

MARKETING POST-FEMINISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA:  
FAN IDENTIFICATION AND FASHION ON *PRETTY LITTLE LIARS*

by

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ABSTRACT

MARKETING POST-FEMINISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA:  
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Under the Supervision of Professor Elana Levine

Television shows targeted to a young, female audience often depict post-feminist themes such as self-sexualization, self-branding, consumerism, female empowerment through the body, and the “good” girl. This thesis focuses on the ABC Family hit series *Pretty Little Liars* as an example of the ways in which television shows promote these post-feminist ideologies. I argue that as the network has branded itself as the place for millennial programming; it has used digital platforms to make *Pretty Little Liars* a one-stop-shop for young women to learn about beauty and femininity. Relatedly, this project analyzes the ways in which young women construct their identities and online self-brands around the female characters on *Pretty Little Liars* and how, through the stars and costuming especially, the show inspires audiences both as a cultural phenomenon and an object of consumption.

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## Chapter 1, Introduction

While filming season one, episode three of ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars*, costume designer Mandi Line looked at Lucy Hale, who plays Aria Montgomery, and felt there was something missing from her ensemble. Before cameras rolled, Line quickly plucked an enormous, long feather earring from her own ear and gave it to Hale.<sup>1</sup> After the show aired, fans immediately took to Twitter saying things like, "WOAH! where can you buy one?!?!?!?", "where do u get it??? I want one so bad!!!", and "aria's huge feather earring is so cool like damn". That instance marked the moment *Pretty Little Liars* became a fashion and social media frenzy.

*Pretty Little Liars* is an ideal example of the merging of fashion, social media, and girls' and young women's popular culture in recent years. At the time of writing, the show was in its fourth season. In its summer session, it aired for twelve weeks from June 11, 2013 to August 27, 2013.<sup>2</sup> In those twelve weeks, *Pretty Little Liars* was ranked TV's number one telecast every week in the 8:00pm to 9:00pm time slot with women ages 18-34, and females age 12-34.<sup>3</sup> The summer 2013 finale of *Pretty Little Liars* was the "most social series episode in television history, amassing nearly 1.9 million tweets by 637,000 unique tweeters, spiking at over 70,000 tweets in the show's final minute."<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Heather and Jessica, "Pretty Little Liars: The GFY Interview," Go Fug Yourself. January 3, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Pretty Little Liars." *International Movie Database*. Accessed on December 13, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "ABC Family's 'Pretty Little Liars' Summer Finale Becomes #1 'Most Tweeted' TV Series Telecast Ever with Nearly 1.9 million Tweets." *The Futon Critic*. Accessed on December 13, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Danielle Mullin, "Content Marketing for the Second Screen and Social," Presented at the 2013 iMedia Entertainment Summit. <http://www.imediaconnection.com/summits/coverage/35105.asp>

popularity of *Pretty Little Liars* and its social media presence with fans mark it as a particularly important cultural product for analysis.

The producers and creators of *Pretty Little Liars* are intensely aware of the prominence clothing has to the characters and to the show itself. Costume designer Mandi Line emphasizes the importance of wardrobe, saying that people will watch the show simply for the clothes and accessories if it is done such that the clothes represent a “fifth character.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Line recently released a *Pretty Little Liars* inspired fashion line with Aéropostale, a national retail chain that targets 14 to 17 year old girls.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, *Pretty Little Liars* and its costuming are prime examples of female identity construction as centered around the characters, clothes, and personal style more generally.

In this thesis, I analyze identity construction within a post-feminist media culture around female characters on TV and how, through the stars and costuming especially, programs inspire audiences both as cultural phenomena and objects of consumption. Post-feminist themes such as self-sexualization, self-branding, consumerism, female empowerment through the body, and the “good” girl pervade shows targeted to a young, female audience within a neo-liberal, individualized, equal-playing-field society. One major way in which such programs offer their female viewers a site for post-feminist identity construction is through the costuming of characters, as *Pretty Little Liars* demonstrates. The characters’ costumes offer fans images through which they can create their own self-brands, hailing one position of femininity over the others offered. In

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<sup>5</sup> Marissa Meltzer, “Costume Designers for TV Have Big Impact On Fashion,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Aéropostale, “Investor Relations,” *Aéropostale*. Accessed on January 13, 2014.

addition, programs, the stars, and on screen wardrobes become brands themselves that inspire the teenage female market both as cultural products and objects of consumption. Through the Internet and on television, post-feminist themes continue to infiltrate teenage girl culture, providing complex messages of identification.

In this project, I look at *Pretty Little Liars* as an example of this post-feminist media and consumer culture. I differentiate between how the industry uses social media to engage with the audience and how fans use social media to engage with the show and the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. I analyze ABC Family's marketing strategy and argue that it has set an example of a new way of marketing teen television. The network has revolutionized the branding of television by using social media to mark itself as a media-savvy cable television network targeting the female, millennial demographic, women born between 1977 and 1996.<sup>7</sup> I discuss how ABC Family has gained success as a prominent outlet for the teen television genre of programming through its various social media strategies, and how the network maintains a following during the off-season for the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. Finally, I analyze the ways ABC Family promotes post-feminist ideologies through its social media platforms, teaching young women the importance of a highly feminized body and style.

Beyond ABC Family's marketing strategy, I discuss *Pretty Little Liars* from the fans' perspective. I argue that the core four female characters, their costumes, and their "real life" personalities, understood through social media, are important sites of identification for girls and young women toward a particular, narrow type of femininity. I

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Liesse. "Millennial Appeal." Ad Age. July 9, 2007. Accessed July 3, 2014. [http://brandedcontent.adage.com/pdf/ABC\\_Family\\_Meet\\_The\\_Millennials.pdf](http://brandedcontent.adage.com/pdf/ABC_Family_Meet_The_Millennials.pdf)

work to understand both the problematic and empowering ways in which fans use the characters and the costuming to understand their own identities, or personal brands, in a neo-liberal, post-feminist context. I also write about the ways in which fans negotiate their own feminine identities online in relation to other types of feminine identities through personal style choices and fandom.

I look at popular and trade press texts about social media engagement and millennials, ABC Family, *Pretty Little Liars*, and Line's fashion line with Aéropostale to understand the strategies and motivations of these media players and their impact on the resulting texts. Also, I use online teen magazine websites like *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* to recognize how these digital magazines and *Pretty Little Liars* cross promote each other and offer narrow versions of popular femininity to their young, female readers.

I then look at fan engagement with the show on social media and through blog posts, understanding how fashion on *Pretty Little Liars* is a site of aspiration toward certain types of femininity and toward the characters themselves. Social media and blogs offer suggestions on how viewers can purchase the same clothes or clothes of a similar style, directly adding to viewers' identification with a particular kind of femininity, the gothic artist, book-worm, girly-girl, or athlete, as represented on the show. I analyze blog comments and posts from fans on social media to learn fans' thoughts on the show, the characters, fashion, and how their own identities are tied into the characters and the stars that play them.

To summarize, I look at ways in which fans identify with the characters on *Pretty Little Liars* through fashion on social media, and how the network uses social media as a

way to connect and engage its core audience in a new, digital age. I analyze how the fans use fashion and the characters' different styles to create their own self-brands, and adhere to the post-feminist ideologies provided to them through their favorite television show. I argue that through its use of social media, ABC Family promotes post-feminist ideologies for the millennial target demographic and that fans of *Pretty Little Liars* adhere to these standards based on their adoption of a highly feminized identity online.

### **Literature Review**

There are four different bodies of scholarship important to this project. The work on post-feminism and post-feminist girl culture explains the context within which *Pretty Little Liars* offers various types of femininity for identification to fans in addition to the image of what a successful, “good” girl in contemporary American society looks like. Within post-feminist culture, young women are encouraged to create a self-brand and, through the self-brand, achieve “good girl” status within society. I argue that fans can use *Pretty Little Liars* to maintain their self-brands around the characters on the show. Next, the literature on fandom and fan culture gives meaning to the work fans of *Pretty Little Liars* do in order to show their appreciation of, and identification with, the show. Finally, scholarship on teen television situates ABC Family's success as a network in a historical context, rising in popularity after the WB. It defines teen television, its characteristics, and its appeal to a young audience. What follows is a detailed overview of this literature.

### **Post-feminism and Girl Culture**

The literature on post-feminism and post-feminist culture encompasses a few similar themes. Many of them Rosalind Gill outlines in her journal article, “Postfeminist

Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility” where she works to define post-feminism. Among other things, she highlights a woman’s empowerment through her body, the importance of sexual self-subjectification, and consumerism as crucial aspects of post-feminism.<sup>8</sup> Post-feminism, most authors write, works within the context of a neo-liberal society. Because of political and institutional changes in the 1980s, neo-liberalism works under the assumption that all people are equal in society. It focuses on, and emphasizes, the importance of individual accomplishments, not taking into account the various social, political, and cultural factors that make up a person’s place in society, because the assumption is that equality has been achieved. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, Anita Harris, and others have pointed to neo-liberalism as an outlet for post-feminist themes to work themselves out. Other scholars add the notions of choice, individual entrepreneurship, and self-branding as themes that pervade both post-feminist and neo-liberal ideologies as a way to place the woman as the singular force for her success or failure.

Anita Harris writes that the 21st century “future girl” is the perfect symbol for this neo-liberal, post-feminist culture because she is seen as most able to deal with the new challenges and expectations of the times. This is, in part, because of changes in educational and employment opportunities since the second wave feminist movement, and also because ideas of individual responsibility, “dovetail with broad feminist notions

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<sup>8</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (2007): 147-166.

about opportunities for young women.”<sup>9</sup> The intersection of the “future girl”, post-feminism, and neo-liberalism is where my research focuses.

For Harris, the future girl is separated into two categories, the “can do” girl and the “at risk” girl, which can also be understood as the good girl and bad girl, respectively. Young women grapple with the hail of these contradictory subjectivities regularly. Notions about how they should look, act, and behave come from the media, their peers, their family, and themselves, and are often conditioned to walk the thin line between good and bad. She must be good, girlish, feminine, and innocent, but not a prude or a “goodie two-shoes” and she must also be bad or be sexy but not a “slut” or a “ho.”<sup>10</sup>

The “can do” girl has the world at her feet and is expected to succeed. She has exceptional career goals and a strong consumer lifestyle. She is confident; she has nothing to fear, is unique, able to reinvent herself, and feels secure both in herself and in the fact that she will succeed.<sup>11</sup> She is the girl next door; she does not question patriarchy, is gracious, and is traditionally feminine in looks and physique.<sup>12</sup> Good choices, ambition, and effort are the only components responsible for the success that separates “can do” girls from bad girls.<sup>13</sup>

The bad girl comes in various incarnations. She is generally of an ethnic minority and lives in poverty, where drugs and crime are everywhere. The “at risk” category is

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<sup>9</sup> Anita Harris. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Gigi Durham. *The Lolita Effect*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Harris. *Future Girl*, 16-24.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser and Inna Arzumanova, “Creative Authorship: Self-Actualizing Individuals and the self brand,” in *Media Authorship*, eds. Cynthia Chris and David A. Gerstner, New York: Routledge, 2013, 171.

<sup>13</sup> Harris. *Future Girl*, 26-27.

positioned such that the girls within the category are seen as having inherited a bad attitude, laziness, and poor family practices.<sup>14</sup> The myth of the bad girl is also seductive, sexy, and dangerous.<sup>15</sup> She challenges authority and, in a certain respect, is cool because she does not always play by the rules.<sup>16</sup>

My research expands on this binary by giving a contemporary example of what the “good” girl looks like and what real young women face in constructing their own identities. The core four characters on *Pretty Little Liars* absolutely fall into the “can do” category but they walk the good girl/bad girl line. The setting of the show is in a fictional, upper-middle class suburb of Philadelphia called Rosewood. The girls’ wealth is depicted by their large homes, expensive cars, and their costuming. Each girl rarely, if ever, repeats an outfit, and has her own unique, distinct style. This shows both that her disposable income is enough such that she does not wear the same thing twice, and also that she is an individual, even within her friend group. In addition, the girls are often depicted in school, symbolizing their studious nature, as they are follow-the-rules kinds of girls. Each girl offers a typical, traditional representation of femininity. While they are positioned as unique and different, they are petite, have long, curled hair, wear a fair amount of make up, and dress in stylish, feminine clothes like skirts or dresses. Additionally, they each represent typical character tropes such as the artist, “girly” girl, athlete, and bookworm.

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<sup>14</sup> Harris. *Future Girl*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Durham, *The Lolita Effect*, 72-75.

<sup>16</sup> Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, New York: Scribner, 2005, 47-48.

The core four characters walk the bad girl line in their portrayals of coolness. Juliet Schor identifies coolness in a few ways. First, cool is social exclusivity because it demonstrates a status hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, if things are taboo, dangerous, risky, or edgy, they are cool.<sup>18</sup> The core four can be understood as cool for a few reasons. First, they are constantly undermining parental authority, lying, and getting themselves into dangerous situations. In addition, the show can be read as sexually risky and edgy. While *Pretty Little Liars* is not necessarily sexually explicit, one character, Aria, has an inappropriate, intimate relationship with her English teacher. Also, Emily's homosexuality can be seen as risky or edgy in that it is possible that it makes some people uncomfortable. By not filming sexually explicit scenes, though, the show can get away with showing these taboo relationships comfortably and safely for viewers. In this sense, the core four characters perfectly embody both "good" and "bad" in various ways, making them particularly ripe for analysis of this dichotomy.

The next themes running through the literature on post-feminism are the discourses of girl power and sisterhood, in which girls with girl power are framed as individualist, unique, and successful. Harris posits that, "[T]he benchmark for achieving a successful identity is no longer adherence to a set of normative characteristics, but instead a capacity for self-invention."<sup>19</sup> The characters on *Pretty Little Liars* can be read as agents of girl power in a few ways. First, they are each unique in their own way, and they are positioned as sisters. Only one of the four actually has a sister. She is older, does not

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Anita Harris. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Routledge, 2004,) 6.

live at home, and is vilified from the first episode. The girls are framed as unique, but when they are together, they are within their own “family” and become complete. So, each girl is a unique component of the good girl and, seen as a whole, the four put together are the ultimate good, “can do” girl, strengthening the notion of girl power by banding together. The “unique” feminine identities offered are still a narrow, traditional way to understand women. Each is successful both in school and in romantic life. Because any and every other type of female is essentially excluded on the show, viewers can understand that these are the only socially acceptable ways to be female and still participate in society as a good girl.

Encompassed within the next theme, a woman’s individual power through her body, is the idea that youthful “hotness,” perfect looks and a perfect body, are a young woman’s ultimate goals and that a woman’s empowerment comes through a performed sexual identity.<sup>20</sup> Femininity within a post-feminist society is decided, then, through the physical body, not the spoken interpellation of a feminine position.<sup>21</sup> This power through the body is a way for women to be visible in society. The centrality of fashion on *Pretty Little Liars* positions the female characters’ bodies as the primary site of femininity and aspiration. In this way, young women can create their self-brands online to gain power and visibility within society. Additionally, in order to brand themselves as feminine and manage their brands, young women must purchase things to mark their femininity. This highlights both women’s power through the body and power through consumption practices. She gains power through the purchase of feminine goods. Relatedly, the

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<sup>20</sup> Gigi Durham, *The Lolita Effect*, 64-70.

<sup>21</sup> Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, “Creative Authorship,” 167-168.

emphasis on girls' purchasing power through consumption "suggests that without these commodities a girl is not powerful, thus making Girl Power seem like the possession of only those girls who can afford these products."<sup>22</sup>

### **Self-Branding**

The notions of self-invention and performed identity are both a part of the good girl's identity and the broader notion of the self as brand within post-feminist culture. The branded self is a particular form of labor. Allison Hearn defines it as a "self-conscious construction . . . through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries."<sup>23</sup>

Industries and institutions work to shape young people, their self-brands, and their "conduct through perpetual every-day observation . . . to elicit self-monitoring in youth themselves."<sup>24</sup> Yet this encouraged display of the unique, self-policed identity is actually an obligation framed as a freedom for youth, like using a social media account to engage with friends online.<sup>25</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that the internet has opened up a large space for girls to create self-brands for the display of others.<sup>26</sup> Post-feminist authorship, she writes, is the use of digital media to self-brand and create an online identity.<sup>27</sup> ABC Family aids in this post-feminist online authorship for young women and fans of *Pretty*

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<sup>22</sup> Jessica Taft. "Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance." *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris. (New York: Routledge, 2004,) 75.

<sup>23</sup> Hearn, Allison, "'Meat, Mask, Burden': Probing the contours of the branded 'self'," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8 (2008): 198.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, *Future Girl*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>27</sup> Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, "Creative Authorship," 165.

*Little Liars* by encouraging them to post reaction photos and interact in other ways with the show on social media outlets like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Jessica Ringrose writes that girls have to make “complex” choices about how to construct a digital identity and are “under pressure to visually display and perform a new ‘compulsory’ ‘disciplinary technology of sexy’ in digital environments.”<sup>28</sup> Young women are able to hail a sexual identity as one part of their self-brands on the internet. Girls also make complex choices about their performed sexual identities in person, though, and one dominant way to make a statement about sexual identity is through clothing choices.

My research uses this concept of the self-branded identity to understand how the costuming and the show help young women maintain their online identities, particularly by using Instagram as a space to share their outfits with other fans and Line herself.

Television shows provide a template for what the appropriate female brand should look like through “performance, communicat[ion] and image[s].”<sup>29</sup> In this way, youth, particularly young females, are encouraged to invent and display their uniqueness for the scrutiny of others, and self-police through the careful hailing of different identities at different times, either in person or online based on the images they see on TV. The costuming on *Pretty Little Liars* is a way for young women to read each character’s identity and emulate her own identity through a similar style, complicating her self-brand.

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<sup>28</sup>Jessica Ringrose. “Are You Sexy, Flirty, or a Slut? Exploring ‘Sexualization’ and How Teen Girls Perform/Negotiate Digital Sexual Identity on Social Networking Sites.” In *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 100-101.

<sup>29</sup> Hearn, “Meat, Mask, Burden,” 207.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller works to explain fashion and dress as a person's extension of herself.<sup>30</sup> To understand that, he looks at how women use clothes as an actual, physical part of themselves, in addition to how they use style to individualize their personalities, using it not only as a form of self-expression, but also to create who they are. Miller's study usefully defends fashion as a way to construct identity rather than seeing fashion as a superfluous, meaningless practice, however the feminized practice of fashion still relies on a patriarchal understanding of what is feminine, beautiful, and in style. The creation of self through clothing choices that Miller explicates, coupled with Banet-Weiser's girl power through self-brand, parallels young women's identity construction through consumerist practices within the post-feminist, neo-liberal society.

### **Fandom**

In addition to fashion and style choices, young women can build their self-brands through identification with cultural media products, like television. Henry Jenkins, Mark Duffett, and Matthew Hills write about fandom as various communities that form around specific cultural or media products. Fans over the years have been stereotyped into different categories such as the stalker, nerdy geek, or the hyper-sexualized groupie.<sup>31</sup> In reality, fans "are active producers and manipulators of meaning."<sup>32</sup> Fans often come from a marginal position in society; they do not have access to or influence over the culture industry: they depend on the culture industry for entertainment, yet they exercise agency

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Miller, "Why Clothing is not Superficial," in *Stuff* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), 2009, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge), 1992, 13-15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

over cultural products by manipulating and interpreting the texts in their own ways.<sup>33</sup>

Duffett quotes Jenkins in saying that a person becomes a fan not only through viewing programs, “but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about program content with friends, [and] by joining a ‘community’ of other fans who share common interests.”<sup>34</sup> Fans are active consumers and participants in the culture surrounding their favorite shows, creating their own texts like slash or fan fiction out of the existing product.

Each author makes clear that fans typically work to share texts rather than purchase them from the industry. In this way, they express their agency and help others enjoy texts without the industry’s financial gain. The fan, however, is considered to be the ideal consumer because of her loyalty and devotion to both the industry and her object of fandom.<sup>35</sup> A notable difference in fans of *Pretty Little Liars* is that ABC Family, Mandi Line, and Aéropostale have managed to capitalize on the fans intense adoration of the characters through the clothing line. In this sense, fans not only consume *Pretty Little Liars* by participating in the fan culture online, but also through an economic, monetary exchange with the industry. My research expands on the concept of the self-brand within fan culture, analyzing how fans use the clothes from the Aéropostale line to create their self-brands for others as a fan of *Pretty Little Liars*.

New technologies like the Internet and social media have intensified fan identification and made it more accessible and visible to the masses. *Pretty Little Liars*’

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic) 2013, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew Hills. *Fan Cultures*, (London: Routledge) 2002, 29.

social media accounts have engaged viewers during and after the TV season as a place where fans can identify with the characters, the show, and the fashion. There is a fair amount of literature on fan identification on social media. Melissa Click, Hyunji Lee and Holly Wilson Holiday describe the changing dynamic between fans and celebrities through the use of social media, arguing that social media enhance the identification fans have toward celebrities.<sup>36</sup> They argue that fans develop para-social, imaginary relationships with celebrities that act as real, social relationships. John Caughy's work says that fans often describe their relationships with celebrities by speaking of them as a "friend," "older sister," "father figure," "guide," or "mentor."<sup>37</sup>

The scholars also write about the ways celebrities use social media, saying that sites work to "create a sense of intimacy" with fans "by sharing what appears to be personal information."<sup>38</sup> The *Pretty Little Liars* fan pages on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram often post pictures, memes, and promote other activities of the core four characters. Also, through social media, fans can follow the real celebrities, Lucy Hale (Aria), Ashley Benson (Hanna), Troian Bellisario (Spencer), and Shay Mitchell (Emily) to learn about their lives apart from the show.

Social media work as spaces where fans can enhance their "viewing experiences" by live-tweeting with other fans during the time of the show, re-living that week's episode, and discussing theories and plot lines. A loyal fan base and highly participatory

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<sup>36</sup> Melissa Click, Hyunji Lee, and Holly Wilson Holladay. "Making Monsters: Lady GaGa, Fan Identification, and Social Media." *Popular Music and Society* 36 (2013), 366.

<sup>37</sup> John Caughy, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1984, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Click et al. "Making Monsters," 366.

fans give a show greater cultural significance.<sup>39</sup> Online communication not only benefits the fans by giving them a deeper connection to the show and the fan community, but it profits the industry in that fans create “user generated content,” keeping the show within the dominant discourse of popular culture in this particular moment.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the user-generated content via social media that expresses viewers’ commitment to the show, blogs and Line’s fashion line act as outlets and cultural symbols of fashion, where fans can learn how to take on the characters’ identities.

Using fashion, style, and technology “as constitutive elements of adolescent identity, social belonging, and community” has been an on-going trend on television shows for more than a decade.<sup>41</sup> Celebrity images educate fans “about fashion, taste and consumption practices” and, based on *Pretty Little Liars*’ popularity across multiple media platforms, it can be said that the core four characters, too, work as this kind of “cultural intermediary.”<sup>42</sup> Each of these practices is evolving in the case of *Pretty Little Liars*; they all function to brand the show in addition to encouraging fans’ self-branding.

Shows directly address fans as consumers by emphasizing the costumes.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Line does this both by democratizing fashion through her clothing line, and also by using clothes from stores like Target and H&M, which are accessible to ABC Family’s target demographic. The democratization of costuming parallels the post-feminist theme

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<sup>39</sup> Josh Stenger, “The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom when *Buff*y the Vampire Slayer Goes to eBay,” *Cinema Journal*, 45 (2006), 28.

<sup>40</sup> Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 241.

<sup>41</sup> Josh Stenger, “The Clothes Make the Fan,” 27.

<sup>42</sup> Helen Warner, “Fashion, Celebrity, and Cultural Workers: SJP as Cultural Intermediary,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 35 (2013): 383.

<sup>43</sup> Josh Stenger, “The Clothes Make the Fan,” 28.

of power through consumption practices by assuming that fans will use the available products to enhance their self-brands.

In addition to addressing fans as consumers, ABC Family uses the fans as a form of unpaid labor, by encouraging them to maintain a conversation online surrounding the show via social media. Marc Andrejevic, Shawn Shimpach, and others have written about the complex nature of using the audience as an unpaid, marketing labor force. The industry frames social media as an outlet for fans to enhance their viewing experiences.<sup>44</sup> Fans are valuable for two reasons. They assume some of the responsibility for making the show more interesting for other fans in addition to providing feedback to producers.<sup>45</sup> Shimpach uses the audience as a category to explain how a fan may understand herself in relation to the “cultural category” of audiences more generally.<sup>46</sup> In this way *Pretty Little Liars* allows fans to feel an allegiance toward others in their same cultural category.

### **Teen Television**

Teens have been visible on TV shows for many decades, however teen television has been around as a genre since approximately the 1980s. Teen TV can be described as both shows that feature teen characters, as well as shows that use teens as a part of the main cast, along with adults, and deal with teen themes, like identity, sexuality, or social pressures.<sup>47</sup> Teen television is considered quality programming that historically has been

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<sup>44</sup> Megan Wood and Linda Baughman, “Glee Fandom on Twitter: Something New, or More of the Same Old Thing?” *Communication Studies*, 63 (2012), 329.

<sup>45</sup> Marc Andrejevic, “Watching Television Without Pity: The productivity of Online Fans,” *Television and New Media*, 9 (2008), 26.

<sup>46</sup> Shawn Shimpach, “Working Watching: The Creative and Cultural Labor of the Media Audience,” *Social Semiotics*, 15 (2005), 344.

<sup>47</sup> Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Stein, “Introduction” in *Teen Television*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc.), 2008, 5-6.

characterized by an “ensemble [cast] in an hour-long dramatic format . . . [focusing] on the familial relationships that existed between friends and colleagues.”<sup>48</sup> Teen television is associated with female-oriented programs and has low cultural value.<sup>49</sup> These associations are not surprising based on teenage girls’ place in the American cultural hierarchy. There is relatively little literature that focuses on teen television as a genre, and most of what is written focuses on shows from the 1990s and early 2000s. *Pretty Little Liars* also uses a highly attractive cast, but has added the centrality of fashion and style to the characters’ identities and the use of social media to engage fans. These additions make *Pretty Little Liars* a prime example of teen programming at this current, cultural moment.

In the 1990s, on the heels of Fox’s success at targeting a younger demographic, Warner Brothers and Paramount chose to create their own networks targeting teens, the WB and UPN, respectively.<sup>50</sup> While UPN had success with minorities, the WB targeted a more mainstream, white audience. The WB used distinct characteristics in its shows, like using highly attractive casts. Additionally, the programs “all trace the experiences of youth and growing up with an appealing blend of intelligence, sensitivity, and knowing sarcasm.”<sup>51</sup> The WB revolutionized quality, teen programming by using intertextuality between its shows and promoting up and coming musical artists associated with the network.

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<sup>48</sup> Valerie Wee, “Teen Television and the WB Television Network,” in *Teen Television*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc.), 2008, 48-50.

<sup>49</sup> Ross and Stein, “Introduction,” 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> Wee, “Teen Television and the WB,” 45.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

ABC Family has since become the cable network for carrying on the teen television legacy that the WB and UPN once had. Using *Pretty Little Liars*, ABC Family has further evolved teen television, using primarily a heightened presence on social media sites, encouraging the use of the second screen during programming, and fashion. The references to attainable fashion culture on *Pretty Little Liars* sets it apart from other shows. Additionally, fashion highlights the connection between characters' identities and fans' identities, attracting the teen market to specific stores and brands while maintaining particular styles of femininity as en vogue.

Many of the post-feminist themes outlined earlier pervade contemporary American television on shows targeted toward a female audience, particularly through the lead characters on the shows. Sue Jackson works to understand post-feminist culture on television targeted toward a female audience. First, she writes that these television texts “pervasively represent successful femininity as a carefully balanced and closely self-monitored blend of intelligence, independence, groomed attractiveness and sexiness.”<sup>52</sup> These contradictions of what femininity “should” be are rampant throughout *Pretty Little Liars*; each character exactly represents all of these traits.

This successful blend of femininity is, then, bound within the confines of post-feminist ideologies. “[T]hese popular narratives continually individualize and depoliticize the very notion of ‘choice’ to a narrow range of socially acceptable identities and options.”<sup>53</sup> *Pretty Little Liars* offers four narrow, long-standing tropes of the young

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<sup>52</sup> Sue Jackson, “Girls’ ‘New Femininity’ Refusals and ‘Good Girl’ Recuperations in Soap Talk,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013): 228.

<sup>53</sup> Andrea Braithwaite, “‘That Girl of Yours - She’s Pretty Hardboiled, huh?’: Detecting Feminism in *Veronica Mars*,” in *Teen Television*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc.), 2008, 133.

woman, and leaves out all other options of what femininity means and can be for real, young women.

The teen heroine in contemporary American television is the perfect representation of the “good” girl. She is intelligent, and uses her “intellect to assert authority.”<sup>54</sup> She is strong, feminine, and pretty, which “links exemplary female adolescence with ideals of beauty and consumption.”<sup>55</sup> Because she is still feminine and pretty, her intelligence is non-threatening. Young women watching *Pretty Little Liars* may feel that they must adhere to the same standards the characters do in fashion, beauty, and intelligence.

## **Methods**

In order to understand these phenomena, I do an industry analysis of ABC Family’s marketing strategy using *Pretty Little Liars* as an example of the evolution of teen television and how it promotes post-feminist ideologies through its social media strategies. I follow Brooke Duffy’s analysis of the magazine industry as a model. She argues that as women’s magazines transition from a print to a digital format, they necessarily brand themselves as lifestyle magazines. They offer readers one site for any fashion, beauty, and fitness needs. In the same way, I argue, ABC Family has branded itself as a singular site for young women to learn about fashion, beauty, and romance through characters on the network’s TV shows. I also use Valerie Wee’s industry analysis of the WB as an example of how ABC Family is an evolution from earlier teen TV. She

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<sup>54</sup> Braithwaite, “That Girl of Yours,” 138.

<sup>55</sup> Jenny Bavidge, “Chosen Ones: Reading the Contemporary Teen Heroine,” in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, (London: British Film Institute), 2004, 46.

argues that the WB changed and revolutionized quality teen programming by using intertextuality between its shows and media mixing, among other things. I argue that ABC Family has furthered the evolution of teen television by implementing the same tactics as the WB as well as centralizing fashion and social media as a part of the television viewing experience.

To do this, I look at industry trade press articles surrounding the branding strategy of ABC Family. I work to understand how the show proved successful by using the second screen and costuming tactics. Relatedly, I look at how the show uses various social media platforms and how ABC Family encourages fans to engage with the show online. In particular, I use a presentation ABC Family executive Danielle Mullin gave at the 2013 iMedia Entertainment Summit about the network's use of social media to connect with fans. In it, she explains that ABC Family uses the fans as an unpaid labor force for the network. Additionally, I do a textual analysis of the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook and Pinterest pages to see how they engage consumers, whether it be encouraging them to retweet, repost, pin, or share information, or just thanking them for being fans.

Finally, I analyze popular press articles and video interviews focusing on the fashion of the show. In particular, I look at the partnership between *Pretty Little Liars*, Mandi Line, and Aéropostale. I also work to understand how the show uses the fashion line to highlight the connection between the characters and fans' identities in that they can buy what the characters wear. This attracts the teen market to specific stores and brands, maintaining particular styles and types of femininity as popular and "good." I

analyze video interviews featuring Line about costuming the characters, understanding how she frames femininity and the characters as “good” girls.

In addition to analyzing these industry strategies, my project also analyzes the popular discourse around the show from the audience’s perspective. Jessica Ringrose argues in *New Femininities* that girls are pressured to present themselves in particular, sexualized ways online. They are forced to make complex choices about how to construct their online identities, which pictures to post, what to wear, and how to be desirable without being slutty.<sup>56</sup> Ringrose’s chapter will serve as a model for my analysis of the fans’ perspectives on creating their self-brands online through the characters on *Pretty Little Liars*.

I use various social media platforms to see how fans engage with the show, the characters, Mandi Line, and the fashion line. In particular, I look at fans’ Pinterest and Instagram accounts to see how they connect with each other around the fashion line and the type of feminine beauty the characters represent. Pinterest is a social media site where users can “pin” images, GIFs, or web links to their “pinboards” or “boards.” Instagram is a social media platform where users can take photos, edit, and enhance them through various filters, and upload them to the site for followers to view. Users can “tag” people in the photos, and the tagged person will receive a notification that she has been tagged. Finally, I examine Mandi Line’s Instagram account to show how fans use the clothes as a way to express their intense fandom and adoration for the designer, the characters, and the show.

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<sup>56</sup> Ringrose, ““Are You Sexy, Flirty, or a Slut?,”” 106.

Finally, I look at blogs about the fashion of *Pretty Little Liars*, the *Pretty Little Liars* section of Aéropostale's website, and comments on them from fans to understand what about the fashion is important and exciting to them, in addition to how it influences their thoughts about femininity and style. Here fans discuss their favorite styles, along with their feelings about their own looks and identities in relation to the characters'.

### **Chapter Descriptions**

Chapter two is an industry analysis of ABC Family, Aéropostale, and *Pretty Little Liars*. In this chapter, I examine how the marketing strategies of the show via social media work to use the fans as an unpaid labor force by inviting them to share information online. In addition, I study how ABC Family positions the show to fans, how it encourages female fandom through the female stars' clothes and looks, and mysterious, suspenseful plot lines. Finally, I analyze how ABC Family constructs femininity, and how the network, through *Pretty Little Liars*, teaches young women how to be feminine and maintain visibility in a post-feminist society. Online magazine articles and Mandi Line's video interviews work to construct feminine positions for consumers through the clothing.

Chapter three explores various social media sites, popular websites, and blogs to make sense of how fans use the costuming on the show and the fashion line to create their own self-brands. I evaluate how their fandom influences their online identities and how they use the characters as representations of "good" femininity in their own lives. Additionally, I decipher how they use Instagram to engage with other fans and form a particular type of "girl" community through the Aéropostale collections and fandom for

Line. I also use these texts to see how fans take on identities similar to the characters based on their clothing styles and how they become empowered feminine subjects through the interpellation of a specific type of femininity.

Chapter four is a summary of the project as a whole. I review some of the larger questions surrounding this thesis such as how the narrow feminine positions offered by the characters work to maintain a small understanding of what “good” girls are in a post-feminist society. Relatedly, I discuss how young women’s fandom for *Pretty Little Liars* and identification with the characters adds to the self-brands they create online within a post-feminist context. Finally, I speculate about what it means for young women to adhere to these specific, narrow standards of beauty and femininity in a patriarchal society, reconciling the problematic yet empowering ways they can read *Pretty Little Liars*. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of this project and where future research can go from there.

## Chapter 2, ABC Family and Social Media: *Pretty Little Liars* and the Promotion of a Post-Feminist Ideology

“HoorAy -- PLL continues to kill it in the ratings!!! :) Thanks to our amazing #PLLArmy for watching and being such amAZing fAns!” “How gorgeous are the PLL girls?” “Become a PLL Mobile Insider to start receiving texts from -A! Text PLL to 462223 to sign up now!” “Like if you are #TeamTranna SHARE if you are on #TeamHaleb!” “Loved the music from tonight’s ALL NEW PLL? Disney Playlist has you covered!” “Love the fashion on PLL? Check out our style boards on Pinterest to see where you can buy it!”<sup>57</sup> Each of these quotes, taken from the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page, exemplifies the ways in which ABC Family and the *Pretty Little Liars* brand work to engage its fan base at a personal level. These posts not only drive traffic to other pages and websites by tagging and sharing links, but they give fans a singular online space for finding all things *Pretty Little Liars*: music, fashion, aspirational beauty, and romance.

In her book, *Remake, Remodel: Women’s Magazines in the Digital Age*, Brooke Duffy explores the changing role of the magazine industry as it transitions from a printed format to a digital, online format. She uses interviews with industry professionals to understand how they set out to create specific types of lifestyle brands in this new, emerging climate. She argues that the producers of magazines have “need[ed] to expand the way they deliver content . . . to remain competitive.” She goes on to write that

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<sup>57</sup> Facebook. *Pretty Little Liars*. July 12 - 15, 2014. Accessed July 16, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/prettylittleliars>

producers work to make their magazines “the place a woman comes for fashion, to shop, and get workout advice, all under the auspices of a single brand.”<sup>58</sup>

As in the magazine industry, the television industry faces new challenges of branding and identity in the age of digital convergence. The *Pretty Little Liars* brand must create an emotional experience for consumers in order to remain relevant. This means strengthening the bond between fan and show; ABC Family has provided fans this emotional connection through its various social media platforms. Due to this intense emotional feeling toward the *Pretty Little Liars* brand, ABC Family has profited from its fans, capitalizing on their insecurities and aspirational feelings toward the characters by selling them clothing items to help them achieve the characters’ same looks.

Using fashion as a promotional tactic has changed in the years since ABC Family replaced the WB as the home for popular teen programming. Branding and merchandising are now more central to TV shows than ever before, and ABC Family has benefitted from this practice by successfully creating a fashion line with national retail chain Aéropostale. This fashion line gives fans an outlet for aspirational identification toward the characters through the clothes, profiting the *Pretty Little Liars* brand both monetarily and culturally.

In the same way magazines have branded themselves as a one-stop-shop for women’s beauty, fashion, and fitness needs, ABC Family has used the *Pretty Little Liars* brand and its various digital platforms as a one-stop-shop for young women to learn about fashion trends, how to be feminine both in looks and behavior, as well as how to

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<sup>58</sup> Brooke Duffy. *Remake Remodel: Women’s Magazines in the Digital Age*, 76. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2013.

gain exposure in a post-feminist society via a digital platform, encouraging them to create their own self-brands around *Pretty Little Liars*.

This chapter explores how ABC Family has transformed quality teen TV programming from its previous incarnation, the period of the late 1990s and early 2000s when the WB was at its height of popularity. In addition to using similar tactics as the WB did, ABC Family has added the use of fashion and the second screen to revolutionize quality teen programming; *Pretty Little Liars* is the most successful example of this evolution. The show references fashion culture by trendsetting and offering creative ideas on how to “be” feminine. The characters’ popularity with fans undoubtedly emphasizes fans’ love for fashion and, because fashion is known as a traditionally female practice, in a sense the show’s fashion emphasizes traditional femininity.

*Pretty Little Liars* uses some clothes from stores like H&M and Macy’s to make items more accessible to the average teenage girl.<sup>59</sup> The fashion on *Pretty Little Liars* highlights the connection between the characters’ identities and fans’ identities, in that they can often times buy exactly what the characters wear. These feelings are very much increased through costume designer Mandi Line’s fashion line with Aéropostale. ABC Family uses social media, fashion, and connections with popular magazines to frame femininity, to promote post-feminist ideologies on *Pretty Little Liars*, and to maintain the characters’ styles as en vogue and the primary options for teenage “good” girls’ visibility in society.

### **The New Teen TV and Social Media Marketing**

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<sup>59</sup> Melinda. “Costume Designer Mandi Line on Creating Aria’s Style.” Wet Paint. July 7, 2010. <http://www.wetpaint.com/pretty-little-liars/articles/costume-designer-mandi-line-on-creating-arias-style>

In the introduction to *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom* Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein define teen television as shows that are about teens or targeted toward teens. They write that these shows often draw in pre-teen and older audiences, as well.<sup>60</sup> This is evidenced by *Pretty Little Liars*' capture of the most viewers in the categories of females 12-34 and women 18-34 each week the show airs.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the authors write that the teen TV genre deals with teen themes and uses adults, or parents, as secondary characters.<sup>62</sup> *Pretty Little Liars* uses these same tactics to attract a teen audience. Not only does the show deal with romantic relationships typical in a high school setting, it also addresses drug and alcohol abuse, sexual identity, competitive sports, and high academic achievement, among other pressures high school students face.

*Pretty Little Liars* is the "perfect mix of romance, drama, and suspense."<sup>63</sup> The show is based around four high school-aged girls, Aria Montgomery, Hanna Marin, Spencer Hastings, and Emily Fields. The core four characters are harassed via text message, hand written notes, and other clues by the mysterious A who knows all of their secrets and threatens to expose them if the girls do not do what she (or he) says. The girls think A stands for Allison, their friend who disappeared the previous summer. Though "Allison's body" is found in the pilot episode, the girls are not convinced she is dead

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<sup>60</sup> Ross and Stein. "Introduction," 5.

<sup>61</sup> Sara Bibel. "ABC Family's 'Pretty Little Liars' is TV's number 1 telecast in Women 18-34 at 8 O'clock." TV By the numbers. January 23, 2014. <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2014/01/23/abc-familys-pretty-little-liars-is-tvs-number-1-telecast-in-women-18-34-at-8-oclock/231593/>

<sup>62</sup> Ross and Stein. "Introduction." 5-16.

<sup>63</sup> Danielle Mullin, "Content Marketing," 2013.

because all of the messages from A involve secrets from their past that nobody else could possibly know, so they make it their mission to discover A's identity. Interestingly, the plot of the show has very little to do with how many fans engage with the fashion on it. For these fans the show is more about pretty girls dressing in cool clothes rather than the central mystery.

In the same anthology, Valerie Wee traces the history of teen television and discusses the WB network's success in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>64</sup> She writes that, by the 1990s, the group "teens" were considered to be more about a lifestyle, mentality, and shared cultural interests rather than age demographics. By focusing on this broad definition of teen, the WB capitalized on a wider audience, which heightened the appeal of these shows to advertisers. Also, because the teen market was hard to reach, advertisers were willing to overpay for time on this channel.<sup>65</sup>

Wee defines quality programming as "the use of ensemble casts in an hour-long dramatic format [with] narratives that . . . focus on the familial relationships . . . between friends and colleagues." The WB's quality programs shared distinct characteristics. For example, the network often used young, attractive actors. Additionally the shows, "all trace[d] the experiences of youth and growing up with an appealing blend of intelligence, sensitivity, and knowing sarcasm . . . the shows addressed many sensitive and relevant teen and youth issues, such as self-destructive teenage behavior, alcoholism, teenage sex, and sexual identity" among other things.<sup>66</sup> In this way, the WB distinguished itself from

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<sup>64</sup> Wee. "Teen Television and the WB," 43-60.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 48-50

its main competitor, MTV. It addressed issues important to teens, but did so in a more wholesome, family-friendly manner, which was necessary to satisfy advertisers. As a broadcast network and not a cable station, this was imperative to stay competitive in the market.

The WB created its own niche market by using teen protagonists and storylines that would resonate with the audience. In addition, the WB's original programming often made intertextual references that would resonate with that young, core audience. The synergy between popular film and television benefitted both industries as well as "rewarded" viewers for their pop culture knowledge and understanding of references. By using intertextuality, media mixing, attractive casts, and similar, youth-centered storylines, the WB changed quality programming and solidified its teen-centered brand.<sup>67</sup>

ABC Family has necessarily furthered the evolution of quality teen programming from the WB's earlier incarnation due to particular changes in the target market. The millennial generation, Americans born between 1977 and 1996, consumes between 11 and 15 hours of media per day, often times in as little as a six hour period.<sup>68</sup> This is because millennials are constantly multitasking; they watch TV, sometimes online, while also using their laptops and smartphones to connect and engage with friends on social media.<sup>69</sup> The network has been successful in using social media to engage with its fan

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 50 - 55.

<sup>68</sup> Julie Liesse. "Millennial Appeal." Ad Age. July 9, 2007. Accessed July 3, 2014. [http://brandedcontent.adage.com/pdf/ABC\\_Family\\_Meet\\_The\\_Millennials.pdf](http://brandedcontent.adage.com/pdf/ABC_Family_Meet_The_Millennials.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Beau Ryan. "ABC Family Promotional Video." April 3, 2007. Accessed July 3, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxSEQ0H6H64&list=PLB6E17AD0BD1BBEF0>

base on a large scale both during the show's season and while she show is on hiatus and filming its next seasons.

ABC Family's strategies necessarily evolved from the WB's due to new technologies just after the turn of the millennium. Social media and digital platforms changed branding strategies by moving away from one-way advertising as a form of communication from TV to viewer to a communicative, two-way strategy. These new technologies allowed networks to work in tandem with consumers to improve their experiences, while simultaneously obtaining specific demographic and psychographic information about these new digital and social consumers.

In 2004, ABC Family started its millennial branding strategy, targeting young women who were "conceptualized by the network as diverse, engaged with global concerns . . . and technologically adept, shaped by the influence of the internet and new media."<sup>70</sup> ABC Family's millennial target market is young, white, and middle class.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, she is optimistic, independent, responsible, assertive, connected both technologically and emotionally with others, and has strong relationships with friends and family. The "colorblind" diversity depicted on ABC Family's shows serves to represent millennials' diverse identities and conceptualize them as one large, consumerist identity. Finally, the protagonists are seen as "active and empowered subjects."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Caryn Murphy. "Secrets and Lies: Gender and Generation in the ABC Family Brand." in *The Millennials on Film and Television*. eds. Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally, 16-19. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally. "Introduction," in *The Millennials on Film and Television*. eds. Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally, 9. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Murphy, "Secrets and Lies," 25 - 26.

In essence, ABC Family depicts the ultimate can-do girl living in a post-feminist, neo-liberal society.<sup>73</sup> Notions of consumerism, sisterhood, independence, and empowerment thread through the shows and discourses surrounding the shows, and are widespread on *Pretty Little Liars*. These themes promote post-feminist ideologies for how young women should think, behave, and look. It is useful for ABC Family to create these types of characters in order to appease advertisers from various industries who profit from young women's need to maintain particular standards of beauty, femininity, and behavior in a patriarchal society.

In the introduction of their book, *The Millennials on Film and Television*, Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally describe millennials as distracted viewers who often check Facebook, Twitter, or their smartphones while they watch television.<sup>74</sup> They write that due to this new phenomenon, producers make shows with this distracted viewership in mind.<sup>75</sup> ABC Family has capitalized on this distracted audience through its marketing strategy by encouraging online engagement via what executives termed “the second screen.”<sup>76</sup> This type of online activity makes fans want to watch the show during the live telecast. Cast members live-tweeting to fans enhances fan identification with the stars and characters. Special hashtags that ABC Family promotes at the bottom of the TV screen

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<sup>73</sup> Anita Harris. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> Kaklamanidou and Tally, “Introduction,” 1-13,

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Danielle Mullin, “Content Marketing for the Second Screen and Social,” Presented at the 2013 iMedia Entertainment Summit.

track fans' tweets and have made for an innovative marketing strategy, making *Pretty Little Liars* "the most tweeted about show on TV."<sup>77</sup>

An article on Bloomberg.com describes how ABC Family has used online marketing to stay relevant during the show's season. The author writes that Disney and ABC Family use social media to "keep young audiences watching its broadcasts, including commercials. ABC Family executives accomplish that by creating a kind of virtual watercooler where viewers chat before, during, and immediately following each episode."<sup>78</sup> Due to new technologies like DVR, network smartphone apps, streaming, and downloading, creating this sense of fan community to watch any television show and participate in online conversations is not easy to do. Many shows have learned to use social media as a second screen to engage with consumers, but ABC Family has effectively captured the millennial demographic by using this very particular social media strategy.

The network has had success due to *Pretty Little Liars*' young, female, millennial fan base. Sarah Banet-Weiser and Inna Arzumanova argue that post-feminist authorship is the use of digital media to self-brand and create an identity in online formats. Young women must create online identities, called self-brands, as a way to exercise autonomy and obtain visibility in society. They write, "Consequently, feminine subjects are at once neoliberal entrepreneurs, reliant on the ethos of competitive individualism, compulsive managers of a self-brand, and subjects who rely on post-feminism to claim empowerment

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<sup>77</sup> Nick Watt. "How 'Pretty Little Liars' is Changing the TV Game." ABC Nightline. June 10, 2014. <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video/pretty-liars-changing-tv-game-24067013>

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Palmeri. "ABC Family Tweets to Keep 'Pretty Little Liars' Viewers Tuned in." Bloomberg Tech. October 22, 2012. <http://go.bloomberg.com/tech-blog/2012-10-22-abc-family-tweets-to-keep-%E2%80%98pretty-little-liars%E2%80%99-viewers-tuned-in/>

through visibility.”<sup>79</sup> So, young women use online self-brands to promote themselves for others. Self-brands, though, are always inextricably linked to a commercialized product.<sup>80</sup> Their identities as self-brands are always wrapped around consumerist practices like fashion, fandom, and beauty. Because *Pretty Little Liars* targets this young female demographic, who spend much time online and on social media as it is, and who have a stake in showing off their fandom as a way to promote their own self-brands for others, *Pretty Little Liars* has been extremely successful in its online presence.

Most of ABC Family’s core target audience owns a smartphone; 79 percent of 18-24 year olds and 81 percent of 25 to 24 year olds use one.<sup>81</sup> However, this information does not account for people under the age of 18 who may have a smartphone or tablet to connect online, nor does it account for people who may connect from a laptop or personal computer; it is possible that an even higher percentage connects through these alternative platforms. Additionally, 84 percent of people who own smartphones or tablets say they use them as a second screen while they watch TV. “Consumers use second-screens to deepen their engagement with what they’re watching,” says an article on Nielson.com.<sup>82</sup> These extremely high numbers show just how participatory and engaged fans are with their favorite shows. ABC Family’s young female viewers are very active and engaged

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<sup>79</sup> Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova. “Creative Authorship,” 165.

<sup>80</sup> Banet-Weiser. *Authentic*, 66.

<sup>81</sup> Aaron Smith. “Smartphone Ownership 2013.” Pew research Internet Project. June 5, 2013. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/05/smartphone-ownership-2013/>

<sup>82</sup> Neilson. “What’s Empowering the New Digital Consumer?” Nielson. February 10, 2014. <http://www.nielson.com/us/en/newswire/2014/whats-empowering-the-new-digital-consumer.html>

consumers in part because they can create self-brands as fans of the show as they participate with it and with other fans online.

Megan Wood and Linda Baughman point out that transmedia products are “embedded with marketing strategies wherein the goal of the producer is to expand the audience experience.” This does two things for the producer and for the consumer. First, it enhances the fan experience and “reestablish[es] fans as empowered individuals.”<sup>83</sup> This means that they can take the show into their own hands, requesting certain plot lines or giving feedback to the producers. This helps the show creators make the show better and more directly related to what the fans want to see. Second, it provides the producer, in this case Alloy Entertainment, with an unpaid labor force, keeping advertising costs down.<sup>84</sup> Fans discuss the show together online. This online visibility for *Pretty Little Liars* comes organically from the fans themselves, and acts as promotional material for the show. This reduces advertising costs for the industry in that it reduces the necessity to promote the show through traditional means. This serves the interests of the industry and it profits greatly from this online promotion and discussion, giving it more media attention.

ABC Family capitalizes off of this highly participatory fan base by promoting special hashtags, which help to create buzz around the show and to achieve trending topics in the Twittersphere. The network typically invents the hashtags and releases them a few weeks before the airing of a “big reveal,” which keeps fans talking during the week

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<sup>83</sup> Wood and Baughman. “Glee Fandom and Twitter,” 330 - 332.

<sup>84</sup> Andrejevic. “Watching Television Without Pity,” 25.

while they await the next week's episode.<sup>85</sup> One highly noteworthy example of fans' use of Twitter came during the season four summer finale in August 2013. The show "saw 38 unique topics trend in the U.S. and worldwide, with 'Ezra Is A' still trending nearly 12 hours later."<sup>86</sup> This demonstrates how invested in the show fans are on social media. By using hashtags across social media platforms, ABC Family has kept a consistent place for fans to discuss the show. Hashtags also help to promote the show during its off season.

This has worked especially well for *Pretty Little Liars* for a few reasons. The intense fandom young women feel for the show, stars, and costume designer make them objects of admiration in the fans' eyes. Social media makes the stars seem more relatable and attainable than ever before. Young women, whose age and demographics are similar to the characters, look up to the starlets because of who the characters are, beautiful, cool, "good" high school girls. The starlets' beauty and popularity as themselves on social media also make them aspirational figures. ABC Family and the *Pretty Little Liars* fan page share the starlets' personal photos posted to their social media accounts. They are typically photos of other projects or photo shoots, exclusive behind-the-scenes images, or even photos of their own lives on vacation.<sup>87</sup> Fans can feel closer to the stars through this connection to the show because Facebook blurs the line between the star and the character, so fans are fans of both the show and the stars.

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<sup>85</sup> Mullin, "Content Marketing for the Second Screen and Social," 2013.

<sup>86</sup> "ABC Family's 'Pretty Little Liars' Summer Finale Becomes #1 'Most Tweeted' TV Series Telecast Ever with Nearly 1.9 million Tweets." *The Futon Critic*. Accessed on December 13, 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Facebook. *Pretty Little Liars*. June 30 - July 3, 2014. Accessed July 3, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/prettylittleliars>

This intensification of fandom and aspiration toward the stars makes Alloy Entertainment, ABC Family, and the entertainment industry more generally benefit from the connection between the stars, characters, and fans. The industry benefits because the stars and their images all become more visible for people. ABC Family, and its partners in the show, get exposure because fans share or like photos *Pretty Little Liars* posts on Facebook. Likes and shares on Facebook show up on the sharer's or liker's friends' news feeds, so their connections on social media will also see these photos even if they do not follow the *Pretty Little Liars* fan page. This alone gives greater awareness to social media users about the *Pretty Little Liars* brand.

Other than Twitter hashtags, the show uses various social media sites during the on- and off-season to keep fans buzzing about the show and to keep *Pretty Little Liars* at the top of pop culture relevancy. The *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page, Instagram, and Pinterest boards all serve as a cohesive mix of platforms on which to promote the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. Using the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page, ABC Family posts messages, pictures, and links to drive traffic to its other social media sites or to promote the actors' and actresses' personal social media sites. The show posts multiple times daily to ensure that Facebook followers will see at least one message from the show, which also keeps the brand at the forefront of fans' memories.

For example, on June 10, 2014, the same day the season premiere of season 5 aired, the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page posted 27 times. It posted a wide variety of things to different social media sites and offered other forms of fan engagement. The majority of the posts, 14, served as reminders to watch the show that evening during the

live telecast and created a sense of urgency around the show by saying “don’t miss” the premiere, and to “unplug” if they are not going to watch the show live with other fans. Next highest, with a total of seven posts, drove traffic to other social media outlets.<sup>88</sup> Three encouraged fans to live Tweet with one of the stars, Janelle Parish, who plays the villain, Mona. Her live chat with fans intensifies the para-social relationship between her and fans. Fans feel a stronger bond with her because they actually communicate with her, rather than look at her pictures and read stories about her in magazines.

Two other posts on the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page told fans to check-in to TVtag, formerly GetGlue, a “second screen app that synchronizes content and audience reaction with TV moments.”<sup>89</sup> Checking in to TVtag will, according to the Facebook page, “unlock [a] PLL sticker” for the *Pretty Little Liars* marathon that was airing on ABC Family that day. One post drove traffic to the site’s Pinterest page, where followers get “the latest gifs, quotes, and a very special behind the scenes look of the *Pretty Little Liars* set tomorrow morning.” Finally, one post drove traffic to the *Pretty Little Liars* official Instagram page, where fan favorite male character Toby, played by Keegan Allen, would “share his first post.” The remaining six posts were miscellaneous; they either referenced a different upcoming show or were tied to a promotion with Coke.<sup>90</sup> Each of these posts encourage a particular type of fan engagement and labor across social media platforms so that fans will connect with each other and the show. By asking fans to

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<sup>88</sup> Facebook. *Pretty Little Liars*. June 10, 2014. Accessed June 10, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/prettylittleliars>

<sup>89</sup> TVtag. “About.” Accessed June, 10, 2014. <http://tvtag.com/about>

<sup>90</sup> Facebook. *Pretty Little Liars*. June 10, 2014. Accessed on June 10, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/prettylittleliars>

follow *Pretty Little Liars* or its stars, each social media space increases the brand's popularity and exposure. From ABC Family's perspective, this connectedness is useful because it could increase followers on these social networking sites; the more popular a star or brand is on social media, the more buzz it gets. As one interviewee put it, "[w]atching this show after the fact is like watching the Super Bowl the next morning."<sup>91</sup> By using the second screen, this show requires that fans watch it during real time, including commercials. In doing so, the show's ratings go up and it can ask more in advertising dollars.

When the Facebook page posts photos of the starlets from their own Instagram pages, the captions often read like this: "How cute is Janel?! We love this selfie she took last night!!" or "Troian is gorgeous!" and "How cute are these two?!" referring to Ashley Benson and a male friend of hers, and "24 hours from now, we will be watching the summer premiere of *Pretty Little Liars*!!!!!!!!!!!!!"<sup>92</sup> Using words like "cute" and "selfie" as well as excessive exclamation points give the page a youthful feel, which resonates with the target audience. The person posting sounds like a fan and member of the target audience, thinking of herself as young, playful, and cute. Also, the captions always highlight the stars' beauty in some way. This does two things for fans. First, it separates the stars as sites of aspirational beauty. Their images are worthy of being posted on the page because they have achieved the standard of beauty necessary to become famous.

Second, it encourages young women to look up to them *for* their beauty, making it seem

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<sup>91</sup> Christopher Palmeri. "ABC Family Tweets to Keep 'Pretty Little Liars' Viewers Tuned in." Bloomberg Tech. October 22, 2012. <http://go.bloomberg.com/tech-blog/2012-10-22-abc-family-tweets-to-keep-%E2%80%98pretty-little-liars%E2%80%99-viewers-tuned-in/>

<sup>92</sup> Facebook. *Pretty Little Liars*. June 9-11, 2014. Accessed on June 10, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/prettylittleliars>

like their looks are the most important thing young women should strive for. Additionally, it sends the message that the Liars' type of beauty in particular is the best way to become visible because of the show's popularity and visibility both on social media and in society.

In addition to promoting one standard of beauty, the Facebook page also promotes a fun type of fan labor framed as engagement by connecting fans with each other and their friends. For example, on June 8, 2014, the page posted a photo of the four girls saying, "It's National Best Friend Day and PLL's 4th Birthday! Coincidence? We think not! Tag your besties below and tell them they rock!"<sup>93</sup> This photo alone got over 106,940 likes and 1,794 shares. This is a perfect way for ABC Family to use Facebook to connect with fans and at the same time use them as a database to learn more about them. Each like and share notifies the *Pretty Little Liars* account; the network can then look through each person's profile to learn more about them, should they so choose. This type of immaterial labor is framed as something for girls to feel more connected to the show. It does not take any time or effort for them to like or share a post, but it promotes the *Pretty Little Liars* brand organically through them. It also adds to their self-brands as *Pretty Little Liars* fans to post about the show for others to see on their own social media accounts.

### **Fandom and Fashion: ABC Family, Aéropostale, and *Pretty Little Liars***

In his article about fashion, fandom, and *Buffy*, John Stenger discusses the internet as an outlet for fans "to express and cultivate their devotion to a series." He writes that

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<sup>93</sup> Pretty Little Liars. Facebook. June 8, 2014. <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152140767730233&set=a.432236410232.199673.291824160232&type=1&theater>

this type of devotion and participation by fans give a show great cultural significance. He continues to say that shows “repeatedly [affirm] consumerism, especially in the realm of fashion.”<sup>94</sup> This makes sense given that shows like *Buffy* and *Pretty Little Liars* target young women in a post-feminist context. Many shows depict women using their bodies as a source of power; fashion and style highlight this type of power by showing off the body in flattering ways. Additionally, the devotional nature of these fans, in conjunction with their social media use from a young age, works such that they emulate characters’ behavior or looks to display their fandom for others on a public platform.

Fashion is a good way to show fandom for a few reasons. First, it gives fans a sense of ownership over the show.<sup>95</sup> Second, it works as a creative way for fans to develop their self-brands for others to see. Stenger writes that fans of the WB’s *Buffy* used fashion as a way to physically own a part of their fandom by purchasing items up for auction on eBay. *Pretty Little Liars* has used fashion in a similar way, and has furthered the use of fashion and femininity within a post-feminist context by encouraging girls’ power through consumption practices and power through the body by creating its own fashion line. *Pretty Little Liars* has found ways to deliberately monetize this interest through its social media strategy, promoting the fashion line on all digital platforms.

ABC Family first had to find the right partner to make the characters representative of four different types of girls and femininity within post-feminist culture. These characters as a whole depict the ultimate can-do girl. She is smart and athletic, yet

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<sup>94</sup>John Stenger. “The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom when *Buffy* the Vampire Slayer Goes to eBay.” *Cinema Journal* 45 (2006): 26 - 28.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

feminine with a sexy edge. To do this, the characters' costumes had to frame each one very particularly in order to show these nuanced differences. Mandi Line's appearances on TV and in interviews help describe the characters and their styles in ways with which fans can relate. Third party magazine articles, like those from *Entertainment Weekly* or *Seventeen*, feature the friendship and sisterhood between the real stars; this helps their friendships in character be more believable. Magazine articles, Mandi Line, and other sources like bloggers work as teachers of fashion and femininity for the young fans. Their posts, interviews, and comments, among other things, not only address their fan base as consumers first, but also explain how through purchasing the "right" fashion and accessories, girls can create their self-brands around the show and buy the can-do-girl attitude.

In the press release for the launch of the *Pretty Little Liars* collection at Aéropostale, the TV industry clearly identifies who it believes is the target audience and who it wants to be wearing its clothes. Sonia Borris, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Operations with Warner Bros., links Aéropostale's fashion-forward brand to *Pretty Little Liars*, saying that the partnership "captures the essence of *Pretty Little Liars* and is a perfect fit for the show's young, passionate and fashionable fan base."<sup>96</sup> She positions the audience as fashionable, which suggests that fans' appearances, fashion, and femininity are important to them. Because this is the perspective of the industry, not the fans themselves, it also suggests that this is how ABC Family *wants* to see the fans

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<sup>96</sup> "Aeropostale Partners With Warner Bros. To Launch First Ever *Pretty Little Liars* Series-Inspired Collection, In Collaboration With Costume Designer Mandi Line." PR Newswire. January 7, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/aeropostale-partners-with-warner-bros-to-launch-first-ever-pretty-little-liars-series-inspired-collection-in-collaboration-with-costume-designer-mandi-line-239113191.html>

behave, as well as *who* it is the network wants to target with the fashion line--fashion-forward 'it' girls who will influence others to purchase the products. Having this type of target purchasing the fashion line would help keep ABC Family and *Pretty Little Liars* relevant to young women's popular culture.

Similarly, Maryellen Zarakas, Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing and TV & Studio Licensing at Warner Bros., said the partnership between *Pretty Little Liars* and Aéropostale was a "perfect match," and continued to say that through the collaboration, fans could enjoy original designs "inspired by the characters in the stylish and trend-setting series – so if you're a fan of the show or a fashionista, this collection will let girls wear their favorite character's look and make it their own."<sup>97</sup> This quote emphasizes the idea that fans are necessarily creative fashionistas who enjoy the stylish show and enjoy fashion. It also suggests that purchasers can get creative with the looks by adding their own touch. But in order to remain an embodiment of the character, they can only add the few options, shoes, and accessories, that Aéropostale affords the consumers, one outfit per character. This confines buyers to being feminine only in the ways Aéropostale and the *Pretty Little Liars* brand offer. Additionally, fans can purchase any of the core four character's looks, meaning that they can, through the clothes, embody the characters. This keeps *Pretty Little Liars* relevant both in their own lives and as a competitive brand in the consumerist, fashion marketplace.

Also in the press release, Mandi Line was quoted as saying:

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

It's so rewarding to create a line that truly brings the style of these 'it' girls to life . . . I knew fashion would play an important part in the show from the start. The fans were really my inspiration for the collection. You can easily mix and match the pieces to express your personal style. It's all about incredible looks at obtainable prices.<sup>98</sup>

The fact that Line addresses the core four characters as 'it' girls makes them objects of admiration and aspiration. Giving fans the ability to purchase the same clothes as these popular characters also gives them a sense of belonging and meaning within a community of other fans. Line explicitly says that the fans were her inspiration; making such a seemingly personal connection between herself and the fans creates a special bond for the fans who look up to her. Not only do fans purchase the products to show their fandom for *Pretty Little Liars*, but also to show their loyalty and support for Line and her achievements.

### **Teaching Fashion and Femininity: ABC Family's how-to guide**

ABC Family and Mandi Line have successfully framed the characters in very identifiable and different ways through video interviews and magazine articles. By talking about each character in specific ways, and describing them in the same way in each interview, Mandi Line details the essential aspects of each character for fans. Often times, she offers suggestions and tips on how to dress like the Liars, teaching fans how to be more like these characters through putting on various styles. Additionally, she refers to the characters as real personalities, and in doing so, she makes them more real and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

seemingly attainable. A fan cannot really become a character, but a fan *can* be more like another person, and referring to the characters as real people makes it seem like fans can really be more like these girls by sharing a similar style. This is useful for the producers, Warner Bros. and Alloy Entertainment, the network, ABC Family, and the retailer, Aéropostale, in that they can profit from fans by having them purchase objects from the Aéropostale line.

In video interviews often shared by the *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page, Mandi Line frequently shows off one outfit for each of the four main characters and describes each look, how she put it together, and what fans can do at home to achieve a similar style. Line is typically asked to describe some key points for each girl's style, in particular, a signature must-have, a signature color, and style. The tips Line offers are very telling about each character's personality. For Line, Aria must have a black boot, her signature color is black, and her style is "schizophrenic" and "different."<sup>99</sup> She also says Aria needs "a crap load of accessories" to complete her look. These descriptions exemplify Aria's artistic, gothic, creative style and personality. Hanna's style must-haves are "beautiful earrings" and heels; "she never walks out the door in flats."<sup>100</sup> Also, she must wear pink, and have trendy clothes. From this, viewers can read Hanna's style as girly, hyper-feminine, and fashionable. Line describes Spencer's style as "preppy with a twist," saying she needs a good blazer and anything navy to pull off her look.<sup>101</sup> She also

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<sup>99</sup> Allison McNamara. "Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line." Youtube. May 4, 2013. Accessed June 15, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD4klbWlY-U>

<sup>100</sup> Kristin Dos Santos. "Watch Exclusive 'PLL' Wardrobe Tour." E! Online. June 2, 2014. Accessed June 17, 2014. <http://www.eonline.com/videos/222281/watch-exclusive-pll-wardrobe-tour>

<sup>101</sup> McNamara. "Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line."

needs a good belt and she “*always* has amazing boots.”<sup>102</sup> This clearly defines Spencer’s character as preppy, and classically chic. Finally, Emily is explained as always having a pair of good denim and a style that is “laid back man, laid back and cool.”<sup>103</sup> Line also says Emily needs a good cut-off tank top and a bomber jacket.<sup>104</sup> This characterizes Emily as an easygoing, all-American, simple tomboy.

Line never deviates from these same descriptions when she discusses the characters’ styles in any of the interviews she gives. These descriptions give fans a broad, yet very clearly defined and consistent vision of who each character is and how she dresses. By having this knowledge, fans can go shopping with these ideas in mind in order to dress like the Liar of their choice. Line stays true to each character by only describing them in these ways, and in doing so she solidifies the *Pretty Little Liars* brand using these particular images of teenage girl visibility.

In describing the characters in these particular ways, she stays on message and maintains consistency for the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. It is likely that she has been coached to speak in this way and describe the characters in the same ways every time. For example, on more than one occasion she has described Aria’s style as “schizophrenic.”<sup>105</sup> This term is too unique to believe that she comes up with it randomly from interview to interview. It seems as though she has a number of adjectives she draws

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<sup>102</sup> Dos Santos. “Watch Exclusive ‘PLL’ Wardrobe Tour.”

<sup>103</sup> McNamara. “Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line.”

<sup>104</sup> Dos Santos. “Watch Exclusive ‘PLL’ Wardrobe Tour.”

<sup>105</sup> Dhani Mau. “Pretty Little Liars Costume Designer Sort Of Tells Us Who ‘A’ Is.” Fashionista.com. March 19, 2013. Accessed July 5, 2014. <http://fashionista.com/2013/03/pretty-little-liars-costume-designer-sort-of-tells-us-who-a-is>

on for each character's style. Also, in the video interview she does for Popsugar, the interviewer asks her if Emily's sexuality has influenced the way Line dresses her. Line responds by saying, "Oh yeah, I wanna make her like *super* butchy. That's what *I* wanna do."<sup>106</sup> She really emphasizes the I, and laughs as she says it, but the footage was edited immediately after so that the viewer does not know why she cannot make Emily "super butchy." This suggests that she does not have full control over how each character is represented and that she must not vary the characters' identities from how ABC Family wants them positioned. Also, it works to keep Emily's character more relatable to a broader female audience.

Line often blurs the line between the character's reality and fictionality by referring to the characters as real people when she talks about their styles. For example, in one interview, she talks about girls channeling their inner Aria, saying, "Channeling your inner Aria is don't be afraid. There are so many great tricks to Aria's trade and she upcycles. She takes something that was in her closet. She's like, 'hmmm if i cut off the sleeve, if i lace this up' . . . her whole head to toe is really special and I think to channel your inner Aria is to have no fear."<sup>107</sup> In describing Aria's style, Line emphasizes Aria's fearlessness, suggesting that those who channel their inner Aria, or learn to embody Aria's personality through clothing, will gain a certain confidence in themselves through her body and fashion choices.

This is a perfect example of the post-feminist ideological construction of young, female empowerment through the body and power through consumption practices, while

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<sup>106</sup> McNamara. "Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line."

<sup>107</sup> McNamara. "Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line."

celebrating female-centered knowledge. In order to achieve this similar look, fans must purchase items to replicate the look. Also, by telling fans that Aria upcycles, or cuts and sews existing pieces of clothing to make it more her own, she displays a special kind of artistic creativity and fashion knowledge that is required to do that. It would take much time and effort to make these changes; it is likely that only the most devoted fans or fans that already possess similar artistic abilities would be able to channel this part of Aria's personality. This makes her character seem attainable because she is creative and thrifty, but also sets her apart and makes her unique because such a specific skill set is necessary to upcycle clothes.

In addition to the language use, Line essentially tells viewers that Aria is the one who is creative and who actually cuts the pieces of clothing to style herself. This makes the character seem more life-like and "cooler" because she is so creative with fashion. It is a really strategic and smart way to make her character more identifiable, and to make people want to be like her. If they really look up to her, because she sounds like a real person, and her style seems like one they can do, too, fans may continue watching the show to get more of her upcycled fashion ideas. Through this notion of upcycling, Line does *not* explicitly sell anything in particular, yet these videos are all about selling. She sells the show, clothing line, and even sells the idea of the self as brand through fashion creativity.

She also blurs the line between the star and the character. About Spencer, she says, "I just love how Troian Bellisario can pull off anything, the mix of patterns, the mix of textures, she always keeps her colors grounded though she doesn't do too pinks or

polka dots, or nothing too femme. So I love, you know she can definitely pull off those earth tones but with the right patterns.”<sup>108</sup> In this statement, Line is talking about the character, but refers to the star. The lack of distinction she makes between Bellisario’s real self and her character highlights the intersection of the star with the character. Line seems to offer both the star and the character up for identification through her style choices and fashion statements. In so doing, she broadens the *Pretty Little Liars* brand by extending the fandom to both the characters and the stars themselves as sites for identification.

Line’s interviews sometimes have small sections where she does a quick fashion lesson. For example, she teaches girls how to mix prints, which, if done incorrectly, can clash and not look acceptable. She says,

Hanna has no fear of color. Hanna has no fear of patterns. But what she does she does it ultra-femme . . . I just love this mix-matching prints, properly . . . You’ve got to do it in the right way because you’ve got to tie in something, you just can’t just throw it on. So what I did was I took the colors as the connection. So I took the orange from this necklace to the orange in the belt and then you have a great orange heel.<sup>109</sup>

In this part of the video, Line slows the pace of her voice. She acts as a teacher for girls interested in fashion, giving them a quick tutorial on how to mix and match prints to create their own looks that are similar to Hanna’s feminine style. This makes the style more accessible to anyone who may want to dress like Hanna, or like Aria, who also

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<sup>108</sup> Dos Santos. “Watch Exclusive ‘PLL’ Wardrobe Tour.”

<sup>109</sup> McNamara. “Pretty Little Liars - Style of Season 4 - Interview with Mandi Line.”

often mixes prints. By teaching them how to achieve a similar look, Line creates fashionistas who will ultimately spend money on certain clothes to make these styles their own. In addition, she explains it in a way that is easily understandable and clearly spelled out for a young audience. Where fashion magazines tend to be more formal, higher end, and less interactive, Line differs in that she comes off very personable and relatable. Her word choices and tone of voice resonate with her young fan base, giving them a greater understanding, in their own terms, of how to create a similar look. Also, seeing a video and actually watching her explain how to mix prints is different than reading it in a magazine because in a magazine, the pieces are already put together and photographed. Watching Line pull together an outfit makes it easier to visualize how varying pieces look together.

Articles from magazines like *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* work as how-to agents in teenage female femininity. These pieces offer fans and viewers of the show a consolidated outlet for how to get the look, tips on where to shop, and items to purchase in order to dress like a Liar. They encourage post-feminist consumption practices by writing about the characters in a relatable tone and capitalizing off of the already highly active and consumerist fan base. This furthers fans' ability to construct their identities around the show through commercialized practices. The fact that these magazines are fashion magazines tells viewers that they are more knowledgeable and legitimate than blogs or tumblr pages, and give carefully constructed advice to fans. The magazines act as style guides for the *Pretty Little Liars* brand, creating loyal consumers through the fans' relationships with these characters. They encourage girls to dress like them, which

helps the fashion and beauty industries flourish and gain profits while molding loyal fashionistas.

One example is *Seventeen*'s article, "The 20 Most Amazing Outfits From *Pretty Little Liars*."<sup>110</sup> It teaches girls how to be good consumers and how to be feminine; essentially, it teaches them how to create their post-feminist self-brands around *Pretty Little Liars*. Rather than an identity, it is a self-brand because the fans are always being hailed by the commercialized, *Pretty Little Liars* brand. Using the Liars as an example of the type of femininity that will establish readers' visibility, it promotes the consumption of goods and services within the realm of fashion and beauty. In this sense, fans are first hailed as consumers of the *Pretty Little Liars* brand because of its commercialized connection to the fashion and beauty industries. Rather than being a fan of the show first, they are agents of post-feminist self-brand construction around the fashion and beauty industries, ABC Family, and *Pretty Little Liars*.

One of *Seventeen*'s style tips comes from an image of Hanna in a snakeskin printed blazer. The caption says, "Only Hanna could wear snakeskin this well! The key to rocking a wild print is picking pieces perfectly tailored for you, and pairing them with solid basics. A bright pop of color funs up the look for school."<sup>111</sup> The magazine first says that Hanna is the only one able to look that good in the outfit. Paradoxically, it then gives fans "the key" on how to look the same. By offering them this "key," the magazine gives

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<sup>110</sup> Kara McGrath. "The 20 Most Amazing Outfits From *Pretty Little Liars*." *Seventeen*. Accessed June 20, 2014. [http://www.seventeen.com/fashion/tips/pretty-little-liars-fashion?src=spr\\_FBPAGE&spr\\_id=1442\\_63503452#slide-1](http://www.seventeen.com/fashion/tips/pretty-little-liars-fashion?src=spr_FBPAGE&spr_id=1442_63503452#slide-1)

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

the fan the power to feel as feminine, girly, and sexy as Hanna looks, wearing a similar outfit.

In another example, the author writes, “Her style may be polished, but Spencer knows how to add some quirky-fun details into her look as well! When Spence gets serious, she can be just as terrifying as the wild cats printed on her dress. PS: This look, with the preppy blazer, has serious internship-wear potential.”<sup>112</sup> This example is important for a few reasons. First, the reference to the “internship-wear potential” highlights the post-feminist ideology of the individual entrepreneurial spirit. It implies to the reader that wearing the outfit and looking the part is more important than actually having the skill set to perform whatever duties the internship might require. As long as she can wear something that looks professional, she will feel empowered to tackle any task at hand.

Additionally, this word choice in particular is telling of how to relate to a young female in a post-feminist context. First, Spencer is terrifying when she is “serious,” not angry, because “good” girls do not get angry. Second, the exclamation point and words like “quirky-fun,” “PS,” and, in Hanna’s description “funs up,” makes the prose young and peppy, which resonates with the target audience. Finally, calling Spencer “Spence” as the characters do on the show makes it seem like *Seventeen* has a tight connection with the character and highlights the “friendship” it has with this character. Because it is a fashion magazine, it is more authentic, legitimate, and has access to Spence’s friendship, which raises it to a higher hierarchical position than a blogger or regular fan.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

*Teen Vogue*'s article is shorter and gives more concise information on how to achieve the Liars' looks. It is also highly commercialized in that it gives actual brands that are similar to the characters' styles. For example, for Aria's character the article lists "Urban Outfitters, Sam Edelman, Free People, Forever 21, H&M" as brands similar to her style, and for Emily, it names "Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle, Nike, LuLu Lemon, Splendid."<sup>113</sup> All of these brands are relatively accessible to the target market. By offering less expensive brands available in many shopping malls, the website democratizes fashion in a way that makes it seem as though it is possible for anyone and everyone to achieve these looks. In comparison to shows like *Gossip Girl* or *Revenge*, where the protagonists are wealthier, the clothes on *Pretty Little Liars* are much more reasonable, yet the only people likely to purchase these brands are young, middle class women, the show's target audience. In making the clothes relatively inexpensive, it grabs a larger audience and a larger share of the consumerist market.

The ways in which ABC Family and *Pretty Little Liars* have used social media and fashion so fluidly together has made for an incredibly innovative marketing strategy. The network has revolutionized teen television programming through its use of social media, partnerships with digital magazines, and centralizing fashion as the show's primary form of identification. Through these specific tactics, the industry has perpetuated post-feminist ideologies of young women's empowerment through the body and consumption practices, the self as brand, and maintaining a feminine, "good" girl identity.

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<sup>113</sup> "Pretty Little Liars Character Styleguide." *Teen Vogue*. Accessed June 20, 2014. <http://www.teenvogue.com/entertainment/tv/2010-12/pretty-little-liars-character-style-guide/?slide=1>

The next chapter will focus on how young women actually engage online with the *Pretty Little Liars* brand, Mandi Line, and fashion via social media outlets like Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, fashion blogs, and Aéropostale's website. I argue that young girls create their self-brands around the fashion and show for their peers and, in this sense, are always connected with the commercialized "good girl" image that the characters represent. I look at the problematic ways that young women are encouraged to behave and think about themselves as visible, feminine subjects online as well as the reasons they engage in these social media practices, focusing primarily on what it is fans get out of this online participation.

### Chapter 3, “I want to be a Spencer but I think I’m a Hanna”: *Pretty Little Liars* and the Post-Feminist, Self-Branded Fashionista

In *New Femininities*, Jessica Ringrose writes about teenage girls’ use of social networking sites to negotiate and perform a sexual identity. She suggests that social networking sites be analyzed in a “postfeminist media context,” understanding that girls are “under pressure to visually display and perform a new ‘compulsory,’ ‘disciplinary technology of sexy’ in digital environments.”<sup>114</sup> Anita Harris holds a similar position, writing that youth today must invent themselves in creative ways, and are encouraged to express and display their uniqueness for the scrutiny of others. She argues that this performed uniqueness is an obligation framed as a freedom for youth.<sup>115</sup> A public display of the self on social media platforms is one way youth perform their identities to others. More specifically, girls can create their self-brands via social media platforms to maintain their unique identities.

Ringrose recognizes that girls have to make “complex” choices about how to construct their digital identities; they are “continuously negotiat[ing] and mak[ing] choices around which images and words they use as they construct and perform their teen sexual identities in semi-public spaces.”<sup>116</sup> I argue that an online sexual identity is a part of the self-brand, but it is not the entirety. Girls also make complex choices in creating their overall, feminine, self-branded identity. *Pretty Little Liars* fans use the fashion and

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<sup>114</sup> Ringrose. “Are You Sexy, Flirty, or a Slut?,” 99-116.

<sup>115</sup> Anita Harris. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>116</sup> Ringrose, “Are you Sexy, Flirty, or a Slut?,” 101.

characters to self-brand as fashionistas and fans, and to adopt a traditionally feminine identity.

The most important post-feminist ideology to outline here is that of self-branding. The branded self is a particular form of immaterial, unpaid labor. Allison Hearn defines it as a “self-conscious construction . . . through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries.”<sup>117</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser writes that the internet has opened up a new space for girls to create their self-brands for the display of others. She argues that the young, can-do girl perfectly symbolizes the media-savvy consumer, or “interactive subject,” because its emphasis on individual entrepreneurship, consumerism, and independence aligns with some of post-feminism’s ideals about the female individual.<sup>118</sup>

Banet-Weiser argues that individuals must use brand management techniques like relationship building, full disclosure, and transparency to create their self-brands. By using similar techniques, the individual’s real self, who she truly is, will be revealed to friends and family. This requires blurring the line between self-brand and identity. She writes that self-brand construction, “*necessarily* acknowledges the individual’s role as producer . . . [there is a] self-conscious role of individual labor in the production of the self-brand.” Presenting a self-brand online, then, is the result of a long process of self-creation through particular products and brands. Once girls post about the products and

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<sup>117</sup> Hearn, “‘Meat, Mask, Burden’,” 198.

<sup>118</sup> Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 53 - 56.

brands online, they give friends and followers an “authentic,” transparent view into who they really are.<sup>119</sup>

The performance of a self-brand on social media is different from identity formation because of its commercialized context.<sup>120</sup> While social media is a space for girls to create gendered identities, they are always engaging with it in a commercial, cultural context, in the case I am analyzing, by performing immaterial, unpaid labor for the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. Thus, their engagement becomes branding for *Pretty Little Liars* and ABC Family. In addition, their engagement works as a kind of sellable identity, a self-entrepreneurship via social media that works to make them visible in society from a digital platform.

Sarah Banet-Weiser and Inna Arzumanova write that the self-brand is the use of digital media to create an online identity.<sup>121</sup> In this way, young females are encouraged to self-police through the careful hailing of different identities at different times, either in person or online. Television shows like *Pretty Little Liars* provide a template for what the appropriate female brand should look like through fashion, as well as through “performance, communicat[ion] and image[s].”<sup>122</sup>

There are a few major ways that *Pretty Little Liars* fans use social media and other online platforms to engage with the fashion in order to create their self-brands, while helping to brand the series. I have found that, more broadly, they use social media

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>121</sup> Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, “Creative Authorship,” 165.

<sup>122</sup> Hearn, “Meat, Mask, Burden,” 207.

as a way to take on the type of feminine identity that the *Pretty Little Liars* characters offer. In addition, they often seek validation from a more expert opinion like blog post writers. Sometimes they assert their fashion authority over others by complimenting the expert or offering suggestions on how to wear a particular clothing item. These practices allow girls to get in touch with the *Pretty Little Liars* characters and their personalities by creating self-brands connected to, or inspired by, the characters. Social media, fashion, and particular “looks” enable girls to access this type of feminine brand more “authentically.” The various types of femininity represented on *Pretty Little Liars* become a part of fans’ branded selves online, expressed for others, by using the feminine characters presented on the show.

Additionally, fans connect with the *Pretty Little Liars* brand and Mandi Line by using social media sites like Instagram as a platform to express their fandom toward the show and self-brand as nice, good girls through their admiration for Line. They often tell her how proud they are of her, how inspirational she is to them, and praise her for her work on the show and for the Aéropostale line. Also, fans show how they embody the characters through the clothes from the fashion collections, sharing pictures with Line. They often express how the clothes make them feel, attributing their feelings to Line’s work and the *Pretty Little Liars* characters. In this way, too, fans gain access to a femininity within their own self-brands through the characters, through Line, and through the performative nature of niceness that is typical of traditional femininity.

### **The self-brand and traditional femininity**

The first example of self-brand creation around the *Pretty Little Liars* characters surrounds traditional types of femininity on Pinterest and other sites that are similar. Users, or Pinners, can create as many boards as they want and can organize the pins into various categories. Examples include Can I Please Be You?, Inspiration, Beautiful Women, and Fashion/Style.

Similarly, Weheartit.com is a social networking site that allows users to search for and collect images that “move” them, create collections of images, express their personalities through their collections, and follow people who inspire them, by “heart”-ing various images and collections.<sup>123</sup> Its home page is a grayscale photo of a young woman wearing trendy sunglasses blowing something from the palm of her hand into the camera. This image evokes a playful and youthful feeling with which users may identify. At the very least, it clearly demonstrates who the website’s target audience is. The homepage says, “Believe, Feel, Love, Be, Create, Inspire.”<sup>124</sup> This very clearly and deliberately encourages girls to create self-brands through its use of imagery and words. It tells girls to create who they are via this social media site, and their true selves will be discovered through their use of the site; this is a hallmark of the notion of the self-brand.

Similarly, Pinterest, We Heart It, and other social media platforms encourage feminized practices and displays of the self-brand through feminine, youthful language and images. For example, the word “heart,” using smartphone emojis to represent fans’ feelings and thoughts, and pinning aesthetically pleasing images and inspirational quotes work to establish a cutesy, hyper-feminine self-brand that users can post for others. In

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<sup>123</sup> “About us,” We heart it, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://weheartit.com/about>

<sup>124</sup> “Home,” We heart it, accessed May 1, 2014. <http://weheartit.com/>

contrast, the sites maintain a commercial and promotional nature for corporations and brands like *Pretty Little Liars* that is framed as a positive creation of an “authentic” personality, or self-brand, on these digital platforms. In so doing, industries successfully and sneakily keep a particular standard of feminine beauty as visible and acceptable for young women not only by making them do promotional, immaterial labor at no cost, but by making them think that they are doing this for their own benefit.

On We Heart It’s website a *Pretty Little Liars* infographic originated that typifies and constrains the characters within a few smartphone emojis. It later was pinned from We Heart It to Pinterest. By using this to describe the characters, it is possible to understand how Pinners should read each character as she is meant to be read, and can navigate their own self-brands through those images. Because of the static, cartoonish nature of smartphone emojis, there is no room to deviate, or read the symbols for the characters in any way other than how they are presented; each girl is understood specifically through the feminine images shown. Though fans’ knowledge of the show may allow them to read the characters in a different way than they are presented in this example, the infographic exemplifies the basic, rudimentary personality traits of the characters without any character development throughout the four seasons that the show may provide. The reduction of characters to these few symbols depicts a very specific demographic to whom the show is marketed in addition to a very specific type of girl who would identify with the show.

Aria is artistic, creative, and feminine, as seen by her photo camera, paint palette, and dress.<sup>125</sup> Spencer is a preppy girl, which is denoted by a purple button down collared shirt. She is a bookworm, and cares about academics, as depicted by an open book and a graduation cap and tassel.<sup>126</sup> Hanna's emojis are a pink lipstick, a red stiletto, and a manicured hand with long, pink fingernails.<sup>127</sup> She is quite clearly positioned as the "girly" character that loves make up and fashion. Emily's symbols are two girls holding hands; she is the lesbian character on the show, but this picture depicts Emily as still feminine because both girls are wearing dresses. In addition, her symbols show an athletic shoe and a person doing the front crawl to define her as an athletic swimmer.<sup>128</sup>

This key has 5,412 hearts on We Heart It and exists on 754 different collections. In addition, it has 850 repins and almost 200 likes on Pinterest. Pinning and hearting this infographic suggests that users find it useful or noteworthy to identify the characters in specific ways. They can remind themselves easily how each character is represented, and can self-brand around their fandom for *Pretty Little Liars* for others to see. Girls who "like" this infographic may see these types of traits as important or necessary to a feminine identity. Additionally, these types of feminine identities are the best, most important, or necessary to be popular, or visible, within their own social circles both online and in school.

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<sup>125</sup> "Pretty Little Liars," Valentina, We Heart It, accessed May 3, 2014. <http://weheartit.com/entry/group/28806622>

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Pinterest is also useful to understand how users create an online, self-branded identity around femininity more broadly. The existence of boards like “Beautiful Women,” “Can I please be you?,” “Inspiration,” and “Keep calm and...” are noteworthy to understand what types of femininity women are working toward and inspired by, and what types of femininity therefore remain an acceptable standard to society.

Lindsey Austin’s “Can I Please be you?” board features exclusively one type of feminine beauty. All of her pictures are of actresses like Blake Lively, Shay Mitchell, and Lucy Hale, two of whom portray *Pretty Little Liars* characters.<sup>129</sup> All of the women have long, curled, voluminous hair, perfectly done make up, and are usually wearing some kind of glamorous dress or outfit. The one picture where the woman’s face is not visible, she is pumping gas into a \$100,000 Mercedes Benz SUV wearing Christian Louboutins.<sup>130</sup> Based on this picture in conjunction with the others, Lindsey is clearly defining herself around beauty, and also aspiring toward a life of luxury as represented by the car, shoes, and fashions.

Pinner Mimi’s “Keep calm and. . .” board is filled with phrases related to *Pretty Little Liars* in addition to what it means for her to be and act feminine.<sup>131</sup> The *Pretty Little Liars* related pins say “Keep calm and watch Pretty Little Liars,” “Keep calm and Love PLL boys,” “Keep calm because Toby was never -A.”<sup>132</sup> The last two examples hail a

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<sup>129</sup> “Can I Please Be You?,” Lindsey Austin, Pinterest, accessed March 26, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/linloo111/can-i-please-be-you/>

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> “Keep Calm and...,” Mimi, Pinterest, accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/Mimilee02/keep-calm-and/>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

heterosexual subjectivity in Mimi that she must maintain in order to keep her self-brand hegemonically feminine. Other pins offer a similar idea of how Mimi should act to be feminine. “Keep calm and Love Gucci,” “Keep calm and stay innocent,” “Keep calm and make dinner,” “Keep calm and be a princess,” “Keep calm and do pilates,” “Keep calm and wear lipstick,” “Keep calm and love fashion,” “Keep calm and be cute.”<sup>133</sup> All of these pins act as reminders of what to do and how to behave in a traditionally feminine way. For Mimi, femininity is associated with shopping, make up, fashion, domesticity, and her body. These behaviors—consumerism, hailing a traditional femininity, and power through the body—are all important in the post-feminist sensibility of what it means to be feminine. The *Pretty Little Liars* characters all share this representation as well. In this sense, Mimi’s fandom for the show and her self-brand are both constrained within and defined by post-feminist ideologies.

Also available on Pinterest is a *Pretty Little Liars* workout routine. This exercise is meant to be done while watching the show. It has two columns; the first, is “Every time this happens” and the second is “do this.”<sup>134</sup> It suggests actions like 20 calf raises when someone eats food, 20 crunches when someone makes a phone call, 10 lunges on each side when -A is on screen, 20 mountain climbers when the group looks around, and 20 squats when the episode ends, among others.<sup>135</sup> Not only does this physical activity directly relate to post-feminist ideals of a “perfect,” toned, feminine body, but it engages the viewer in actual, physical labor during a traditionally more relaxing time. This tells

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> “Pretty Little Liars,” Anna Donatelle, Pinterest, accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/annadonatelle/pretty-little-liars/>

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

the viewer that she should essentially be working any chance she gets to achieve a flawless, feminine physique. She should be happy about performing these exercises because they take the “work” out of exercising; it is framed as a fun, enjoyable activity to do while *Pretty Little Liars* is on.

The *Pretty Little Liars* workout also calls out a playful irony around the show. Pinner know each action happens often. Those who pin it, in their own way, poke fun at the repetitive nature of the show. They knowingly participate in the *Pretty Little Liars* fan culture, but also engage in a mocking interpretation of the show. Pinning this workout is a way for them to show a fun, playful side of their self-brand while still connecting it to *Pretty Little Liars*. While they may pin the workout because it mocks the show or makes fun of it in a silly way, the act of pinning it at all still defines their self-brands *for others* around the workout, the body, and the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. Because it is not necessary that users know each other in real life, they may simply follow each other on social media, so the context within which the Pinner has pinned the workout, seriously or otherwise, is unknown. All that is known is that it revolves around her fandom for the show and a particular type of feminine body.

### **The self-brand in progress**

Young girls who are in the process of creating their self-brands for others both in person and online seek advice from those who have a more concrete self-brand; this often happens through comments section on blogs. In particular, the blog College Fashion has a series on the fashion of *Pretty Little Liars* that devoted one post per week to each of the

core four characters. The author, Ali, writes a how-to guide for dressing like them.<sup>136</sup> She writes in her first post, “Every Tuesday night, you’ll know where to find me: I’m parked in front of the TV, riveted by ABC Family’s latest hit show *Pretty Little Liars*. Is anyone else as obsessed as I am with this summer series?”<sup>137</sup> Her obsession with the show positions her as a fan and, in that sense, equal to other fans, yet her status as a college senior makes her cooler and more knowledgeable about fashion and style than other, younger fans.<sup>138</sup>

Fans use the comments section to ask for her expert opinion. One of the most telling examples for how fans use the blog to self-fashion was Jasmine’s comment. She asked, “For outfit #2 can u wear a black long sleeves instead of a short sleeve? Also will it look weird wearing it with a long sleeve? Please answer back, I really want to wear it to school but it can be cold in side sometime so i need to know if long sleeves will work.”<sup>139</sup> Outfit number two was a black, billowy t-shirt paired with a chunky, jewel encrusted necklace, an open-front, gray sweater vest, green, skinny-legged pants, wedged gray ankle boots, and a cream-colored knit cap.<sup>140</sup> The fact that Jasmine needed validation over such an insignificant change to the outfit before wearing it to school gives the author of the blog an immense power and influence over her. It also reveals how carefully

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<sup>136</sup> Ali, “Pretty Little Liars Fashion & Style,” *College Fashion*, accessed December 15, 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ali, “About Ali,” *College Fashion*, accessed May 4, 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Ali, “How to Dress like the Pretty Little Liars: Aria,” *College Fashion*. Accessed December 15, 2013.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Jasmine constructs her self-brand around this type of style for her peers at school; she does not want to wear something that would look weird or risk social embarrassment.

In another instance, commenter Sarah refers to Aria's style, saying, "My style is very similar to hers but im wondering what she would wear on holiday in a hottish country, any ideas?"<sup>141</sup> First she makes it clear that her style is similar to Aria's. She is not just saying that she likes Aria's style or that she doesn't know what Aria would wear on vacation, but that they share a style. Having said that, she still needs advice from an expert on what she should bring. If their styles were really all that similar, she wouldn't need validation or the blogger's opinion on what to bring because it would already exist as a part of her wardrobe. This shows that Sarah, like Jasmine, is in the process of constructing her self-brand for others and needs advice from a more knowledgeable person because fashion, style and clothing choices are important to a post-feminist self-branded identity.

On Instagram, fans seek acknowledgement from Mandi Line in a different way than they do from Ali, the College Fashion writer. *Pretty Little Liars* fans often post pictures of themselves wearing the outfits from the Aéropostale line, or create their own looks for various characters. In any case, they often tag Mandi Line's username to the photos so she will see be more likely to see them.

For example, user PLL\_Outfits posted a photo of her own outfit collage for Spencer with a caption reading, "Spencer Hastings."<sup>142</sup> Mandi Line comments on the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Instagram. PLL\_Outfits, Accessed March 10th, 2014. [http://instagram.com/PLL\\_Outfits](http://instagram.com/PLL_Outfits)

image saying, “Perfect.”<sup>143</sup> To Line’s comment, PLL\_Outfits replied, “Thank you so much! [red heart emoji] You seriously don’t know how much that means to me [blushing smiley face emoji] @mandiline” PLL\_Outfits’ self-brand around being a fan of the show is exemplified by her excitement and appreciation of Line’s comment and communication with her. PLL\_Outfits take the time to put together the outfit. In doing so, she demonstrates how important *Pretty Little Liars* is to her self-brand. Her Instagram followers and other people can see her outfit creation and make their own judgments about whether or not she did a good job. But, according to the costume designer herself, PLL\_Outfits was able to capture Spencer’s personality. Because her self-brand is still in progress, this validation from Line is even more important. Line’s assurance that she got the outfit correct enhances PLL\_Outfits’ self-brand as a fashionista and as a fan of *Pretty Little Liars*. In this sense, her fandom and her fashionista identity, in this moment, become the primary identifiers of her self-brand for others to see.

PLL\_Outfits uses two smartphone emojis in her conversation with Line. The red heart emoji symbolizes a type of love for Line that is reserved for few. The blushing, smiling emoji represents a timid, gracious femininity that is characteristic of “good” girls. PLL\_Outfits would probably not have posted the outfit if she did not think it was an accurate representation of Spencer, but Line’s comment elicits a certain respect for the superiority of her knowledge over that of PLL\_Outfits. It is polite for this fan to accept Line’s comments graciously, and in so doing she also self-brands as a “good” girl.

### **The self-brand as a knowledgeable fashionista**

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

The second way readers use the internet to engage with *Pretty Little Liars* is to assert authority. Whether it be through a commercialized, economic exchange or a simple hailing of a particular identity, these individuals seem to have an advanced self-brand and online presence. These girls have been successful in creating a fashionista self-brand online; they represent a particular example of the post-feminist can do girl. Within the post-feminist context, the can do girl has the world at her feet, is career driven, and has a strong consumer lifestyle.<sup>144</sup> She is confident; she has nothing to fear, and is unique.<sup>145</sup>

The notions of postfeminist authorship, or individual entrepreneurship, are also necessary for the can do girl. Having a background or knowledge in fashion, and offering it up to others online affords the fashionista an online visibility. This is important; it could lead to a successful career in the fashion and beauty industry because of the possibility of corporate sponsorship.<sup>146</sup> The seemingly many career opportunities available from this platform make it important to self-brand as a fashionista.

On the College Fashion blog commenters do this by complimenting the author. For example, Chassidy writes this about Spencer's How To page: "i love this show and spence!! my friends always make fun of me for always being like her "twin" haha. I am soo preppy its not funny! i think these style choices are perrrfect! spence would be soo proud! hehe! xoxo thanks again Chass" Chass presents a young female identity by the way in which she writes her comment. She lacks appropriate punctuation, suggesting that she is moving quickly, excitedly, as she writes. The drawing out of particular words like

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<sup>144</sup> Harris, *Future Girl*, 16-24.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, "Creative Authorship," 165-167.

“soo” and “perrrfect” suggest that she is writing exactly how she would say the phrase. Writing out laughter like “haha” and “hehe” are playful demarcations of her youthfulness, yet her “xoxo” makes her seem older, like she is the blogger’s friend and equal. This type of speaking is typical of young, middle-class white girls, and the cutesy way this post is written enhances Chassidy’s feminine self-brand as a young, playful, innocent, can-do girl.

In addition, her post is revealing because she displays her intense fandom by calling Spencer “Spence” like the characters do and, in doing that, she positions herself as the character’s friend. Because she is “Spence’s” “friend” she can say with authority that the choices are “perrrfect” and that “spence would be soo proud,” inverting the blogger to reader hierarchy and offering validation to the blogger.

Unlike the College Fashion blog, the Aéropostale fashion line offers actual, purchasable *Pretty Little Liars* identities. On College Fashion, fans self-brand around the characters’ styles, or, more accurately, around inspirations of the characters’ styles, not their exact outfits. Through Aéropostale, fans need only to purchase the existing items to construct their self-brands around the characters for their peers. The commercial, monetary exchange differentiates one self-branded identity from the other. Those who spend money on the characters’ clothes support the show and Line, and in that sense can be seen as more devoted fans, having a closer relationship to the characters because of their fandom and their clothes. They are more knowledgeable about the characters, then, and can give advice to others on how to wear the clothes.

On Aéropostale's website, product reviewers can fill in the "about me" section saying that they are "trendy," a "stylish dresser," or "classic." This pigeonholes their identities into exclusively fashion-related characteristics. Often times the reviewers who self-identify with these qualities act as expert fashionistas by offering suggestions on how to wear the items. For example, someone from Cleveland, Tennessee who self-identifies as a trendy and stylish dresser gave one of Hanna's dresses five out of five stars, saying, "I'm a big fan of Hanna from *Pretty Little Liars* and this look describes her all the way. This is the cutest dress I've seen in a long time, if your a girly girl and love dresses then this is totally the style for you."<sup>147</sup>

This girl acknowledges that Hanna is the girly girl, and because she is a big fan of Hanna, we can understand that her self-brand reflects the "girly girl" persona. Here she expresses her hyper-feminine, fashionista self-brand and *Pretty Little Liars* fandom by saying that other "girly girls" will "totally" love this dress; she *knows* that this look describes Hanna perfectly, because she is a "big fan." Much like Hanna's character, this girl claims the hyper-feminine identity as her own and expresses it for others through her youthfully feminine word choices and exaggeration to describe the dress. For example, she calls this dress the cutest one she's seen in a long time. It is probable that her fandom for Hanna, *Pretty Little Liars*, and her own hyper-feminine self-brand has some influence over this belief, but because she identifies as a trendy and stylish person her opinion seems more knowledgeable and authoritative.

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<sup>147</sup> Aéropostale. *Pretty Little Liars* Hanna printed maxi dress. Accessed March 1, 2014. <http://www.aeropostale.com/product/index.jsp?productId=25003486>

Blair Waldorf from Melbourne who self-identifies on Aéropostale's website as "Classic, High-end shopper, Practical, Stylish, and Trendy" acts as a stylist to other readers in her product review.<sup>148</sup> The fact that she self-identifies as a high-end shopper, yet is shopping at Aéropostale is paradoxical, but it certainly sets up a hierarchy between her and other consumers. The *Pretty Little Liars* fashion line democratizes the characters' fashions into a more affordable collection for fans, so her experience as a high-end shopper tells viewers immediately that she is superior to them.

About the Spencer Schoolboy Blazer, Blair writes, "If you are tall and skinny like me i got a small, and that fit well. I recommend getting pretty much your usual size, however, it runs slightly smaller. It looks good a bit tighter though, so dont stress!"<sup>149</sup> Her recommendation is intriguing because she hails Blair Waldorf's identity, a character from the CW's *Gossip Girl*, suggesting that she is more fashionable or more knowledgeable about fashion than other readers, at least from her own perspective. The preppiness of Blair's character parallels the preppiness of Spencer's, so it makes sense that she would purchase and write about the blazer. When she explains that it "looks good a bit tighter, so don't stress!," she articulates her fashionista self-brand for others, assuming that potential buyers need her to reassure them that the blazer looks good tight.

Sierra in Ontario, Canada self-identifies as a trendy and stylish dresser and gives the Hanna Lace Dress 5 stars w/a title of "Just buy it!"<sup>150</sup> Her review says,

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<sup>148</sup> Aéropostale. *Pretty Little Liars* Spencer Schoolboy Blazer. Accessed March 1, 2014. <http://www.aeropostale.com/product/index.jsp?productId=28818376#ReviewHeader>

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Aéropostale. *Pretty Little Liars*. Hanna Lace Dress. Accessed March 1, 2014. <http://www.aeropostale.com/product/index.jsp?productId=24532776>

I first saw this in Seventeen Magazine and thought wow love the color!  
 Then when i saw it they had one left (the one one the manikin) and it must  
 have been meant to be because it fitted perfectly and looked amazing on  
 me. i wore it out on a date and i got asked many times from other girls on  
 where i got my dress. Best purchase I've made in a while and works for  
 almost any occasion(school, work, date, wedding, etc.).<sup>151</sup>

For Sierra, fate steps in and blesses her with this perfect dress that looks “amazing” on her. Her reference to a “meant to be” love story narrative reinforces feminine ideologies about romance, love, and destiny. This is also significant because she explains that she wore the dress on a date; it fits the love story narrative. Sierra’s fashionista self-brand is partially constructed by *Seventeen* magazine. She takes the time to carefully read through the magazine, learning fashion and style tips, which teaches her how to construct her own feminine self-brand and act as a femininity teacher for others. She receives compliments from many girls, which establishes a sense of hierarchy between her and them. They see her as fashionable and ask for insight on where she got her dress, and therefore Sierra enhances her fashionista self-brand through the hailing of the *Pretty Little Liars* fashion, specifically that of Hanna’s character.

### **The self-brand as constrained femininity**

Readers also use blogs and social media as spaces to showcase a traditionally feminine self-brand. For example, on the how to dress like Aria College Fashion page Julia writes, “This was super helpful! This summer, I’m gonna lose a lot of weight (the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

heathly way, of course) and re-invent myself. I've always loved Aria's fashion and This gave me super motivation and confidence in myself. Thank you :)"<sup>152</sup> This illustrates how the show provides aspirational images toward a particular "look." Julia wants to "lose a lot of weight" so she can fit more into the Liars' standard of beauty; it is sad that she feels inadequate in the first place because of what is being represented on the show. However, Aria's character gives her motivation; she is resolute and *will* make the necessary changes. Julia is using the show as a means to make changes to be healthier and this character helps her do so.

Another example is Hanna, who says, "i love aria i love all of the pretty little liars girls i love this website because it shows me how to be like her now i can be pretty like her and all of the rest of the pretty little liars thank god for this website!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"<sup>153</sup> This girl is so enthusiastic and happy to know how to dress just like the characters so she can be pretty, implying that without the qualities the Liars' have, she won't be pretty. The terms "pretty" and "little" suggest that the show, and Hanna, value a certain type of femininity. Pretty, rather than beautiful or sexy, values a younger, more innocent look. The word little does the same, but also implies that a small physicality is more valued. She seems to believe that by wearing similar clothes, she will somehow transform her own identity into Aria's or one of the other characters. The statement "pretty like her" makes it seem as though she not only believes her *identity* will be transformed, but that by wearing similar clothes her *physical* self will become more like Aria's.

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<sup>152</sup> Ali, "How to Dress like the Pretty Little Liars: Aria," *College Fashion*. Accessed December 15, 2013.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

Also on the Aria “how to” College Fashion blog post, commenter S. says, “I’ve never even seen this show but I loooove this look. . . It’s a bit edgy without being gothic or too rocker/grunge, feminine without being girly. SO me!!! I love it! this character is my new style inspriation lol. thanks guys.”<sup>154</sup> She describes the fashion similarly to how the author did, and immediately identifies with the fact that it is *just* like her. The fact that she says she has never seen the show positions her self-brand as fashion forward because she wore these similar styles *before* the post came out and other people had an opportunity to learn how to dress like Aria. However, she is still inspired by the character; if the style were already “SO” her, she would not necessarily need this fashion inspiration.

### **The self-brand as character embodiment**

Aria Stylinson from Annapolis, MD identifies herself as a casual dresser and gives Aéropostale’s Hanna Lace Dress dress 5 stars w/a title of “Two can keep a secret with this dress.”<sup>155</sup> Aria signals fandom in 2 ways. First, she adopts Aria Montgomery’s identity by calling herself Aria. While it is possible that Aria is her actual name, the surname, Stylinson, is clearly made up, so it stands to reason that the first name is also made up. The second way is through the title of her review, “2 can keep a secret.” It refers to the lyrics of the introductory theme song to *Pretty Little Liars* by The Pierces. She writes,

I really liked this dress and I felt really good about buying it.I ordered online which made it take four days until it arrived.I immediately tried it

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Aéropostale. *Pretty Little Liars*. Hanna Lace Dress. Accessed March 1, 2014.

on out of excitement. The dress fit well except for the rib area, but I fixed that with a belt. I am actually wearing it to an upcoming dance. Many people have asked me where to buy and so I told them. The dress was a bit shorter than expected, but I still loved it. I also feel that this dress makes me feel like Hanna. In the end, I would recommend this to someone that was thinking about buying it.<sup>156</sup>

She shares with readers her entire experience about the dress; the intensity of her fandom is exemplified through this story. Also, she says specifically that this dress makes her *feel* like the character. Interestingly, though, she does not specify *why* the dress makes her feel like Hanna. But based on Hanna's character, it is possible to understand that wearing this dress could make her feel girly, feminine, popular, sophisticated, and glamorous. For her, wearing the clothes allows her to embody these qualities of Hanna's character while creating a public self-brand connected to Hanna as a character type.

On Instagram, fans often express to Line their confidence, newfound beauty, character embodiment, and inspiration about her and the clothes. When Line comments back to them, excitement from the original commenter or a friend typically ensues. For *Pretty Little Liars* fans, Instagram is very much about fans' relationships with Line and their fandom for her and the clothing line, and less so about the actresses who play the characters.

@Prettylittleclothingline: "So here is my last outfit! I want to buy more but here is what I got today! @mandiline sorry for spamming you today. I

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

feel so confident in this dress and I've never felt better! Thank you for this line. #pllcollection #prettylillianscollection”

@Mandiline: “OMG I just saw that you started this u are seriously the cutest thing in the entire world and one of my first believers u are the people that keep me going and u look so gorgeous rocking that dress I truly love you all the strength and style u have!!!”

@Littleliarsgossip: “OhMyGod @Mandiline just commented on your picture. You are the luckiest person breathing on earth right now.” . . .

@Prettlelittleclothingline: “Thank you so much Mandi! You're really the first person who inspired me to follow my dreams and do what I love! I'll always support you! Thank you! @mandiline”<sup>157</sup>

Prettylittleclothingline has posted a few pictures of herself in the clothes, tagging Line in them. In this particular photo she is wearing the Hanna Lace Dress from the first Aéropostale collection. The dress gives her confidence that she has never had before and attributes it to the clothes and Line herself. Prettylittleclothingline's feeling of confidence in the dress rather than feeling sexy or beautiful fits with the post-feminist ideology of girls' empowerment through the body. Because she is a can do girl, she is not sexy; that would be inappropriate and not an accurate representation of the can do girl. Her confidence is unwavering; she can take on any challenge in the dress.

Line's response is very appreciative and grateful; she compliments her follower. This strengthens the relationship she has with Prettylittleclothingine, who then responds

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<sup>157</sup> Instagram. Prettylittleclothingline. Posted January 10, 2014. Accessed March 3, 2014. <http://instagram.com/Prettylittleclothingline>

by telling her how inspirational Line is to her. It is unclear as to what dream Line has inspired Prettylittleclothingline to follow, but it would seem that it does not matter; Line is the source of inspiration either way. This is interesting because Prettylittleclothingline feels a connection to and identifies with Line, not necessarily the characters. She has constructed her self-brand around her fandom for *Pretty Little Liars*, but even more so around Line's clothing line and her relationship with the costume designer. Also noteworthy is Littleliarsgossip's comment. The fact that she says Prettylittleclothingline is "*the luckiest person breathing on earth*" suggests that Littleliarsgossip's self-brand is also wrapped up in a relationship with Line, the characters, and the show.

Prettylittleclothingline's admiration for Line, and the fact that Line is such an inspiration for her to follow her own dreams is significant given Line's background.

According to her website's bio, she:

[grew] up on a tight budget, [and] promised herself she'd never wear the same thing twice. During her senior year, her imaginative flair and skill with scissors and a needle made that a reality. Soon, her future in fashion was all sewn up. After graduating from the prestigious Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM), Mandi first gained experience as an intern, quickly moving into music videos and celebrity styling . . . Her dream of working on TV came true when she became Head Costume Designer on ABC's breakout hit *Greek* [and later *Pretty Little Liars*].<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Mandi Line. "Bio." Accessed August 4, 2014. <http://mandiline.com/bio/>

Line's hard work and dream-come-true narratives perpetuate the neo-liberal and post-feminist notion of self-entrepreneurship and that hard work alone will help an individual succeed. Her story reflects the way many fans may feel by using Line, *Pretty Little Liars*, and fashion to self-brand. If they can just become visible online, and gain a large enough following, they too may be famous one day.

In a different post, *Prettylittleclothingline* writes, "Today I channeled my Aria Montgomery. I chose to add a belt to my sweater instead of a necklace and I wore my maroon pants because I can't find a green pair in stores! @mandiline @lucyhale."<sup>159</sup> Pictured is a photo of Lucy Hale wearing a sweater next to a photo of herself wearing the same sweater. She brings out her inner Aria by wearing the same sweater as the character, but she adds her own creative twist by wearing different colored pants and accessorizing with a belt.

For her, Aria's personality will shine through, meaning that she already has elements of this character inside her somewhere. She needs the clothes to bring Aria out of her, but she embodies Aria's confidence and personality through the clothes. Much like Aria, *Prettylittleclothingline* identifies as creative. This is exemplified by the way she maintains her self-brand by adding her own artistic touch to Aria's outfit. She tags both Line and Hale, who plays Montgomery, which suggests that she is looking for a response from them. Line responds, saying, "U did so good!!"<sup>160</sup> Line's comment validates *Prettylittleclothingline*'s changes to the outfit; she succeeds in creating her own artistic self-brand around Aria's artistic character. Line's public acknowledgment of

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<sup>159</sup> Instagram. *Prettylittleclothingline*. Posted February 28, 2104. Accessed March 2, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

Prettylittleclothingline's outfit satisfies the necessary public display of an entrepreneurial post-feminist self-brand required for her on social media.

In another post, Grimmiegirl writes, “#showmeurpll only three things from the line but soon I'm going to buy Aria's since they are sold out at my mall. This clothing line makes me feel confident and gorgeous! It's so comfortable! @mandiline amazing job on these clothes!”<sup>161</sup> To this, Line replies, “Obsessed with u ps”<sup>162</sup> This post is notable for two reasons in particular. It is extraordinary that the entire clothing line, as she says, makes her feel “confident and gorgeous” simply because it revolves around *Pretty Little Liars*. Her feelings about the clothing line suggest that she did not feel that way before the line came out, and also that these feelings are necessary to become a visible participant in social circles with peers.

In addition, Line's comment suggests that she has a special connection with Grimmiegirl. Her use of “ps,” referring to post script as in a letter, suggests that they already talked about something and her “obsession” with Grimmiegirl is just an afterthought to their already existing relationship or conversation. Writing ps after the message is common among young women; Line may be taking on a particular young identity by saying it that way. From the pictures posted, it looks like Grimmiegirl and Prettylittleclothingline are the same girl. So she and Line have formed a special relationship based on the Aéropostale fashions and *Pretty Little Liars* which is significant for the girl's self-brand as portrayed to her friends on social media. This relationship has

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<sup>161</sup> Instagram. Grimmiegirl. Posted January 9, 2014. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://instagram.com/grimmiegirl>

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

a certain cache: it shows her friends that her fashionista self-brand is very authentic due to her friendship with Line.

The #showmeurpll hashtag is also noteworthy. This was the official hashtag for the first Aéropostale collection's opening weekend in New York City. Line explains this hashtag promotion by saying in a post, "I'm #pllffashion @aeropostale collection lovers!! THIS WHOLE WEEKEND IS CALLED #SHOWMEURPLL I want to see the way YOU wear your new #pllcollection looks!! I'll be posting them! hashtag! #SHOWMEURPLL."<sup>163</sup> Here Line rallies her fans and followers to connect with each other and her through this hashtag, creating a sense of community for her fans. Also, the "ur" has a double meaning of your and you are. It could mean show me you are *Pretty Little Liars*, as in you *are* the Liars, you *are* the show, you *are* the characters, or show me your *Pretty Little Liars* as in the collection. This encourages fan engagement around the characters and clothes, and hails fans as extensions of the characters around the fashion for their self-brands.

In a more recent photo of Line's, an image of the third collection's outfits, allegrajordyn comments:

Ur clothing line is my life :) like I have 15 items from it, 7 spencer, 2 Hanna, 1 Aria, 3 Emily and then 2 of the liars unite shirts!! I actually was Emily two days ago in her black jacket from the second collection and yesterday I was Spencer in her cardigan from the second collection...and I

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<sup>163</sup> Instagram. Mandi Line. Posted January 7, 2014. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://instagram.com/mandiline>

was also aria last week for a day and Emily last week for a day haha I love the collection so muchhhhhhh<sup>164</sup>

Allegrajordyn shares her love for Line's designs by telling her that the fashions are "her life." Saying things like "I actually was Emily" and "I was Spencer in her cardigan" demonstrates how she feels that she embodies the characters when she puts the clothes on. She switches between different identities regularly, suggesting that she refuses to be pigeonholed into one of the branded identities. Also, because the characters all have very different personalities, when put together they form the ultimate good, can do girl as seen from a post-feminist ideology. So if a girl can tap in to each personality, even if it is at different times, she can still achieve the ultimate "good" girl standard. The fact that she describes Line's designs as "her life" suggests that she defines her self-brand enthusiastically around the characters and the clothes. Her identity is transformed by the clothes into the characters; her self-brand entirely encompasses the *Pretty Little Liars* characters in those instances.

A few weeks later, Line reposts this girl's comment collaged with another person's comment and said, "These words are what I have always dreamed of hearing. I can't express my gratitude to the fans for all their love for fashion and how it changes lives. #EXPRESSYOURSELF #nevereverygiveup #pllfashion @imarleneking"<sup>165</sup> By posting comments from fans like this, Line shows gratitude to her fans, and also develops a tighter connection with them. In addition, she shows them that there is a mutual

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<sup>164</sup> Instagram. Mandi Line. Posted March 16, 2014. Accessed March 16, 2014. <http://instagram.com/mandiline>

<sup>165</sup> Instagram. Mandi Line. Posted April 14, 2014. Accessed April 14, 2014. <http://instagram.com/mandiline>

inspiration between her and them. She positions her drive to succeed, and her success, as coming from the fans, which gives them a certain kind of power. For Line, if the fans didn't believe in her, she would not be able to succeed. This is probably not exactly true; she could still be a successful costume designer in Hollywood without their support, though maybe not a household name. Her creative fashion sense existed before *Pretty Little Liars* and the excitement over the costumes. In fact, she consciously decided that she would try to make excitement around clothes by making them a fifth character, so she understood that there would be a big influence. But the gratitude she shows them makes it seem like they give her the success she has.

Allegrajordyn sees Line's post including her comment and writes, "OMG U ACTUALLY REPOSTED MY COMMENT WTF OMG ILYSM THIS IS CRAZYYYYYY!!!!"<sup>166</sup> Her use of acronyms to replace "what the fuck," "oh my God," (twice) and "I love you so much" here are indicative of her youthfulness, as is her use of all capital letters. Her excitement is very clearly exemplified by the shouting, capital letters and extreme emotional phrases like "I love you so much" because her self-brand is so closely tied to Line and *Pretty Little Liars*.

Also on this post of Line's, Rayraychelchel comments, "My confidence hasn't always been the best. But I realized with me, sometimes what I'm wearing makes all the difference. When I put on one of my pll line outfits, I feel different. I'm excited to go and show it off. You did that."<sup>167</sup> This girl attributes her confidence to Line's designs. She gains confidence from channeling the character's personalities through the clothes.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Instagram. Mandi Line. Posted April 14, 2014. Accessed April 27, 2014. <http://instagram.com/mandiline>

In a conversation between friends on Instagram, character embodiment is very visible. For example, these two girls discuss their outfits together, attaching their own identities to the characters’:

@ppliersunite: “Wore my Aria outfit today!!! Thank you @mandiline for

this awesome collection. #PLL #Aero #Awesome #Loveit #Aria

#Montgomery #Lucy #Hale #Fabulous #WerkItGurl #Fierce

@4\_cant\_keep\_a\_secret: Ik I’m wearing my Emily outfit today

@ppliersunite: I’m wearing Hanna tomorrow! @4\_cant\_keep\_a\_secret

@ppliersunite: @4\_cant\_keep\_a\_secret Send me a pic of our Emily outfit!

@4\_cant\_keep\_a\_secret: Ok (: I didn’t get the pants cus nobody was

gonna now they were pll

@ppliersunite: neither did I! Hahaa @4\_cant\_keep\_a\_secret<sup>168</sup>

For these two, the fact that the clothes are recognizable as ones from Aéropostale’s *Pretty Little Liars* collection is important to their self-brands. Neither bought Emily’s pants for that reason. Because Emily’s pants would not have been known as Emily’s pants, it would not enhance their self-brands in any way to purchase them. Their money would go further by purchasing something that their self-brands can benefit more greatly from. Also, a part of their friendship revolves around their love for *Pretty Little Liars*. This shows how carefully they construct their self-brands around the fashion and characters.

This instance, as with Allegrajordyn’s, demonstrates how fans of the show fluidly traverse the boundaries between characters’ personalities. In this sense, it suggests that

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<sup>168</sup> Instagram. Pliersunite. Posted January 10, 2014. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://instagram.com/ppliersunite>

their self-brands are created just as much around Line and the *Pretty Little Liars* brand in general as they are around identifying with one particular character or type of femininity. It also suggests that girls may understand and recognize that these post-feminist feminine identities are all performative and can be changed, switched, or “put on” just like an outfit. This benefits them in that they can move between various feminine identities and become more visible in society. They can be and act differently when wearing different clothes in various situations with diverse groups of people. It complicates their identities, giving them a complexity and dimension that may not exist without the commercial practice of shopping. Additionally, the clothes empower them to be whatever type of girl they want, even if the types are restricted within a particular, socially acceptable standard definition of femininity.

As shown by the above examples, girls’ self-brand creation around the characters of *Pretty Little Liars* traverses many social media platforms and encompasses a variety of types of feminine self-brands. All are inspired by and aspire toward a particular type of femininity as represented by the characters. Some girls, though, seek validation from a more knowledgeable source; their self-brands are still forming and they need assurance that they are “doing” femininity correctly. Some assert their own knowledge and fashionista self-brands for others. In this way, they act as a femininity teacher to the girls whose self-brands are less developed.

The most telling ways girls use the clothes as a part of their self-brands is through the embodiment of the characters through the fashions. For these girls, the clothes change their lived experiences in a way that makes them feel a closer connection to the

characters and Mandi Line. Not only does it enhance their self-brands as *Pretty Little Liars* fans, but as feminine subjects in fashion. By hailing the characters' identities, these girls work to transcend their own physical selves and personalities to access an identity that is perhaps more feminine, well-adjusted, and more accepted by peers than their own bodies. Aéropostale's fashion line is an already developed feminine brand that the girls recognize because of their relationship with the *Pretty Little Liars* characters. So, because their self brands are still developing, the characters and the fashion act as teachers to show girls how to be feminine.

The greatest implication of Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, and other social media are that they perpetuate one dominant type of femininity for young women to look up to as beautiful and socially acceptable. They are all platforms for young women's self-brand creation and semi-creative self-expression, but they are only expressive within the confines of the dominant standard of beauty. While these images and messages are clearly meaningful for the Pinner and commenters who engaged with them, they still suggest a very narrow definition of femininity. It is possible that *Pretty Little Liars* fans recognize the artificiality and constructed, constraining nature of the feminine identities on the show, and perform their self-brands for others through putting on different outfits in order to gain a certain visibility in social circles that may not have always been available to them. Yet these unrealistic, unattainable representations on television and the internet nonetheless have serious consequences for young a woman's self-esteem, body image, and self-brand.

## **Chapter 4, The Good, the Bad, and the *Pretty*: The Liars' impact on American Teens**

### **Project Summary**

This research and analysis has worked to understand how fashion and femininity on television shows targeted at a teenage, female audience infiltrate and influence the lives of young female fans. I have tried to understand how girls' fandom for these shows affects their online interactions and personalities as well as their representations of themselves for others online. I have used ABC Family's hit show *Pretty Little Liars* as an example of this phenomenon and situated it in a neo-liberal, post-feminist context. I have argued that ABC Family, through the hit show *Pretty Little Liars*, has revolutionized quality teen programming by centralizing fashion and the second screen, engaging fans as an unpaid labor force while promoting post-feminist ideologies in the process. The network teaches young women which types of feminine identities gain visibility in society through the characters, and teaches them that female power comes through the body and consumerist practices. Finally, I have argued that fans use the show to create their self-brands on social media by hailing the types of femininity represented by the characters through fashion and style choices.

Chapter one has introduced and outlined the project, situating the importance of understanding it in a neo-liberal, post-feminist society. It also reviewed the necessary bodies of literature for working through some of the larger concepts of post-feminist girl culture, the post-feminist self-brand, fandom, and teen television. Additionally, it discussed the methods I chose to analyze *Pretty Little Liars*, both from the industry's

perspective and the fans' perspective through various social media sites, websites, and video interviews.

In chapter two, I wrote about ABC Family's marketing strategy and how the network has revolutionized teen television through its use of fashion and social media to encourage engagement with the second screen while the show airs. By doing this, *Pretty Little Liars* has increased its presence online, maintaining relevancy with its young, female audience. Additionally, it covered how the show promotes post-feminist ideologies on its online platforms by representing very narrow versions of what visible femininity looks like.

Chapter three focused on the audience and how fans of *Pretty Little Liars* use fashion to create their self-brands online. I looked at the various social media outlets like Instagram and Pinterest that fans use to connect with the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. In addition to social media, I analyzed a fashion blog dedicated to the fashion of *Pretty Little Liars* and the comments section on Aéropostale's website for the *Pretty Little Liars* clothing line. These were useful in understanding how the target audience used fashion and traditionally feminine looks to aspire toward a particular feminine self-brand as represented by the characters.

### **Limitations and Future research**

This research focused on my own interpretation of how girls perceive bloggers, Mandi Line, and the Aéropostale fashion line by interpreting their comments. While their comments are very telling about many things, it is of course not possible to really know for sure how these girls feel and how these feelings affect their day-to-day lived

experiences. Future research could do one-on-one interviews with self-identified fans to understand the ways in which they use fashion and fandom to construct their self-brands online.

Questions surrounding this larger phenomenon, how young women use TV shows and fashion to self-brand online and how this benefits industries through social media, could be expounded upon in various ways in the future. For example, new research could use different networks as examples of the new type of television branding that has occurred since the rise of digital technologies and the second screen to understand what tactics they have used to be successful in this new climate. ABC Family has made itself the singular place for learning about fashion, beauty, and femininity for a young, female audience; how do other networks brand themselves to position and differentiate themselves in the online marketplace?

An additional limitation of this research is that it only focuses on the ways fans use fashion to engage with the show. Future research could analyze fandom for *Pretty Little Liars* more generally, working to understand how fans read the characters and identify with them online. Future research could look at various social media platforms to see how fans engage with the show, the characters, and the four stars' real life personalities. It could look at fan accounts on social media related to the show as a way to see how fans communicate with each other on social media sites, discussing plot lines, theories surrounding the show's mystery, and their admiration for the stars.

Finally, in its attempt to target millennials, ABC Family has established a multicultural, colorblind cast for most of its TV shows. Additionally, there are often

homosexual characters, including Emily on *Pretty Little Liars*. Future research could analyze the contradictions between ABC Family's representations and its roots as the Christian Family Channel, to grapple with these moral and sociological issues.

### **Cultural Implications**

As stated in the introduction, the perception of achieved gender equality in a neo-liberal society has created a space for post-feminist culture and its themes to work themselves out. Examples used in this research include power through the feminine, the sexualized body, power through consumption practices, representations of the "good" girl, and the notion of the self-branded identity online. Each of these themes work to maintain traditional femininity and beauty standards in their own ways, but in particular, it is the notion of the self-branded identity that makes this period of post-feminist culture distinct. Because post-feminism operates under the assumption that equality has been achieved, the concept of a self-brand is presented as a choice for young women. However, in order to participate in popular culture, and be visible in society and with peers, they must follow the rules and create an online identity for the judgment of others. Fans taking on a highly feminized self-brand works to present them in a way that is widely accepted in society, the "good," pretty, polite, girl-next-door.

According to Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke, the fashion industry, television, and other "soft" knowledge industries are those of the highest economic growth because of the ways these cultural products are marketed to consumers. They are marketed "in terms of particular clusters of meaning, often linked to 'lifestyles', and this is taken as an indication of the increased importance of 'culture' to the production and circulation of a

multitude of goods and services.”<sup>169</sup> This emphasizes the importance society places on affective, creative, and cultural products. Not coincidentally, it dovetails with the post-feminist notion of power through consumerist practices. Young women have a large degree of purchasing power; *Pretty Little Liars* has capitalized on this growing economy through its popularity with the middle-class, tech-savvy, millennial target demographic. These intense fans, who admire the characters and Mandi Line, have the economic power to purchase things that help them achieve a similar look or style as their objects of adoration. This type of lifestyle--intense fandom in conjunction with the democratization of fashion and the post-feminist authored self-brand--is driving the economy by increasing the importance of popular culture in the fashion and beauty industries.

John Allen argues that affective knowledge is often marginalized to favor logic and reason, but argues that because cultural production is central to the economy, there is more of an appreciation, acceptance, and understanding of “soft,” affective knowledge as important and valid.<sup>170</sup> Affective knowledge and expressive meanings cannot be coded or quantified. They are interpretive, and only through active participation and engagement can a person understand this type of knowledge. Affective knowledge is often found in feminized areas of consumption like clothes, fashion, and beauty. Even though for some, these areas of knowledge are seen as superficial and frivolous, for others they are important. For culture industries, like those of fashion, beauty, and entertainment,

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<sup>169</sup> Paul du Gay, Michael Pryke, Introduction to *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*. Ed. Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke. (London: Sage Publications) 2002, 7.

<sup>170</sup> John Allen, “Symbolic Economies: the ‘Culturalization’ of economic knowledge,” in *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*. Ed. Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke. (London: Sage Publications) 2002.

feminized forms of knowledge are justified and accepted as valid in the modern cultural economy because they are lucrative areas for businesses.

Allen also argues that clothes function like language, with signs that “provide ‘access’ to a particular ‘world’ be it cultural, political, or economic.”<sup>171</sup> In this sense, only those who share in the intense fan community with other *Pretty Little Liars* fans can know what it means to connect with not only each other, but also with the stars, Mandi Line, and the clothing line to create their self-brands online. It sets them apart from non-fans or other people in their social communities, creating a kind of cultural hierarchy with certain peer groups.

Each of these areas of knowledge, however, continue to work within a patriarchal, capitalistic society. In this context, young women must use their purchasing power to be in-the-know or culturally relevant and maintain visibility with peers. To participate in this fashion and beauty culture, she must not only have access to particular types of cultural knowledge, like that of the *Pretty Little Liars* brand, but must necessarily have a disposable income to pay for things related to the *Pretty Little Liars* brand, in addition to having a certain body shape to make these fashions look the way they are meant to look. In necessitating these prerequisites, this fashion and beauty culture leaves out many young women such as those of lower socio-economic status, and those who do not fit the standard body shape that the *Pretty Little Liars* characters do. Any young women who cannot afford these fashion and beauty choices deviate from the societal standard and risk

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<sup>171</sup> Allen, “Symbolic Economies,” 51.

social invisibility by their peers and by society. This is incredibly important at the age of *Pretty Little Liars*' target, teenage girls.

These narrow representations of feminine beauty perpetuate dominant beauty standards that have been held for decades. The intense visibility of images of young, skinny, beautiful women on social media platforms emphasize that many young women have achieved these standards. The images make unattainable beauty standards seem actual and attainable. This is arguably dangerous for young women's mental and physical health. According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 69 percent of fifth through twelfth grade girls report that images in magazines influence their perception of the ideal body shape, and 47 percent say that they want to lose weight because of magazine images.<sup>172</sup> Clearly, these feelings of inadequacy are related to images that pervade magazines. It is not out of the realm of possibility that these feelings are just as strong and seen at least as often through social media and other cultural products, such as TV shows like *Pretty Little Liars* and social media sites like Pinterest and Instagram.

ABC Family has capitalized on producing cultural products that contribute large economic growth to the fashion and beauty industries by maintaining these narrow standards of femininity. In so doing, ABC Family uses young women's already aspirational feelings toward the characters and insecurities in themselves to promote post-feminist authorship and self-branding online. By taking an already devoted audience and giving them a way to express their fandom through physical, fashionable products, ABC

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<sup>172</sup> National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders. "Eating Disorder Statistics." Accessed July 28, 2014. <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>

Family and *Pretty Little Liars* have captured the hearts, minds, and wallets of this young, fashionista audience for four years and counting.<sup>173</sup>

However, to say that these ideologies are only problematic simplifies the post-feminist equation. Clearly there are important gains for the young women who follow this show, admire the characters, stars, and costume designer. These celebrities are, in their own ways, for problematic reasons or not, figures girls look up to and who inspire them to reach their own dreams and future goals. Many of these young fans share an intense adoration for the costume designer; on Instagram I found more comments about her being an inspiration to them than any of the *Pretty Little Liars* stars. It seems as though many young women share a similar love for fashion and the industry that Line has. Line is very active on Instagram: many of her posts are photos of the *Pretty Little Liars* wardrobe. She presents herself as a skilled professional; yet it is possible that ABC Family encourages her to post these images on social media, much like they encourage the core four stars to do. In this sense, Line is an aspirational role model as well, but as an industry professional rather than solely for her looks.

Fashion, beauty, and make-up are feminized practices, and often are delegitimized and deemed superfluous or denigrated in some way. Yet this research has shown that girls enjoy these practices for various reasons, like to learn about fashion, to connect with other *Pretty Little Liars* fans, and to create their self-brands around the *Pretty Little Liars* brand. If society continues to denigrate female-centered knowledge as worthless, selfish, and superficial, then it stands to reason that young women's feelings of self-worth would

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<sup>173</sup> Whitney Friedlander. "Pretty Little Liars Renewed for Two More Seasons." *Variety*. June 10, 2014. Accessed June 12, 2014. <http://variety.com/2014/tv/news/pretty-little-liars-season-six-season-seven-1201217600/>

fall in the same direction. By this I mean that young women who are passionate about and creative with fashion, beauty, make up, and other feminine things are, in a sense, told by society that their likes are superficial, unnecessary, and worthless, which may make them feel as though they are not intelligent or worthy of the same recognition and praise as someone who enjoys studying the natural sciences or math, for example. Validating these feminized practices is significant; it refuses to accept one form of knowledge as “less” than another, and in so doing, refuses to accept gendered hierarchies and imbalances in a society that still remains unequal along gender lines, despite post-feminist rhetoric to the contrary.

If young women find pleasure in learning about traditionally feminine things, and place a stronger emphasis on female-centered, affective knowledge, it is important to acknowledge and validate their strengths in these areas. Young women’s feelings should be legitimated, not denigrated. Even though these industries operate within a patriarchal, capitalistic system, and there are many problems that go along with that, it is also, realistically, the world in which we live. If a young woman finds joy in participating in fashion and beauty culture, it should be celebrated as other types of more masculine experiences, like sports, are. However, it is not enough to simply celebrate their passions *because* of the problematic post-feminist, neo-liberal context within which women live. There must be a larger discourse in society about fashion and beauty, women’s bodies, and self-worth, recognizing what it means to participate in this image conscious fashion and beauty culture. Young women and men must be taught from a young age to think critically about the kinds of images they consume from the media and online. The fashion

and beauty industries are very creative, artistic fields, and it is important to recognize them as a form of artistic self-expression. But if young women are solely using fashion and beauty to achieve the look of America's "next top model," that can be detrimental to their health and well being. Through a greater understanding of the millennial generation, it is possible to allow them to grow and flourish in ways that are important to them, setting up a world of highly esteemed, powerful women for the future.

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