exactly, exactly. It's really really overwhelming, and she does follow my Madeleine Instagram for the website, and some people are like well she follows you, can't you send her a message? And I'm like no, I'm not going to do that. You know she made the choice to follow me, and I'm going to respect that and I'm not going to-- Like I don't bug her, you know. Like I wished her a happy thanksgiving and that was the extent of it. You know I don't use the connections that I have because they were given to me as a privilege you know, and not... So...

Ysabel: Yeah, yeah. You see it a lot on Twitter, like a lot of people put in their bios, you know, such and such liked on this day and such and such followed on this day and such and such favoured on this day. What type of fan is that? I mean... Are there types of fans?

Emily: Kind of. There are, kind of. I mean those types of fans-- A lot of them I find are younger. That's been a trend with that one, you know they're younger and they're really excited to do anything to get noticed, like that's the big thing. They want approval or they want

attention or, you know, just some sort of recognition that no matter how much they bug a person, it will get them attention. It's kind of like an attention thing, like hey, they followed me, you should follow me too. It's a lot of like bragging and whatnot. And I mean some level of bragging is ok, but I find the fans-- Some fans like that will just jump from person to person to do that, so they'll just find a new person they like every couple of months, and then they'll do the same thing. They'll just tweet them non-stop, you know, a million times a day, another notch on my belt.

Ysabel: It's interesting that age keeps coming up, because-- I kind of had this issue with *Revenge*, because I wanted to look at teen drama series, but technically *Revenge* isn't--

Emily: No, technically it's not.

Ysabel: But it gets nominated for all of the Teen Choice Awards, it's constantly in a teen category, but it doesn't fit with typical teen dramas...

Emily: It is, and the demographic is very much teen! I'm finding-- Like some of the youngest fans I've met for *Revenge* are twelve, and some of the older fans I've met are in their sixties! So it's very-- It's massive, I mean I'm in eighteen to twenty-four myself, and I found that *Desperate Housewives* was the same. *Desperate Housewives* was not-- It wasn't a teen show, but it was winning a lot of the awards for teen and for best this and best that with People's Choice and Teen Choice and whatnot. And-- That's a hard one! I think a lot of it... \*Sigh\*. I don't know. A lot of the faces that we see on it who are not the older adults, like Victoria and Conrad and whatnot, they are the faces that a lot of the teens or people who are now into their young adults grew up with. So I think that's kind of what they were going for with that. And *Revenge*-- When people ask me about *Revenge*, I say that it's *Gossip Girl* meets *Desperate Housewives* set in The Hamptons. That's the best way to describe it, and it's also like the best parts of *The O.C.* It's all of that rolled into one. I think that because the themes are what some teens are dealing with-- I mean it's really hard to say that everyone is dealing with them, but I



think it hits home. And I mean with Emily constantly being in a love-square or octagon or whatever it's at now \*laughs\*. It is-- I mean it is fairly close to what some of today's market is going with, and I think because *Revenge* was coming in at a time when *Gossip Girl* was still a big thing, I think it just kind of jumped. And with ABC, they don't have anything that's strictly adult. ABC is very much teen plus, and whether it's-- It's acceptable for all demographics. I think with ABC, because it is Disney no matter what they do-- Even if it's not the most critically acclaimed thing, like *Selfie*. I mean *Selfie* was-- It was really well received, but it didn't have the demographic or whatnot and so it was cancelled. It was still a good mark for ABC. I find with ABC and with Disney, you know, with anything that's owned under the Disney flag, it's going to be popular and it's going to be a hit.

[...] (Talking about *Desperate Housewives*)

Emily: You have things like *The Vampire Diaries* where the fans are so wrapped up in it that even if it's not doing well critically, it'll still do well demographically. [...] *Pretty Little Liars* is all female-driven, and some of the girls will rely heavily on their male counterparts, but it's still all about the girls at the end of the day. And then with things like *Orphan Black*, you know, Tatiana does everything. You know, it's her playing every character. But because it's sci-fi, it's automatically out for Emmys or, you know, Golden Globes or whatever because it's in a sci-fi category. [...] I'm glad that we are seeing more female-driven things, but I think genre is the thing that we need to break.

Ysabel: And why do you think that is?

Emily: I don't know, I don't know. That one, you know, I've tossed back and forth over the years and I wish I had an answer. But despite the fact that it's been proven that TV-- You know, like with *Revenge*, it has two female leads and they're doing equally despicable things to each other and to other people, and they're downplaying the men in their lives and they're not letting them control them, you know, and they're fighting against the mould. But it's still not breaking

to that next level, and I don't know what it's gonna take to do that. Like we are definitely getting there, slowly, so just like with the introduction of gay and lesbian and bisexual characters. Like we're getting there, and I think that shows like *Orange is the New Black* are breaking the mould and getting people talking. So I think we still have a little bit to go, but we're slowly getting on the right way. Every season there's a show that has female leads and female-driven and it's breaking moulds, and I think in the next couple of years it'll finally hit that point where we're not-- You know, where there isn't a category anymore. Female and genres or whatever, it's all equal and everyone's got a fair shot, and hopefully we'll see it in the next you know five or ten years.

Ysabel: Yeah, yeah. Just to go back, it was interesting that you said you could figure out roughly how old they are and stuff, and I wondered do you ever put anything-- Like do you ever reveal yourself to fans?

Emily: For the most part no. But there are-- Occasionally, with my work on my Victoria-related pages and my Madeleine Stowe pages, I have made some-- Some friends and whatnot. So those people I'll let in and I'll let them know, but I think there's only one or two who I've ever told of that kind of thing, so like this is what I do because we're friends now, it's been four years. One or two of the players-- uh... The tweeters in my group know a little bit, because I'm friends with them outside of the group. Others I'd never-- We speak when the episode is done and whatnot, but we don't know each other's names, we don't converse. Like some of them-- Some of the players, we text and we call, so some of us are fairly close for the most part. I prefer the-- I prefer being anonymous because I can share my opinions a little more, and that's why I do have the separate profiles. Um... But it's like I was saying, doing Emily-- People and fans seem to assume I'm always team Emily, like everything that Emily does is one hundred per cent correct, and you know-- It's not-- That nothing that happened to her is her fault, and that the repercussions of what she's done are because of other people. And-- And I don't always agree with that, and when I'm on Emily I will say you know I do not agree with that. But certain opinions, I do find-- Because of the way fans act, I do have to say it elsewhere, like I do have to

go on-- If I'm gonna be pro-Victoria, like that doesn't go over on the Emily page very well usually \*laughs\*. So-- So this piece that I'm working on right now should be interesting. But for the most part no, I mean um... The odd person if I'm working with another affiliate page like *Revenge Brazil*, I converse a lot with the writers and they've sent me gifts for the work that I've done. So those-- Those things-- Like some of us are Facebook friends and stuff, so those are business and personal, and so those ones I do let in. But for the most part I don't tell them my name, I don't-- I tell them I live in Canada, you know, if there's a question about time differences or whatnot. Um... Certain... Like every now and then I'll drop in-- Like I'm celebrating Canadian Thanksgiving or little things here and there, but for the most part I operate as the handle, and the handle doesn't change. I use it everywhere in conjunction with that group. Like it's the same profile for Facebook and Twitter and Instagram. It's the same username all over the place. I think that's how I kind of stay sane, because if I had to reveal myself every time it would... I mean my opinions change throughout you know situations and whatnot, and so I think it would be really difficult to still maintain-- It is a business, and I still have the voice that I do in the fandom, and fans respond to it because I'm not overly personal. There are-- There are some fan pages that are run by older fans who-- They become less about the show and more about themselves, and it's all about making friends and screaming when this happens and whatnot, so it becomes really blurred. I think that fans respond better to me because it's not blurred, it is very-- It's news, it's-- Like I tweet with them and I answer their questions.

Ysabel: So by attaching your own identity to it, it becomes...

Emily: I think it would take away from it quite a bit if people did know who I was. Because I don't tell people that-- You know, because I have four sections that I cover in the fandom, and they're all connected as affiliates, but I never outwardly say I'm all of these profiles. So I can do everything quietly, and I think... Fans wouldn't change their opinion I don't think, of the work that I'm doing and whatnot. I just think... \*Sigh\*.

Ysabel: You like to keep them separate?

Emily: Yeah, yeah, because it does get blurry, especially when you're getting into the shipper wars and whatnot. I think at conventions or whatnot that's totally different, and you have to-- I have to adjust accordingly to the people that I'm with and the people I'm speaking to at that time. But like there's a *Revenge* convention coming up next year in Paris, and I'm gonna be attending that as a fan, and so at that point I'll have to make the decision as to whether I'm going as my handle or whether I'm going as me. I mean obviously when I'm with the guests, I'll be-- I'll be both, because I've spoken to everyone who's going - you know who's gusted to go - through emilythorne.org and so that's who they know me as. They know me through the work I've been doing and whatnot, so it's a great base builder for anything down the line kind of thing. But with fans, I always have to gauge it as to the way the fan is responding during a conversation or whatnot as to whether or not I'm going to reveal that.

Ysabel: At what point would you consider someone to be your friend? Because I see that word thrown around a lot in-- In different fan groups, and I just wondered what your interpretation of that word was?

Emily: Um... Well I-- I-- Like with my Twitter Victoria, um... Victoria Grayson, she and I are very close friends. You know we chatted quite a bit during the first season to figure out how we were going to play these characters, and from there we went on to texting and to Facebooking and whatnot. So she's someone I've known for a very long time, so I do consider her a friend. With-- With fans who I tweet with and who I see every Sunday, they're like acquaintances. I don't know them personally and they don't know my name. I think when I get to the point where I'm comfortable revealing... Like giving them my name or giving them, you know, my personal Twitter handle or my username on Skype or whatnot, I think that's where I find-- I-- You know, I can trust them and I know that their ideals in terms of respect and privacy are kind of the same as mine. I mean I did have a lot of friends back during the *Housewives* years where there was so much difference. You know I was really against paparazzi and they were really for it, and I think as I grew up and my ideals changed I was able to weed out a little more of that,

because it is so important to me to protect their privacy, even if I'm not doing it. Just-- Their privacy in general is very important, and so I think once I found people who were of a like mind and could discuss, you know, discuss an episode or discuss a character or a choice instead of screaming and yelling and throwing god knows what at the conversation. I-- I try to make as logical a choice about that as possible, um... Like I have really good friends who are huge Victoria fans, and who understand that her choices are because of what's happened in the past and things, and that it's not always her fault, she just goes about-- You know she goes about things the wrong way a lot of the time, but who can also understand that Emily does the same thing.

Ysabel: I think that's why I'm loving this season, because they're playing with-- Especially Nolan, you know he's very much the moral compass for Emily isn't he. It's like they're playing with the concept of revenge a lot more now.

Emily: Yep, yep. And it's not just Emily's revenge anymore, and that was the big thing at the end of the last season after Conrad died, and fans were like well David's alive, what was the point of all of this? Why should we continue to-- To go along, because now everything we know has been totally ruined? And it's like well... Fans seem to forget that it's a story about revenge. It's not necessarily just Emily's revenge, it's also Victoria's, and they forget that. So it's always really interesting when you see something like that with Nolan, because it's just a really harsh reminder that it's not always about Emily all the time.

[...]

Ysabel: And when you were saying that you're friends with some of the other people who run fan pages, so... What about the people in your life who aren't fans, do they know that you run fan pages? How much do they know?

Emily: Um... My family do know that I'm doing it because I do actually work within the company as a day job, I do work within the Walt Disney Company. [...] So... I-- It's separate, but it's still very mixed and I actually find that it helps me do my day job better. Um... because it's an information-based job. I need to know what's going on at all times so it helps me convey, you know, what's coming up next or what to look for during certain dates or whatnot. Many of my real friends do know what I do, like we do big conventions and stuff here so-- Every now and then someone will be a guest who I do have a site on, so they'll know-- My friends will know that if I disappear at the convention or whatever it's because I'm doing something else, like I'm working or... Like when I go to San Diego, as much as it is to catch up with friends and people I haven't seen for a year, it's also work. Like I'm working.

Ysabel: Do you think they like get it though? There's no other way of saying it really.

Emily: \*Sighs\*... Some of them don't, and they do-- They do ask. Like I'm really fortunate where the friends who do care enough to wonder, they ask. And they're like well can you explain this to me a little bit? Like when we go for dinner, they'll be like what are you working on? Can you explain any of this? So they're really really good about it for the most part. Like some of them have even-- If they're watching a show that I'm covering and they didn't realise that was me, then they follow and then they jump in knowing that they're talking to me, but trying to keep it under wraps and stuff. So I've been really lucky in that respect, and my younger sister is into fandom herself, and when she's trying to find new shows to watch or new fandoms she might enjoy, she's like-- You know have you heard good things about this fandom? Do you know if they're super crazy fans? Like I don't-- I hate using that word, but sometimes it is so perfect. Some fans are super over the top, and so I can be like well from what I know based on my network, this is how it sits, so just go in with an open mind kind of thing. So that's really nice. But I learned through my network-- I hosted a website that's just fansites, that's all it is, so everyone in that network has one or thirty fansites. So we all work with each other and we all chat and discuss and figure out what we're working on, and if there's something we can be doing better. So we all learn from each other and I think some of my

friends who-- Like we're all in our twenties, and some of them who were really like rabid fans who didn't understand how difficult it is sometimes for the actor to be on Twitter or the backlash or whatever, and when I sit and I explain it, they come out with a more positive view. So that's really nice!

Ysabel: So when you talk about the friends of yours who kind of don't get it, what-- What do you get from them? What kind of comments?

Emily: Um... They think-- Uh some of them just think that I'm really crazily obsessed with Hollywood or that, you know... Some of them have been like are you a creepy stalker kind of person? Because you know these people and you're friends with them? And just like really basic things, like stereotypes. I mean for the most part, even people who don't get it are fairly like, well it makes you happy you know, you're getting recognition for it or whatever. Good for you. It's been-- It's been fairly positive. I mean I have two sets of parents, so one gets it quite a bit and they know it's a position I want to look at in the future and whatnot, and one doesn't get it because I spend so much time devoted to it. She's like well why do you do this? She watches shows too on Sunday night, so when it's time for *Revenge* I-- Like everything stops. I have to move over, I have to get everything set up and I'm incommunicato for that hour because I'm just doing everything, and she's like why do you do this? They don't pay you and you're making me miss *The Walking Dead*, and like all of these other things. But it's been fairly supportive and I've been really lucky with that. Even with the fans who do like to um... To fight and to bash and to whatnot with each other, I don't know why they listen to me, but they do! I mean if they say something and I'm like hey, you know, can you guys knock it off? That's not cool. Or when I sit and I take the time to explain, you know, what I think or my theories or whatnot, they're all really respectful of it. They do listen because of the power that I guess I've achieved in the fandom because of-- Because my ways of doing things or whatnot. Like they respect the work that I'm doing and so they listen, so...

Ysabel: Yeah. It was interesting as well that you said, you know, crazy fans and then you immediately said I don't like using that term. But what do you think stereotypes of fans are?

Emily: I-- Actually, and I hate-- I do hate to say it, but you know with Twitter and with social media, it has greatened the power of fandom, but it has also made it a very very aggressive... \*Sigh\* I don't know.

Ysabel: Why do you think it's become that way?

Emily: Instant gratification for the most part. Instant access to the people they love, and to the shows they wanna talk about. Um... But it also-- Because of the power of the Internet and the anonymous button, it gives them the power to say what they want without thinking about, you know, a repercussion. You know... I mean it connects people from all over the world, so it gives them the power to chat and to create groups and whatnot, and it is crazy I mean-- Eighty per cent of the fans that I meet are wonderful wonderful people. They come from all different countries and they're all different ages, and they're there just because they love the show or they love the actor. And then the other twenty per cent is the really dark, underground fandom that nobody wants to think about because they're like, well it can't possibly be that bad. And then you go well, it actually is. You sit and you show them, and they're like holy shit what am I looking at? \*Laughs\*. I can't believe some of the things that fans will do, and every fandom without fail has some tiny corner that's like that, but some fandoms are very much defined by the negative points of the fans. They're defined by that twenty per cent that is over the top.

Ysabel: And which fandoms are defined by the twenty per cent?

Emily: Um... *Sherlock*. BBC's *Sherlock*. Uh... *Supernatural*, *The Vampire Diaries*. *Reign* is very much becoming that way. I'm behind on *Reign* but I caught-- I don't know if you caught all the backlash from the last episode, but that was very over the top. There were death threats and you know rape threats or whatever being sent to the actors, and to supporters of the actors



and the writers and whatnot. Um... But *Sherlock*... *Doctor Who* is surprisingly dark in some places! Like it's fifty-fifty for *Doctor Who*. But yeah *Sherlock*, *Supernatural* and *The Vampire Diaries* are probably my three big ones to avoid. *Once Upon a Time* is increasing-- Is right underneath *Supernatural* I think on that list. It's becoming increasingly aggressive and it is very much driven by the ships in it, to the point where they are threatening actors and they are threatening writers and you know, all of that. So I don't-- Like I stopped watching *Once Upon a Time* during year one, and it wasn't because of the fans of that time or anything, it was just that I didn't have time. It was a creative decision for me. I don't regret that choice now because I know what it's like now and I've seen it progress through the years. It has increasingly gotten worse and worse, and I'm really glad that I made that choice because I don't have the patience to deal with that anymore \*laughs\*. I am-- I am really patient you know with the fans and whatnot, and I do spend a lot of time thinking out my answers when I choose to answer. Um... I don't always, and I don't always choose to answer people bringing me ships wars, or people wanting to know who I think Emily should be with or why, and why Emily is doing certain things. Those ones I occasionally will answer, but it takes an hour or two to figure it out and try and word it properly so that the message gets across. Um... But other than that, I don't have the patience to deal with fans fighting each other and whatnot, and you know name-calling. And I have zero tolerance for fans bashing each other and sending threats to crew and threats to-- Like after Conrad died, I learned very quickly a lot of-- The only reason they liked the show or they were watching was because of the actor, and it happens. It happens in every fandom. But after Conrad died, the Convict fans - that's the-- It was a ship - were sending threats to the writers and saying really terrible things because they killed Conrad, totally forgetting that Victoria was alive and well. I was like, there's one half of the ship still here! I'm like, what are you doing? \*Laughs\*. They seem to forget that there's another piece and that it's not just that one person. Um... And yeah, so it was just unbelievable! And I sent the people who were getting bashed a message. I sent each of them a message just saying I am so sorry, like... This-- You know. They know that it doesn't represent the fandom and that I don't have to apologise.

Ysabel: Did you feel responsible? Like responsible enough to say that.

Emily: \*Sigh\*. Yes, for some of it. For certain ones. Like... Because I-- I personally don't think Emily should be with anybody. Emily is a very-- A solitary person, and I'm ok if she never gets the happy ending. She's like-- She's never-- I've resigned myself to the fact that Emily is never going to have a happily ever after, like it's just not realistic for her or for that character's development. [...] I find that I'm a little more-- I feel more responsible when it's a ship or a character that I'm a part of, like I really love David and Victoria as a couple and I always have, like even from season one. [...] But I'm still very very cautious about speaking about it or saying that I have a favourite. [...] I try to-- I think I keep it to myself more for the sake of my sanity, because shippers in every fandom usually go towards the more zealous stage. I-- I don't find as many calm shippers \*laughs\* anymore. As a kid, I really was one of the zealous shippers. But certain things-- With my Victoria page, I've said like I'm not a Convict fan but here are my reasons why, and I try to keep them based off of the show and based off what we've been told. I try to keep it really objective. Um... And I don't sit and I don't join in when people are like, well... You know I don't join in with the bashing. I'm actually like, well that's not ok. We're all-- It's all centred around a specific character that we love, you know why do we have to fight and whatnot? But it's very rare that I will actually jump in and say something. It has to really bug me or-- Like someone has to be attacking me personally or whatnot where I feel like I have to justify it otherwise I won't.

Ysabel: So it's very objective then, it's very...

Emily: Yeah, yeah, and I used to be-- I couldn't keep it objective when I was younger. But I learned from it and I'm a little bit more understanding and tolerant now. I can't imagine going back to that, and I see all these new fans who come in who are like twelve and thirteen and they're not really sure yet, and they're getting attacked because of their views and they don't know how to convey what they're trying to say. So then I'm like, well... I have to try to remember how I would have dealt with it, or try and find a common ground to-- To help, you

know... Kind of thing. And sometimes I miss being able to not be objective, and to have silly discussions!

Ysabel: Do you ever do that \*laughs\*? Do you ever go on other fan sites or make a page so that you can be you?

Emily: \*Laughs\*. I do have my own-- I try to keep my own personal pages where I sit and I do that, and then I can just sit and get everything off my chest. Um... Because I don't always-- I usually do say what I'm feeling but I always justify it, whereas when I'm with my friends or chatting online or whatever outside of the sites and whatnot then we can sit and goof off. So it's a nice balance. But for the most part I don't do that because I feel guilty for doing it, because I've reached a point where it's not just for fun. Like it's not just fun, it's fifty-fifty. And I have to be really careful. Well I don't have to be, but I made the choice to be very careful because I-- I don't wanna alienate anybody. Everybody is welcome to my website, it's visited by people all over the world and by people with different languages and different backgrounds and stuff. So when I do respond, it-- Like some people can whip up a response in five minutes, and with Twitter it's really easy to do but I don't do the in-depth things on Twitter. It would take me, you know, fifty to a hundred individual tweets to do it. Um... So then I do have to take the time and think it all out before I say it, because I don't want it to be taken the wrong way. Some fans criticise me for having really long responses, but then when I don't respond really long, they get upset or they don't understand. So I'm always really careful, for the most part. Even with the cast and with the crew, like until we've reached a point when the relationship has changed and we're a bit more buddy buddy or whatever, I'm still very like cautious and just aware. I don't want to step on their boundaries and they don't want to step on mine. So it works.

Ysabel: So if someone was to offend you or criticise you for whatever reason, does it affect you?

Emily: It did when I was younger. I think now-- I'm comfortable enough with the work that I'm doing, especially with *Revenge*, because of how cemented I am within that fandom. Even-- You know, being criticised or whatnot is not going to affect me, because it's such a small per cent of the positive and I have to remember that-- Like I know a lot of-- I mean some of my friends, especially with *The Vampire Diaries* and whatnot deal with a lot of backlash. You know just because their team won the ship, or won this or won that, and um... But I see how upset that they get, and I just have to remember that-- You know, fan opinions are important but when it starts to affect the work that I'm doing, that's when I need to step back. Because I'm not being paid for this! Like I'm doing it for fun, I'm doing it because I love the show and I love the cast and I love the crew and they're all-- In their own way, they're all important to me and they've shown that the work that I'm doing - and by proxy me - is important to them. So that's what I have to try and remember. [...]

Ysabel: I've got one more question here that I'd quite like to ask you actually. We sort of touched on it earlier, but I wondered how you access your fan page? Like you said that you do kind of thirty to forty hours combined per week, so does that mean you carry around a smartphone, a laptop, a tablet?

Emily: Um... A lot of the base news and whatnot, if it's coming from like TV Line and I'm posting it on the site, I have to do it from my computer. But I mean I-- I have my phone, I have an iPhone with me and it's glued to me, even at work. Even though it's not supposed to be with me at work, it's glued to me so I can do all my tweeting through that. A lot of it-- Because I'm out and about a lot during the day, I have to wait until I get home. But I can always call or text one of my network friends and say hey, can you post this real quick? So I can sometimes-- During the really busy months, if I get a text at say three in the morning saying hey, there's something going on, I will get out of bed to go deal with it because it's like... I have to go deal with it. And even when I'm at Comic-Con, my phone does not leave my person because it is constantly-- Something is constantly going on that has to be tweeted or posted about or whatnot. So I do have a laptop, I have an iPad, I have all of it going. When I was doing my live-tweeting

for um... I did Charlotte as well as Emily, so now that Charlotte's in rehab I have a bit of a-- It's just Emily at night now. But I had my laptop and my desktop set up next to each other, and I would be jumping back and forth between the two of them at the same time. So when I do *Shield*, I have three profiles I have to do at the same time.

Ysabel: How do you do that?

Emily: I have to pause. Like if the characters are speaking in the same scene, sometimes I have to pause and do a rewind. I also tweet live, so that's always been fun. Especially when Emily was doing the voiceovers in the beginning, because sometimes they were hard to catch so you'd have to pause and go back. But I do ninety per cent of my tweeting live. Um... Usually I only do one coast. Usually it's east coast, just because when I was covering five shows it was easier to get them all earlier and do the other ones during west, but um... Now it's just whenever. And if my computers aren't working then I just do it on my iPad, or I try to do it on my iPad. Um... Every now and then I've had to bow out of a tweeting session, just because my computer wasn't working or whatnot. But I always try and catch it-- If I miss east coast I always try to catch west coast kind of thing. I'm always connected, always connected.

Ysabel: And I just have one more very quick question. As opposed to the kind of the official take on the audience and demographics of the shows, I wondered, in your words, how you would describe the audience?

Emily: Sure! That's a tough one. For *Revenge*, ooh... The majority of people seem to be between twenty-four and thirty-six, for the most part. Um... Mostly women, but I am seeing quite a few more men come out, which is nice. Most of the ones who interact I believe are heterosexual, mostly because of who they're shipping or the way they're speaking. But I am seeing quite a few more gays and lesbians coming out to interact, and to tweet and to get involved with the-- The charities and whatnot that are being supported by the show, so that's nice.

[...]

**End of interview.**

**Appendix F: Social Media Observation Guide**

<b>Series title:</b>
<b>Platform:</b>
<b>Date(s) of observation:</b>
<b>Time(s) of observation:</b>
<b>Topic of broader discussion:</b>
<b>Frequency of participants' comments:</b>
<b>Content of comment(s):</b> (Paraphrased)
<b>Topic of comment(s):</b>
<b>Media used:</b> (text/images/video/link/audio/etc)
<b>Description of media:</b> (if used)
<b>Type of comment:</b> (initial/response?)
<b>If initial:</b> (argument/assertion?)
<b>If response:</b> (argument/assertion?)

## Appendix G: Sample Participant Recruitment Message

Hello there,

I hope this message finds you well ☺

I'm currently a PhD student at the University of Leeds, England, and am writing my dissertation about [*Pretty Little Liars/Revenge/The Vampire Diaries*] fandom. So far, I've been interviewing [*Pretty Little Liars/Revenge/The Vampire Diaries*] fans about their experiences of fandom, what it's like to run a fan account, and about their views on the show. One of the fans I've interviewed, [fan name], suggested that I talk to you and I'd absolutely love to interview you for my project. It would also be good to (anonymously) include your fan account as a case study in my research.

As a (huge) thank you for letting me work with you, I'd be very happy to type the transcript up and send it back to you, maybe for you to use in a future post. You must be really busy, so the interview would take place whenever you wanted it to, and would also be conducted through Skype audio or video. Please know that all of my respondents will remain completely anonymous, and my research has had full clearance from my University's ethics department.

Please let me know if this sounds like something you'd be interested in, or if you have any questions!

Yours,  
Ysabel Gerrard