DISCOURSE, DIALOGUE AND CHARACTERISATION IN TV SERIES

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(eds.)

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Introduction

Popular culture has undoubtedly been influenced by TV series, shows and sitcoms ever since television became a commodity in middle-class households. Such series epitomise the rich, diversified heritage of twentieth and twenty-first-century consumer culture, reflecting in one way or another the social and political scenario of their time. The ideas and concepts beneath successful series are the product of the times; and it is also the politics, financial demands and established ethos of such times that determine and often limit the direction of the show and the type of discourse it assimilates.

The fact that, in recent times, streaming services such as Netflix or Amazon have, following the footsteps of long-established public or cable channels such as HBO, ventured into producing their own original series or miniseries goes to show the extent to which (digital) TV series (DTVS) have gained momentum and are currently one of the most profitable initiatives in the entertainment industry. Substantial investments into quality script writing, casting, special effects, directing, editing, and marketing, among other procedures, have ultimately delivered to the public all sorts of audio-visual fictional narratives that address the concerns and interests of a highly diversified viewership whose interest is constantly under the scrutiny of production companies. This cultural phenomenon has caught the attention of scholars who, from a range of disciplines, have approached the multi-signifying discursive significance that fictional DTVS, as stories and products, have in current society.

This book aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on the so-called field of "Television Studies" through a number of critical essays that offer distinct critical approaches to a selection of fictional (digital) TV series, thus evincing the extent to which these types of narratives that are so embedded in popular culture today may be studied from multiple approaches. Chapter one, written by renown scholar Monika Bednarek, exemplifies how corpus techniques, specifically keyword analysis and lexical profiling, can be put to use for the analysis of the presence and use of

Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) lexis in the Indigenous television drama series *Redfern Now*.

In chapter 2, Miriam Fernández focuses on economic precarity and psychological disability in the series *Mr. Robot*. The author explores what may be characterized as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The series' setting and characters prompt questions related to the concept of "narrative prosthetics" that reveal alternative ways through which to reflect and comprehend the notion of vulnerability.

Also immersed in discourses relating to posthumanism and the possibility of human and robot interaction is chapter 3, by Paul Mitchell, with his analysis of the series *Real Humans* and *Humans*, Swedish and British-American productions respectively. Mitchell draws on the work of Kathleen Richardson and Donna Haraway in order to reflect on how current anxieties regarding the connections between humanity and roboticism disrupt and challenge our conceptions of our species' ontology and sexuality.

Following up, chapter four, is Gustavo Rodríguez Martín's examination of terms of address in the hit series *Breaking Bad*, a show which has often been credited for its magnificent script and character development through dialogue. The author focuses on the different forms of address that the characters use to name the protagonist, Walter White. The analysis proves that the choice of terms of address is a stylistic device which helps the audience understand their relationship with the protagonist.

In a similar way, Ana Belén Cabrejas, in chapter five, approaches the discursive construction of the celebrated character of Daenerys Targaryen from HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Using Bucholtz and Hall's identity model, the chapter examines the rhetorical devices and strategies that are employed by Daenerys when addressing her troops and her subjects (military harangues), which are instrumental in the shaping of a unique identity that allows the speaker to reaffirm the conventions associated with such register while at the same time distinguish herself from male leaders. The author reinforces her arguments by the employment of corpus techniques (UAM Tool) to offer quantification.

Using corpus pragmatics methodologies, Manuel Rodríguez-Peñarroja, in chapter six, resorts to a case-study approach of the episode *Nosedive* of *Black Mirror*. The study focuses on the representation of complimenting acts and laughter in an effort to evaluate the interactive dynamics between the collective sender and audiences.

In chapter 7, Daniela Landert shifts the attention onto multimodal frameworks by analysing the verbal, visual strategies and resources involved in direct characterisation. Specifically, she considers how characters appear on scene for the first time – that is, how they are first introduced to viewers, a crucial moment for the vectorizing of how these may assimilate and relate to the character and to what he/she represents.

In chapter eight, Laura Álvarez Trigo, ventures into the terrains of identity politics by focusing on how identity markers such as gender and race define and articulate human relationships and interactions in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power.* The discussion

is then taken to the level of fan theory so as to assess how meanings created through affect transcends the representations on the screen.

Lastly, Laura Mercé Moreno-Serrano addresses the growing influence of feminist thought and theory in recent times, taking *Big Little Lies* as a paradigmatic example of the extent to which gender-based issues such as domestic violence have gravitated toward the centre stage as a topic of interest in television series. The chapter aims to shed some light into how the series reflects the dynamics between wife-beaters and victims of abuse from a Feminist Critical Discourse approach.

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Chapter 1
Using corpus linguistics to study indexicality in Indigenous-authored television drama: Keyword analysis and lexical profiling

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Abstract

This chapter employs the corpus linguistic techniques of keyword analysis and lexical profiling to study the use of Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) lexis in the Indigenous television drama series *Redfern Now*. This is an Australian landmark production, as it was the first major television drama series commissioned, written, acted, directed and produced by Indigenous screen creatives. More specifically, the chapter focuses on *Redfern Now*'s use of lexis to index Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, triangulating the results from the keyword analysis and lexical profiling. The keyword analysis compares a corpus with dialogue from *Redfern Now* to a reference corpus of US television dialogue (The Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue/SydTV). The lexical profiling analysis is based on two custom-created lists of AAE lexis and distinguishes words that are more familiar in mainstream Australia from those that are less familiar. Results show that *Redfern Now* does not engage in Othering Indigenous characters and features linguistic variation in character speech. Both keyword analysis and lexical profiling identify the use of easily recognisable, familiar and salient lexical cues (e.g. *blackfella*[*s*], *deadly*; kinship terms).

Keywords: telecinematic discourse, indexicality, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, *Redfern Now*, Indigenous television drama

1. Introduction

This chapter presents a corpus linguistic study of the Australian Indigenous-authored television drama *Redfern Now* (Dale & Dear 2012-2013, Blackfella films). While the study of "telecinematic discourse" (Piazza et al. 2011) has become increasingly important for a range of linguistic sub-fields (Bednarek & Zago 2021), linguistic research on film and television has largely ignored Australia. This is despite the fact that Australian television series are popular cultural products, increasingly consumed by viewers worldwide. Australia also makes for an interesting case study on account of its recent changes in the media landscape: In the last decade or so, there has been a dramatic turnaround in the amount of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander TV characters

(Screen Australia 2016) with a wealth of "high-end, big-budget Indigenous–authored television drama and documentary series" (Davis 2017: 232). In Sebbens's words:

> The golden age of Indigenous television is upon us and why? Because we, First Nations people, have gained control of our narrative. We are exploring storytelling through television in every way we can. We will make mistakes, we will make history, we will spark dialogue and incite empathy. We will no longer accept a non-Indigenous lens fogging over our history and our lived experience. (Sebbens 2020)

The critical success of this endeavour is seen in the fact that the 2020 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards featured a record number of nominations for Indigenous stories and Indigenous-led productions (AACTA 2020). Indigenous characters are now proportionally well represented in mainstream TV series, with 5% of characters in comparison to 3% of the population, albeit concentrated in particular series (Screen Australia 2016: 3). Australian viewers thus encounter a range of Indigenous TV characters, who vary in their use of Standard Australian English, varieties of Australian Aboriginal English and traditional/new Indigenous languages. This is a significant development, but there is a lack of linguistic knowledge of the language varieties that are transmitted to audiences in this way. This is particularly important since "the closest that many non-indigenous Australians will come to having contact with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is via their representation in the media" (Bullimore 1999: 72). As Vatsikopoulosputs (2019) puts it, the media "is crucial in normalising diversity and demolishing the 'othering' of difference that divides us".

A particular focus of this study is on mediated Australian Aboriginal English (henceforth: AAE). AAE has long been recognised "as a valid, rule-governed dialect of English" (Eades 2013: 2), but is best regarded as "a cover term for overlapping varieties of the dialect(s) of English spoken by Aboriginal people" (Eades 2013: 3). In addition to regional variation, it is hard to draw a clear boundary between a "heavy" (i.e. basilectal) variety and a creole (Dickson 2020: 148) or between a "light" (i.e. acrolectal) variety and general Australian English with some features of AAE (Eades 2013: 4). There is also a significant amount of intra- and interspeaker variability (Dickson 2020: 145). In addition to AAE, I therefore use Diana Eades' term *Aboriginal ways of using English*, which aims to counter the reification associated with the term *Aboriginal English* (Eades 2013: 4).

The main areas of linguistic research on AAE can be categorised as language description, language acquisition, educational and literacy research, legal contexts, cultural/cognitive linguistic work and research into history and ownership (see overviews in Eades 2014; Malcolm 2018; Dickson 2020). Because of this scope, relevant linguistic research tends naturally not to focus on fictional contexts – with "films and literary works […] contain[ing] relatively unexplored sources of Aboriginal English data" (Eades 2014: 436, but see Vinson, 2008, Dickson, 2020). This chapter

addresses this gap by using corpus linguistics to investigate the language used in the Indigenous-authored TV series *Redfern Now* – the first drama project produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Indigenous Department (ABC no date).

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a brief overview of relevant research on minority Englishes in telecinematic discourse, before Section 3 provides necessary background on *Redfern Now* (3.1), the corpus (3.2) and the approach (3.3). Section 4 discusses the results, and section 5 offers concluding remarks.

2. Minority Englishes and telecinematic discourse

Linguistic research on minority Englishes in telecinematic discourse has shown that films and television series have traditionally introduced and reinforced negative attitudes about speakers of minority Englishes and "nonstandard" language varieties, often perpetuating a *standard language ideology* (Lippi-Green 1997). Representations of these varieties of English (e.g. African American, Asian American, Latinx, Southern American, non-native) tend to be selective and inaccurate. For instance, Meek (2006) studied "American Indian (Native American)" as constructed in three television episodes, eight Hollywood films and two greeting cards (produced between 1936 and 1997). She identifies a racialised and racist style of speech she calls "Hollywood Injun English", made up of "a limited set of tokens to serve as indexes of 'Indianness'" (Meek 2006: 95), including certain grammatical markers, metaphorical flourishes and specialised vocabulary (e.g. *chief*, *tepee*, *squaw*, *how*). This style has some commonalities with historical descriptions of American Indian Pidgin English but, crucially, differs from actual American Indian English varieties and "indexes an image of Indians as foreign victims, eloquent yet unsocialized" (Meek 2006: 121). In Westerns, disfluency and linguistic incompetence are normalised as dimensions of Indianness (Meek 2020). Meek (2020: 374) emphasises that such "media performance and representation are critical […] for understanding the racializing of Indian language and the languaging of an Indian race".

On the whole, sociolinguists have found evidence of linguistic discrimination/racism and stereotypes in American movies, for example the use of mock varieties and the use of "non-standard" language by only negative, minor, humorous, or weak characters (for details, see overview in Bednarek 2018a). The dialogue of characters who speak a "non-standard" variety is often characterised by the use of a few marked linguistic features that are easily recognisable and ideologically salient or iconic, without the variation found in "real" life (Queen 2015: 165). The use of such features means that viewers can easily and quickly assess and categorise characters (Queen 2015: 165). The participation framework of telecinematic discourse – the fact that the dialogue is ultimately designed for a ratified, overhearing audience – partially helps to explain this general tendency (Bednarek 2018a: 25).

However, this body of research has largely focussed on representations in older American movies and has not used corpus linguistics as a methodology. Research on more recent TV series suggests that these may perpetuate inaccurate or negative representations, but that there are also exceptions (e.g. Bell 2016; Coupland 2016; Lopez & Bucholtz 2017). The New Zealand series *bro'Town* for example selects appropriate linguistic variables and represents variations within Pasifika English (Gibson & Bell 2010). In Australia, research on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in television has largely taken place in non-linguistic disciplines, such as sociology, media, television, or cultural studies. Research in these disciplines sometimes comments on general aspects of language such as (non-) use of an Aboriginal language or AAE vocabulary in film, but tends to focus on other aspects (e.g. Thomas 2010; Blackmore 2015; Starrs 2016; Davis 2017). This chapter therefore aims to put a new spotlight on mediated Aboriginal ways of using English, with the help of a corpus linguistic case study of *Redfern Now*.

3. Methodology

3.1. Redfern Now

The decision to undertake a case study of *Redfern Now* was influenced by its status in the canon, since it is widely regarded as a landmark production for "bringing diverse representations of Indigenous culture to a wide audience, including some previously unseen and strongly positive sides of Indigenous communities" (Screen Australia 2016: 14). *Redfern Now* was Australia's first major television series commissioned, written, acted, directed and produced by Indigenous industry professionals (Nelson 2013; Riseman 2016). The program attracted critical acclaim, was sold internationally, was nominated for/won multiple industry awards and has been the subject of research outside linguistics (e.g. Collins 2013; Warner 2017).

The series has an urban setting (Redfern is a suburb of Sydney) and is "addressed to local, national and transnational audiences that include Indigenous, settler and migrant peoples" (Collins 2013: 219). As a migrant Australian myself, I am a member of this addressed audience and it is from this non-Indigenous viewer-analyst perspective that this study is undertaken.

In terms of narrative structure, *Redfern Now* is best classified as an "anthology" (Douglas 2011: 15), meaning that there are typically different main characters that feature in separate storylines that are (mostly) limited to a particular episode. Each episode thus features a different, free-standing story, zooming in on the lives of particular characters. However, some of the characters do appear across episodes and there are a few continued storylines across the two seasons (e.g. involving policeman Aaron Davies). While there are a few non-Indigenous characters, the main characters around which the series revolves are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. In Nelson's words:

> Watching *Redfern Now,* the realisation hits that, for perhaps the first time in a television drama, White Australia is 'other', and the token characters are the non-Indigenous ones; the tables are finally turned. There is interaction between the outside world and that community, and there is mobility and fluidity, but the focus is firmly on the Indigenous inhabitants of this universe, and the richness of the characters on full display.' (Nelson 2013: 48)

In terms of authorship, (British) story producer Jimmy McGovern worked closely with Indigenous scriptwriters in a collaborative process:

> Starting in December 2010, McGovern held a series of workshops with the indigenous [sic] writers, honing their stories, mining their minds, searching for what McGovern calls "emotional truth".
> "We drove the writers into the ground," he says. "Two four-hour sessions every day, just talking story; burrowing down, asking, 'is this exciting? Is this convincing'? And because part of the exercise was to bring on Aboriginal writers, we had to make sure that *they wrote every word*."
>
> (Elliott 2012, italics mine)

To analyse *Redfern Now*, corpus linguistic analysis (see section 3.3) is combined with sociolinguistic theory. While some sociolinguists dismiss media language as "artificial", others have interrogated such language closely, suggesting that the narrative mass media play a significant role in establishing, reflecting, recycling and changing language ideologies, language attitudes and sociocultural norms (e.g. Richardson 2010; Queen 2015; Coupland et al. 2016, Meek 2020). It is broadly within this sociolinguistic tradition that I situate the research presented in this chapter. More precisely, the sociolinguistic concept that this study draws on is that of indexicality. As Queen (2015) explains:

> *Type indexicality* is the meaningful connection of language to the broad set of social kinds that characters often inhabit. We can think of these both as their social demographics, like race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and class, as well as specific kinds of personae, like nerds, jocks, and girly girls. *Trait indexicality*, on the other hand, is the connection of language to variability within categories of social demographics and personae, such as being quiet, cheerful, melancholy, or energetic. (Queen 2015: 176, italics in original)

In other words, she distinguishes between the indexing of social variables or social personae (type indexicality) and the indexing of personality features or stances (traits). An example from the film *Boyz n the Hood* is the different frequency of multiple negation and null copula in the dialogue of two characters who are similar in age, gender, race and neighbourhood, but who are distinguished in their orientation or stance towards their circumstances (Queen 2015: 177–178). The different frequency of these features of African American Vernacular English thus indexes these characters' different traits. In this chapter, I am most interested in type indexicality in relation to the indexing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, while other aspects of this model (e.g. social personae; stance; personality) will be less relevant.

3.2. **Corpus**

The corpus for this study consists of edited online transcripts taken from the (now defunct) website https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/. It is unclear how these texts were produced and what they represent – the website refers to them both as *scripts* and as *transcripts*, but does not provide any detail. It is possible that they are automatically extracted subtitles, as they do not include any speaker names. They are clearly not production scripts and it is unlikely that they were actually manually transcribed. I will nevertheless refer to them as *transcripts* here. Using these transcripts as a starting point and watching the relevant episodes on DVD, a research assistant corrected the texts, identified speakers by their character name and allocated turns accordingly. The punctuation and spelling for interjections (e.g. *Arggh!*) in the online transcripts were retained. The spelling of pronunciation variants already present in these texts was also retained (e.g. *'em*, *I dunno*, *nah*, *nothin'*, *thinkin'*), and was not systematically corrected for consistency. It is therefore not possible to use these transcripts for the study of pronunciation variants. Instead, this chapter will mostly be concerned with lexis.

Because the focus of this study is on TV series, the telemovie was not included and because one transcript was not available online, the corpus consists of a total of 11 episodes (season 1, episodes 1-6; season 2, episodes 1-5). The texts were processed as UTF-8 encoded .txt files.

```
File  Edit  Format  View  Help
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> What are you doing? </u>
<u who="RFN_TENEKA"> What? </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> What are you hanging around with these dropkicks
for? </u>
<u who="RFN_TENEKA"> What are you going on about? </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> You got a brain, child. You got a future. Don't
waste it by hanging around with these little arseholes. </u>
<u who="RFN_TENEKA"> Enough, eh? You're making me shame, Coral. </u>
<u who="RFN_GAZ"> Leave her alone! </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> You, shut it. Does your mother know you're
hanging around with these oxygen thieves? </u>
<u who="RFN_GAZ"> You can't steal oxygen, you old bat. </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> And what's two plus two? </u>
<u who="RFN_GAZ"> What? </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> Thought so. Does your mother know you're out
here? </u>
<u who="RFN_TENEKA"> Yeah. </u>
<u who="RFN_CORAL"> Well, you won't mind if I ring her when I get
back, will ya? 'Coz that's what I'm gonna do, girl. If you're still
out here with numb-nuts when I get back, I'm phoning your mother.
</u>
<u who="RFN_GAZ"> Phone her mother, then. We don't care! Mind your
own business! </u>
```

Fig. 1. Example of a corpus file

As Figure 1 indicates, the corpus has not yet been annotated for demographic variables such as gender, age and ethnicity. However, utterances by specific speakers are identified through XML tags, with <u who="…"> showing the identity of

the speaker and </u> marking the end of the relevant utterance. Utterances usually correspond to all dialogue spoken by a specific character before another character's turn, but in certain cases (e.g. where a new, different scene starts or where a lengthy pause occurs because of a non-verbal action sequence), dialogue by the same speaker was identified as a new utterance (Example 1).

> Example 1
> <u who="RFN_GRACE"> Hello. Emergency? Grace Neilson. </u>
> [New scene; different location]
> <u who="RFN_GRACE"> Helen, hi. Yeah, it's just me. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind watching Tyler and Maddi for a week or so. Yeah, it's pretty bad. Oh, that would be great! Thank you so much. We're on our way. </u>

Table 1 shows the composition of the *Redfern Now* corpus (RFN) in number of words.[1] While this is a very small, specialised corpus, it is highly representative of *Redfern Now*, since it contains the dialogue of all but one episode of the series.

Episode	Tokens (running words) in text
S1, episode 1	4,822
S1, episode 2	4,430
S1, episode 3	5,491
S1, episode 4	4,342
S1, episode 5	4,305
S1, episode 6	4,355
S2, episode 1	4,227
S2, episode 2	5,075
S2, episode 3	4,479
S2, episode 4	3,000
S2, episode 5	3,478
Total	**48,004**

Table 1. *Redfern Now* corpus (RFN)

[1] *WordSmith* settings: hyphens separate words; apostrophe not allowed within words (i.e. don, rather than *don't* is identified as one token), numbers not in word lists. Content within tags (speaker names, etc.) was ignored in the calculation of keywords.

3.3. **Approach**

In terms of my approach in this chapter it is useful to draw on the new topology for corpus and discourse analysis proposed by Bednarek & Caple (2017). They distinguish between four zones of analysis, depending on whether research focuses on one semiotic mode or not, and whether research focuses on patterns across texts or within texts. Thus, Figure 2 shows that researchers can situate their study as being intrasemiotic (monomodal) or intersemiotic (horizontal axis), and intratextual or intertextual (vertical axis). These zones are considered to be clines or regions, rather than strict separate categories, and the term *intertextual* has nothing to do with literary intertextuality (allusion) but rather refers to linguistic patterns that can be found across the texts included in a corpus. Figure 2 also shows that I situate my case studies mainly in zone 2: The focus is on language (intrasemiotic) and the primary interest is in patterns *across* texts/episodes in the corpus (intertextual), rather than in patterns *within* texts/episodes (such as narrative or scene structure).

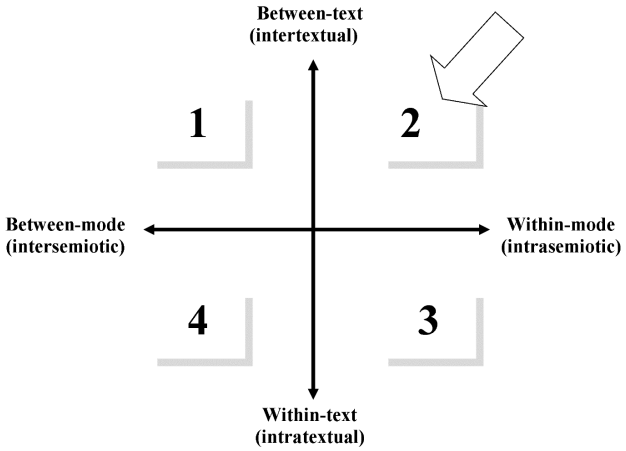

Fig. 2. A topology for corpus and discourse analysis

The first method used in this intrasemiotic and intertextual study is keyword analysis. This is a staple technique in corpus linguistics and identifies words that are unusually frequent or infrequent in the corpus of interest when compared with a second corpus that acts as a reference norm. Nevertheless, the technique is not without its debates, most often centring around how keywords are identified (e.g. Brezina 2018; Egbert & Biber 2019). One debate concerns whether keywords are identified for the corpus as a whole or whether keywords are identified based on how they are distributed across the texts in the corpus. In this chapter, keywords are identified for the corpus as a whole, since the corpus is arguably a meaningful narrative unit, representing the TV anthology

Redfern Now. However, the distribution of keywords across a corpus is clearly also important and will be considered in the analysis. I will use the term *range* (Nation & Waring 1997) when identifying in how many texts/episodes a keyword occurs.

The study used *WordSmith 7* (Scott 2019) to identify words that are unusually frequent in RFN compared to a reference corpus (i.e. "positive" keywords). One appropriate reference corpus would have been a corpus with Australian TV series that include mainly non-Indigenous characters because the aim is to look at mediated constructed speech on its own terms, not to test its accuracy against "naturally occurring" language. However, it would have been very time-consuming to build such a reference corpus and the *TV Corpus* (see Davies 2020) was not deemed suitable (see Bednarek 2020a: 10). It was instead decided to use an existing, carefully-designed reference corpus of dialogue from US TV series: the *Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue* (SydTV; Bednarek 2018b). Using a corpus of television dialogue as reference corpus helps to retrieve keywords that are highly distinctive of *Redfern Now* rather than being distinctive of television dialogue in general. SydTV (www.syd-tv.com) contains approximately 275,000 words of dialogue from 66 US television series. The corpus design is detailed in Bednarek (2018a; 2018b; 2020b). I used the original (not standardised) version 4.0, which contains similar spelling variants as RFN.

Keywords were retrieved by combining a range of different measures (raw frequency, log ratio, BIC score, log likelihood). Thresholds relevant to these measures were not very strict, to account for the small size of the corpus (for other settings, see note 1):

i. minimum frequency = 2
ii. minimum Log ratio = 1.00 (at least twice more common in RFN)
iii. minimum BIC score = 2.00 (positive evidence)
iv. p-value = 0.05 (highest acceptable p-value), derived from the log likelihood score

Based on what is known about the *Redfern Now* corpus and SydTV, we would expect the keywords to relate to four different factors:

i. Different narratives (settings, plots, characters)
ii. Different transcription conventions
iii. Different media landscapes
iv. Different national varieties (Australian English vs American English)
v. Aboriginal ways of using English (absent in SydTV)

Because of the specific focus of this chapter, keywords relating to points i to iii first had to be identified and excluded. This was achieved through a procedure which is described in detail in Bednarek (2020a), which also includes information on the Australian English keywords (point iv). As a result of this procedure, the initial number of keywords (195) was reduced to 121 (available at

https://osf.io/ue9a6/?view_only=01baec6debb8491ba6f61e9088c4432d). These keywords were then classified, with a focus on whether they can be related to the indexing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, based on what we know about Aboriginal ways of using English, i.e. existing linguistic descriptions of AAE.

To say that the identified keywords are associated with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, does not mean that they are so *exclusively*. First, certain words may also be associated with other varieties (e.g. other varieties of English in Australia); second, certain words may simultaneously index other aspects such as informality (e.g. *eh*) or social class/education (e.g. *youse*). In addition, it is worth remembering that indexical meaning depends both on the context of occurrence and on the listener and can therefore be interpreted differently by audiences (Queen 2015: 128). For example, speakers of different language varieties may not share the same indexical associations. While the narrative mass media often rely on features that are particularly recognisable, "this degree of potential variation makes the nature of the meaning of the linguistic variation in the film dependent on the viewer" (Queen 2015: 130). In the remainder of this chapter, any mention of indexicality must be read with this caveat in mind – these are potential associations which may differ among viewers.

The second corpus linguistic method used in this study is lexical profiling of the *Redfern Now* corpus using AntWordProfiler (Anthony 2013). This program establishes the lexical coverage of a text or corpus with the help of wordlists, usually with the aim of measuring the complexity of texts. In essence, the words that occur in a given corpus are compared with specific wordlists to identify which of the words on the wordlists occur in the corpus, including their frequency and distribution. In this study, I used AntWordProfiler not to measure lexical complexity, but to identify the presence of potential AAE lexis in RFN. To do so, I first created two wordlists of AAE based on existing linguistic descriptions. The process of creating these wordlists is described in detail in Bednarek (2020c). The two word lists are structured into headwords (lemmas) and sub-entries (e.g. word forms or spelling variants). List 1 includes entries where the headword is not underlined by the WORD spellchecker for Australian English. This should capture words that are also in use in mainstream Australian English, but are used in specific ways in AAE. It may also include AAE words or words from traditional Indigenous languages that are codified in the dictionary, and are perhaps relatively familiar in mainstream Australia. List 2 includes entries where the headword *is* underlined by the WORD spellchecker. This should capture mostly words that are not codified in mainstream Australian English. The list may also include some words from a specific traditional/new Indigenous language (e.g. *kumanji/ kwementyeye*). The words on list 2 are perhaps more unique to AAE than the words on list 1, or are less familiar in mainstream Australia. In total, list 1 contains 827 word forms (300 headwords), e.g. *dreamtime, gammon, humbug, Koori*,

while list 2 contains 611 word forms (189 headwords), e.g. *goomie, gubbariginal, kartiya, migloo, tidda*.[2] By doing a lexical profile of RFN against these two word lists, it becomes possible to identify which AAE lexis is used in RFN and whether the program uses more of the familiar words (from list 1) or the less familiar words (from list 2). We can also identify word forms and headwords that are the most frequent and the most distributed in RFN.

Corpus linguistic methods are particularly useful for this study because they are less time-consuming than manual reading of the transcripts or viewing of the episodes to identify potential instances of AAE. Such a manual process would also risk missing relevant instances. In addition, these two methods incorporate statistical and quantitative information and make use of suitable points of reference (a reference corpus in the case of keywords and wordlists in the case of lexical profiling). They offer an appropriate starting point for an overview of lexis in *Redfern Now* and can be complemented by qualitative methods in the future.

4. Results

4.1. Keywords associated with Aboriginal ways of using English

Since the vast majority of characters in *Redfern Now* are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, we can identify keywords relating to Indigenous identity (*Aboriginal*, *Indigenous*) and keywords that are associated with AAE (e.g. *whitefella*, *deadly*, *gammon*):[3]

- Range 1–2 episodes: *whitefella*
- Range 3–8 episodes: *fella, fellas, blackfellas, Aboriginal, deadly, Indigenous, gammon, blackfella*
- Range 9–11 episodes: *eh*, *'em*

Looking at the lexicon, the words *blackfella* ('Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person'), *whitefella* ('white person') and *deadly* ('cool, great, fantastic, awesome') would be known to many non-Indigenous Australian viewers that belong to the ABC target audience. *Fellow*, *deadly* and *gammon* ('nonsense, rubbish') all feature in the

[2] It is likely that the lists (and the number of headwords/word forms) will change slightly in the future, for example if additional spelling variants are discovered and added. The relevant versions used in this paper were created on 30 September 2020 and are available at https://osf.io/ue9a6/?view_only=01baec6debb8491ba6f61e9088c4432d.

[3] After all keyword analyses had been completed, I became aware that there are also two instances of *gammin* and two instances of *ay* in RFN, which adds up to a total of 6 instances of *gammon/gammin* and 104 instances of *eh/ay*. The terms *gammon* and *mob* seem to be regionalisms, as they are also used by non-Indigenous people in Northern Australia (Dickson 2020: 147), so these words might be perceived differently by viewers from that region.

very meagre Wikipedia entry on Australian Aboriginal English (which only lists 13 examples under "lexicon"; 12 February 2020). There was also an award called the *Deadly Awards*, which were covered in Australian news. Arguably, most of these words can therefore be described as easily recognisable and ideologically salient; on the whole, these are words that would be familiar and highly likely to be strongly associated with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity for many viewers.

Considering *'em* and *eh*, matters are more complex. These also occur in Australian English and other varieties of English. *'Em* was included in this section because Malcolm (2018) lists the elision of interdental fricatives as an aspect of the phonetics and phonology of AAE, given that such fricatives are "often elided by speakers of Aboriginal English" (Malcolm 2018: 41). However, he also acknowledges that they are also often elided by speakers of many other varieties. In any case, it is unclear whether pronunciation variants such as *'em* have been consistently transcribed.

Eh – when used as a tag – is "not uncommon in Australian English" and also occurs in non-Australian vernacular varieties, but has been associated with AAE (e.g. Butcher 2008; Malcolm 2018). *Eh* has its own entry in Arthur's *Aboriginal English* where its use is explained as follows:

> The use of this interjection, which invites but does not demand a comment from the person addressed, is one of the communication strategies used in Aboriginal society. Direct questioning is often considered inappropriate behaviour; the speaker may attempt to elicit information or opinion by the use of a comment, which the person addressed is therefore free to "answer" if he or she wishes. In this way, personal privacy in a very "public" society is protected, and the personal dignity of individuals is preserved by their not being "put on the spot" with a direct question. (Arthur 1996: 199)

With 102 instances across all 11 episodes (21.25 per 10,000 words; character diffusion: 35 speakers), *eh* is in fact the fourth most frequent keyword in RFN and the second most "key". Analysis of the relative frequencies of only clause- and sentence-final *eh* in (subsections of) three corpora of Australian English (Australian Radio Talkback [ART]; International Corpus of English, Australia [ICE-AUS]; Australian Corpus of English [ACE]) shows that this use is much more frequent in RFN (Figure 3; methodological details available at https://osf.io/ue9a6/?view_only=01baec6debb8491ba6f61e9088c4432d).

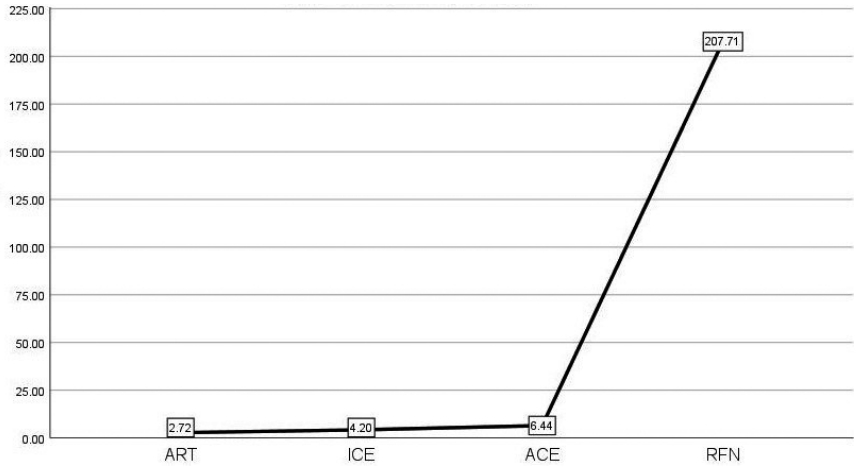

Fig. 3. Comparison of clause- and sentence-final *eh* in three corpora of Australian English vs. RFN (normalised per 100,000 words; numbers rounded)

As shown in Bednarek (2020a), clause- and sentence-final use of *eh* in *Redfern Now* features a large amount of variation between speakers/characters. Moreover, although the majority of characters who use *eh* are clearly Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, it is not exclusively used by these speakers. This suggests that it is also associated with Australian identity more generally. In addition, in combination with other linguistic resources *eh* can also be used to index a character's stance such as their orientation towards the police (see Bednarek 2020a).

Moving on to other keywords that could be classified as "Aboriginal ways of using English", a significant number of keywords are family or kinship terms:

— Range 1–2 episodes: *aunt, poppy, unc, bred* ['brother'], *bra* ['bro'], *nan, kin*
— Range 3–8 episodes: *kids, boys, mob, brother, auntie, sis, cuz, bro, daddy, granddaughter*
— Range 9–11 episodes: *mum, dad, mother, bub, boy, father, son*

As can be seen from their range, these words occur across the corpus. While some are idiolectal and possibly associated with trait indexicality (e.g. *bred* is used by only one character, Charlie) and others are related to specific narrative moments (e.g. *kin* only occurs as *next of kin*), many of these keywords are used by more than one character in more than one episode. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that family is a theme/plot in *Redfern Now* (Nelson 2013); on the other hand, kinship is also a salient aspect of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures probably known to the *Redfern Now* target audience. Kinship was instrumental in organising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies prior to British invasion and continues to be important today (Arthur 1996: 70). The Australian Curriculum lists family and

kinship structures as an organising idea in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (Australian Curriculum no date) and government resources such as *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities* include information on family and kinship (NSW Department of Community Services 2009: 13). Again, I would argue that it is highly likely that kinship terms are ideologically salient, easily recognisable and familiar to *Redfern Now*'s target audience. Ober & Bell (2012) argue that relationship expressed through kinship terms is one of the "key features of this English dialect that make it distinctly Aboriginal" (Ober & Bell 2012: 73). Further quantitative and qualitative analysis of kinship terms in *Redfern Now* is presented in Bednarek (2020a).

4.2. **Lexical profiling**

The software thresholds I used in the keyword analysis did not allow identification of *all* features associated with AAE or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (e.g. *yarn*, occurring twice in *Redfern Now*; *Wonnarua* occurring once). The reference corpus also impacted on the keywords that were retrieved, highlighting differences between the dialogue in *Redfern Now* when compared to US TV dialogue. The use of keyword analysis for identifying indexicality in telecinematic discourse is further evaluated in Bednarek (2020a). It is therefore useful to triangulate results by using a different corpus linguistic technique, in this case lexical profiling using AntWordProfiler (see section 3.3).

Table 2 shows that 2409 tokens in RFN are instances of words from list 1, with 244 word forms (called 'types' in AntWordProfiler) and 152 headwords (called 'groups' in AntWordProfiler) – compared to only 15 tokens of 9 word forms/headwords from list 2. This means that RFN relies on words that are either not unique to AAE or on AAE words that are familiar or codified in mainstream Australia.

	Tokens	**Word forms ('types')**	**Headwords ('groups')**
AAE list 1	2409 (5.03%)	244 (7.47%)	152 (4.79%)
AAE list 2	15 (0.03%)	9 (0.28%)	9 (0.28%)

Table 2. Summary of AntWordProfiler results

The most frequent headwords from list 1 – with a raw frequency of at least 100 – are 'mother' (151; including relevant word forms such as *mum*, *mother*, etc.), 'father' (144; including relevant word forms such as *dad*, *father*, etc.), 'right' (136), 'sorry' (126), 'brother' (105; including relevant word forms such as *bro*, *bros*, *brothers*, etc.), and 'eh' (104; including spelling variants). The most distributed headwords from list 1 – with a range of at least 10 – are 'mother', 'father', 'right', 'sorry', 'eh', 'home', 'hear', 'wrong', 'worry', 'own' (range = 11), and 'walk', 'bub', 'lot' (range = 10). If we

consider the word forms from list 1 in more detail, 73% of the 244 word forms occur less than ten times (raw frequency), while 43% occur only 1-2 times. The ten most frequent word forms occur 944 times, making up 39.2% of all the relevant tokens (2409): *right, sorry, eh, dad, mum, son, home, mother, brother, bit, wrong, bub*. On the one hand, these results confirm the importance of kinship terms and the tag *eh* in RFN, both of which have already become apparent through keyword analysis. However, other word forms (*right*, *sorry*, *home*, *bit*, *wrong*) are not necessarily specific AAE uses. For example*, sorry* does not appear to be used in AAE specific ways in RFN, with zero occurrences of *sorry business, sorry camp, sorry cut, sorry people* or *sorry sore*. In fact, of the 126 occurrences of *sorry*, the vast majority are instances of (*I'm*) … *sorry* (*about*). There is one reference to a historical event, namely the Walk for Reconciliation across Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000: 'Half of your benefactors walked the Sydney Harbour Bridge to say sorry.' Similarly, none of the 136 instances of *right* are used with reference to marriage ('following traditional rules'), or in the phrases *right sort* or *right way* (Arthur 1996: 85). Findings such as these do mean that list 1 includes false positives and that Table 2 vastly overestimates the amount of AAE lexis used in RFN. However, this does not mean that all results are irrelevant – the results do for example include words such as *deadly*, *mob*, *blackfella* or *gammon*, with *deadly* always used with the AAE meaning of 'cool, great, fantastic, awesome' in RFN (see Figure 4).

1	you. </u> <u who="RFN_RAY"> You look **deadly** tonight, woman! </u> <u
2	I just said... you look good. You look **deadly.** If you were goin' to court. </u> <u
3	I was just joking, alright? You look **deadly.** Joely, I'm proud of you, alright?
4	who="RFN_EDDIE"> Well, that's... that's **deadly.** You... you stood your ground.
5	I thought you wanted me because I was **deadly.** </u> <u who="RFN_NIC"> Yeah,
6	who="RFN_NIC"> Yeah, and 'coz you're **deadly.** </u> <u who="RFN_NIC"> It
7	</u> <u who="RFN_INDIGO"> Oh, he's **deadly.** </u> <u who="RFN_ALLIE"> Oh,
8	that tie off. <u who="RFN_AARON"> It's **deadly.** <u who="RFN_ROBYN"> It's ugly.
9	It's ugly. <u who="RFN_AARON"> No, it's **deadly.** <u who="RFN_ROBYN"> It's ugly.
10	it off. <u who="RFN_AARON"> It's still **deadly.** <u who="RFN_ALLIE"> Are we

Fig. 4. Concordance lines for *deadly* in RFN

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine all 2409 occurrences from list 1 qualitatively as regards their specific use in context, but preliminary analysis of a subset suggests that only about 16% of analysed tokens are AAE uses. Moreover, qualitative analysis of all occurrences is easily possible for list 2 (15 instances). Table 3 displays all word forms from list 2 together with their raw frequency (all have a range of only one episode). Concordancing shows that *Chooky* and *Mookie* are used as character names (referring to or addressing these characters), while *piggy* is used in an allusion to the nursery rhyme *This little piggy*.

Word form	Frequency	AAE use
Chooky	4	no
Mookie	3	no
piggy	2	no
binangs	1	yes
bulli	1	yes
Gadigal	1	yes
gungie	1	yes
gunjabulls	1	yes
Wonnarua	1	yes

Table 3. Identified word forms from list 2 (raw frequency)

However, the remaining words are appropriately identified as AAE lexical usage and occur in three different episodes of the first season:

— GRACE: Malakai, give your sister a turn, and bring your runners here, please. Did you hear me, Malakai? Oi. Are your binangs painted on, boy? (season 1, episode 1)
— RAY: Gunjabulls. Bulli man. (season 1, episode 3)
— WOMAN: Raymond is a proud Wonnarua man who's lived most of his life in Redfern. (season 1, episode 3)
— RAY: Thanks. First, I'd like to pay respect to the traditional owners of the land where we are today, the Gadigal people. (season 1, episode 3)
— MAN: Look out, the gungie's here. (season 1, episode 6)

All instances are uttered by Indigenous characters, both main (Grace, Ray) and minor (man, woman). Three instances refer to different AAE words for police (*gunjabulls*, *bulli man*, *gungie*), while two instances refer to specific Aboriginal groups (*Gadigal*, *Wonnarua*). The first instance functions to tell Malakai (Grace's son) off for not listening, and its meaning is easily comprehensible from the co-text. Names such as *Gadigal* or *Wonnarua* would also be familiar to many Australian TV viewers from Welcome or Acknowledgment to Country ceremonies.

5. **Conclusion**

The language practices used in television series can be extremely powerful in influencing audience perceptions, especially given that such programs can reach hundreds of thousands of Australian and international viewers. For many of these viewers, television characters are an important source for experiencing "Aboriginal

ways of using English", especially if they do not regularly interact with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Yet, we know very little about the language practices transmitted to viewers through such series.

To address this gap in knowledge, this chapter has presented a case study of the landmark series *Redfern Now*. As we have seen, this Indigenous-led television drama does not engage in Othering Indigenous characters and features linguistic variation in character speech. It contrasts significantly with US media representation of Native American characters (Meek 2006, 2020). In line with previous research, keyword analysis has identified the use of easily recognisable, familiar and ideologically salient cues (e.g. *blackfella*[*s*], *deadly*; kinship terms). The results from the lexical profiling analysis confirmed this, showing that a low percentage of AAE words are used, especially considering words that are unique to AAE or less familiar to the audience. This use of familiar lexis could be seen as a linguistic reflection of the creators' attempt to appeal to a wide target audience and to portray Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as similar to this audience, inviting them to identify with the characters rather than Othering them (Collins 2013; Davis 2017). In addition, the urban setting of Redfern clearly plays a role: "urban dwellers […] may use English in identifiably Aboriginal ways but may also use English in ways that demonstrate few or any 'Aboriginal' features" (Dickson 2020: 150). The participation framework and mass media context (the need to attract and retain an audience) also constrain the way language is used in the narrative mass media. To be able to fulfil its multiple narrative functions, TV dialogue must be "intelligible, accessible, and comprehensible" (Bednarek 2018a: 19).

However, an analysis based on individual word forms rather than longer syntagmatic structures is limited. For example, the AAE expression *shame job* ('an event / action which causes embarrassment/shame') occurs four times in three *Redfern Now* episodes. Analysis of key n-grams might be useful in this respect, or additional qualitative analysis of the words identified through the lexical profiling analysis. In addition, future research should also consider syntactic or pragmatic indexes of identity, and include analysis of the context of situation (e.g. setting, speaker, addressee, etc.).

Moreover, like other phenomena in television series, mediated AAE can be investigated from several perspectives, including that of production/creation, product/outcome, and reception/consumption (see Bednarek 2018a). To study production of mediated AAE, interviews could be used to investigate whether screen creatives use specific language resources consciously and strategically, and to explore the contributions of different types of screen creatives (e.g. screenwriters vs actors). To study reception of mediated AAE, audience research is necessary to understand how different groups of viewers interpret and evaluate the types of mediated language that is presented to them. For instance, how would *Redfern Now*'s representation of AAE be evaluated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from various backgrounds?

To conclude, the way minority Englishes are represented in the media has important social consequences. Media language draws on and circulates "assumptions about language" (Eades 2013: 188), known as 'language ideologies'. In order to provide a fuller picture of minority Englishes in the media and their associated ideologies, it is necessary to analyse recent and contemporary television series, including Indigenous-authored dramas, so that we can move beyond 'a deficit perspective' (Charity Hudley et al 2020: 18). It is my hope that this chapter has offered a first glimpse into the potential insights that can be gained through such studies. Of course, this chapter has presented insights into one particular series and results should not be generalised to other programs. Whether *Redfern Now* is unique in its use of language or shares certain aspects with other television series is a matter for future research.

6. Language note and acknowledgments

Language note: In this chapter, I use *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander* because I do not know the specific language groups, peoples, or nations of the individual characters/actors I refer to. I use *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people* rather than *peoples* because I refer to individuals rather than nations. The term *Indigenous* is used to avoid too much repetition and typically means *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander* in this chapter.

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Chapter 2
Vulnerable: Intersecting Disability and Precarity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Case of Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot* (2015-2019)[1]

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Abstract

In 2015, USA Network released Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot*, an original series in four seasons ending in 2019 that tells the story of Elliot Anderson; a young hacker working in cybersecurity who develops the alternative personality of a Mr. Robot to put E-Corp's financial oppression over the American people to an end. This chapter explores Esmail's depiction of human vulnerability in his digital TV series *Mr. Robot* in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Thematically speaking, my analysis is concerned with economic precarity as well as physical and psychological disability as the most salient vulnerabilities endured by the American working class. This thematic approach is paired with a formal analysis of Esmail's narrative as a case of «vulnerable text» that heavily relies on «narrative prosthesis». I will be using Klaus Schwab's (2016) definition of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to set the historical frame depicted in the series and Luciano Floridi's notion of "infosphere" and "interface" (2014) to determine the series' setting as well as the particularities of character construction in this context. My formal analysis employs Jean Ganteau's textual markers for the literary category of "vulnerable text" (2015), as well as Mitchell and Snyder's identification of disability as a "narrative prosthesis" triggering narrative interest at the expense of the "materiality of the disability metaphor" (2000). This materiality is thematically developed as a case of vulnerability as defined by Judith Butler in 2004, including psychological and disability as well as economic precarity.

Keywords: Transhumanism, Trauma, Cyberpunk, Vulnerability, Narrative Prosthesis

1. Introduction. Cyberpunk in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

In 2016, Klaus Schwab, founder and president of the World Economic Forum, defined the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) as the historical period where the physical, digital and biological worlds merge into an interconnected global network. In the wake

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of the third millennium, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterized by mobile technologies and artificial intelligence, but what really distinguishes this last revolution is the connection and fusion of "anything to anything" (henceforward, a2a); that is, not only of digital and mechanical technologies as we can currently see in the so-called "Internet of Things" (home automation, self-driving cars), but also of these technologies with the biological (the development of nanotechnologies, mainly in the medical field).

Given its complexity and scope, this 4IR is already triggering a paradigm shift that involves not only socioeconomic and political relations but also the way human beings relate to the world and each other, how they understand themselves in the world, and even the very nature of reality as virtuality and vice versa. As everything gets connected to everything, not only technologies to other technologies but also to biological organisms and hardware to digital code, Luciano Floridi (2014) envisions the 4IR as a context where the real and the informational merge.

The positive effects of this 4IR are obvious in the development of new services and products that make the lives of consumers easier and healthier and constitute the economic and material infrastructure of a transhumanist ideology. Like transhumanism, the rationale behind the advocacy of the 4IR rests on the promise of a better future that is depicted in terms of more social justice, better environmental conditions, more economic and political freedom, direct democracy and human enhancement. However, Schwab (2016: 43) himself has identified relevant negative effects that the 4IR may have on labour conditions and wealth distribution: automated production for instance, can further social injustice as it widens the gap between social classes by increasing unemployment and worsening the working conditions of the lower classes with low-income and repetitive work that hinder human self-realization.

Paradoxically, the human enhancement by fusion with the digital and technological has been related to the loss of purpose and direction in life (Diéguez 2017), while the promise of global, egalitarian access to information flows that Kurtzweil (2005) has attributed to Singularity overexposes individual privacy to the public gaze and may lead to global totalitarian regimes (Han 2015). The risks of living online, or "onlife," in what Floridi (2014: 40) has called "the infosphere", or the redefinition of reality in terms of information include relinquishing our privacy and our notions of ownership (Schwab 2016: 97) in the interest of transparency as we become "integrated into smooths streams of capital, communication, and information" (Han 2015: 1). In the same line, Skilton and Hovsepian (2018) have identified the risks and vulnerabilities that individuals are subject to by welcoming connection to and fusion with the radical alterity of digital technologies, which include socio-economic and environmental factors, the end of privacy, social imbalance caused by computer literacy, and vulnerabilities related to health and wealth distribution as well as to existential unhappiness and meaninglessness.

This is the context of Sam Esmail's series, *Mr. Robot* (2015 – 2019) an original series in four seasons released by USA Network. Esmail's script is set in a nearby-future or

alternative-present New York, where young cybersecurity programmer Elliot Anderson, develops the alternative personality of a super-hacker Mr. Robot to end E-Corp's financial oppression over the American people with the help of a group of hackers or cyberterrorists known as "The Fuck Society" or F-Society. The series depicts an augmented, "Cyberpunk-Flavored" (Butler 2000) version of the 4IR that incorporates the typical sociopolitical and ideological ingredients of cyberpunk. Mostly focalized through the internal monologue of its young, alienated main character, who rejects the inequality, exploitation, and insecurity that the multinational corporate establishment imposes on the American working class through financial debt and digitalized mass mediatization, *Mr. Robot* epitomizes typical cyberpunk fiction in a technologically saturated, globalized, capitalist society whose strengths and vulnerabilities rely heavily on digital interconnectedness.

In the series, the digital and the physical merge through a radical openness to alterity that in the case of E-Corp, is envisioned through heavily digitalized converging companies and interests operating globally to control material production, commerce, and financial speculation irrespective of national political sovereignties. In the individual case of textbook-doppelganger Elliot Alderson (notice the euphonic repetition evoking the characters of William Wilson or Humbert/Humbert, with the el/al pair and alder as "alter-") the merging of the digital, mechanical and biological is represented through the converging subjectivities of (mainly) Elliot and Mr. Robot, who exist in the *undifferentiatedness* between the virtual and the real, the hardware, software and wetware of Elliot's onlife subjectivity, which is the source of his hacking superpowers and of his physical and psychological disabilities. Even as a hacker fighting E-Corp's almighty network, Elliot's identity blends with the conglomerate when he becomes its employee in data security and like the rest of employees and customers, he is regarded by the corporation not as a distinct individual, but as mere undifferentiated data. Still, it is precisely because Elliot's identity results from this fusion between the physical and the digital, that he can become a threat to the corporation's data security, which he does by creating F-Society.

The F-Society heroes that revolt against the system display typical cyberpunk features that portray them as socially and physically vulnerable to corporate violence: outcasts, lowlifes, drifters, drug users, and petty criminals (Butler 2000: 22). Their extreme vulnerability provides an augmented picture of the oppressive social conditions of the 4IR and provides Esmail's narrative with the means and justification to their plan; to bring E-Corp down by erasing all information relating to the people's debt from its servers. The idea behind F-Society is to use the *a2a* integration to bring the almighty E-Corp down. They kidnap and hack financial data, record their messages and distribute their videos online to blackmail E-Corp into condoning the people's debt, often resorting to the analogue as much as to the digital in order to implement their plans. However, as they succeed in making E-Corp comply with their demands, the interdependence of all the elements fused in an *a2a* global

society makes the system collapse into economic ruin and social chaos, proving the inherently totalitarian nature of the 4IR lying behind the mirage of its alleged egalitarianism.

This chapter explores Esmail's depiction of human vulnerability in *Mr. Robot* in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Thematically speaking, my analysis is concerned with economic precarity as well as physical and psychological disability as the most salient vulnerabilities endured by the American working class. This thematic approach is paired with a formal analysis of Esmail's narrative as a case of *vulnerable* text that heavily relies on narrative *prosthesis*.

2. Anything to Anything: Systemic Precarity, Human Disability and Textual Vulnerability

2.1. Systemic Precarity

In the context of 9/11, Butler (2004) related the USA's systemic vulnerability to the visualization of the precarious and unstable life conditions of those whose lives did not matter. The USA's nationalist advocacy of the Monroe Doctrine in the name of America's Manifest Destiny justifies its global imperialist rule at the expense of the precarious life conditions of the many who live in Third (and First) World economies and the vulnerability of US civilians (and institutions) to terrorist attacks. According to Butler's views, as global economies and world mobility of goods, peoples and information blur national borders and identities, acknowledging and visualizing the vulnerabilities and precarious life conditions of the many can set the basis of a more humane national and international politics in a globalized world. Visualization, Butler argues, would help diminish their precarity by making them matter. In this sense, the cyberpunk features present in Esmail's series do help visualize not only the structural socioeconomic precarity of the average individual in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution, but also the physical and psychological vulnerability of onlife existence in the infosphere.

This logic certainly lies behind cyberpunk overrepresentations of allegedly utopian, global 4IR societies as actually precariously dystopian, and it is certainly the ruling discourse of F-Society in *Mr. Robot*. As they address not US citizens, but the "citizens of the world," F-Society videos juxtapose images of E-Corp CEOs with images of the One World Trade Center; world leaders they present as corrupt; environmental pollution; sick children; butchered animals and impoverished masses they refer to as "slaves" as a non-discontinuity of the same inextricable entangled reality. This juxtaposition not only justifies F-Society cyberterrorism but is also aimed at enforcing that the subjects of global structural oppression matter by means of their visualization. Yet in doing so, the F-Society receives the help of the Dark Army, a China-based, hacker-for-hire collective at the orders of a transvestied female Whiterose, who is actually the Chinese Security Minister Mr. Zhang. Paradoxically, as they

receive the help of the Dark Army against E-Corp's interests, the F-Society advances China's colonial interests in a global economy exploiting Third World countries.

The contrast between the few privileged by the multinational corporate establishment and the many who are oppressed by it is also visualized by the physical appearance and life conditions of characters. The cyberpunk aesthetics of the series establishes a similar contrast between the open, wide, clean, healthy, ordered spaces and light, white and transparent internal architecture of E-Corp and the claustrophobic, dirty, unhealthy, chaotic spaces of the dark, heavy, and derelict architecture of the city. Similarly, the glamorous settings where Whiterose thrives in exclusive perfumes and silky dresses stands in stark contrast with the Dark Army unnamed lab tech, invariably wearing a hooded forensic suit and feeding exclusively on hamburgers in gloomy, underground settings. The vertical power hierarchy of the E-Corp building displays increasingly improved working conditions in ascending level, including more privacy, better services, higher food quality and extended access to restricted information. In contrast, the non-corporate population are mostly depicted at an indeterminate floor with no views, street level, or underground (typically the subway). At their best, their work is repetitive (e.g. E-Corp lower-status employees, food chain attendants); but in general terms, petty criminals such as drug dealers, procurers, prostitutes and hackers abound among non-corporate characters. These are not only abused by the corporate statu quo, but also by each other as they strive to survive the insecurity of their homes, their illegal business, and the streets. They wear usually dark, cheap, informal clothes, endure unhealthy environmental conditions, eat fast food or no food at all, abuse drugs and are confined in either prisons or —in Elliot's case— mental institutions.

In between these two extremes, those who enforce corporate order on the average population (most visibly in the series, the FBI and the medical profession) enjoy certain privileges as long as they serve the system's structural oppression; their homes are domotized, their clothes are dark, but not shabby, they drive rather than take buses or the subway and their working conditions are noticeably better than the motley mob's. But as the subplots that describe their personal lives develop, it is progressively revealed that they are either coerced by the Dark Army's hit men (FBI agents Ernesto Santiago and Dominique Dipierro) or use their position in the system to enrich themselves as they exploit others onlife (prison/hospital warden Ray Heyworth).

As Chinese and US-based global economies are designed and enforced online by speculating on the human and environmental resources of the world population, the rate of liable precarity to be environmentally, physically and psychologically endured by the many's dangerous, uncertain, unstable reality is, like the individual's personal debt, absorbed by the system as a calculated risk. Thus, despite the public exposure of the 4IR system's pervasive social injustice by F-Society's videos or even the enforcement of more egalitarian economic conditions by cyberterrorism, the

fusion of the digital, the technological and biological in the 4IR makes it impossible to bring one down without bring the interconnected rest down as well, for even F-Society's actions against E-Corp are a risk calculated by Whiterose's Dark Army.

In *Mr. Robot*, the fusions of the physical and the technological enforces precarious conditions on individuals that relate to wealth distribution and life-long debt, degraded environmental conditions, labour exploitation, poor health, derelict housing, pervasive surveyance of people's privacy, and computer illiteracy. But Esmail's series reinforces its cyberpunk representation of the systemic precarity of 4IR globalized interconnectedness with a metaphorical exploitation of human disability that pervades not only the visual and thematic dimension of the series, but also its structural arrangement. This is done through several devices that rely mostly on a first-person narrative focalization that projects Elliot's internal monologue towards what is ambiguously depicted in the series as his external reality. Although Elliot's voice-over is extremely personal, the ontological ambiguity of the second-person "friend" he addresses along his narrative, metadiegetically suggests that he is addressing both the series' actual audience and the possibility that this audience is his imaginary mental projection or one of his many personalities. In fact, this will also be the case of all the action, dialogues and monologues in all four seasons, since Elliot's psychological disability and his drug abuse make it impossible for the audience as well as for himself, to discern between his physical reality and virtual-imaginaries. Elliot's voice-over as well as all the images and sounds the audience get, thus become an apparent differential continuum within the undifferentiated totality of a global Singularity. It is this impossibility to distinguish an ontological difference among the biological, the technological and the digital subjectivity from a similarly interconnected external reality, what reinforces the metaphorical dimension of Elliot's psychological and physical disability as symptomatic of the 4IR as a global, systemic collapse.

2.2. **Human Disability**

In 2000, Mitchell and Snyder (2000) theorized the narrative instrumentalization of human disability as a "metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse" (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 47). They argue that disability "provides writers with a means of moving between the micro and macro levels of textual meaning" (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 57) since "[p]hysical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a 'tangible' body to text;" a metaphorical use of disability that they have called "narrative prosthesis" (47-48). Narratively speaking, the representation of disability as an anomaly calls stories into being and mobilizes their plot, but despite the "pervasive dependency of literary narratives upon the trope of disability" (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 54), its exhaustive thematization and visualization still leaves the experience of disability unaddressed because "the body is the Other of the text" (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 64).

As Butler's (2004)and Mitchell & Snyder's (2000) views on the visualization of human vulnerability stand in radical contrast, the question of whether the visual and narrative emphasis on representing human disability as a symptom of systemic collapse, reinforces or denounces the vulnerability that *matters* and *informs* the context of the 4IR, seems a justified one. What happens when the body and the text, the digitally prosthetic and the materiality of the virtual fuse in an undifferentiated sameness? What tensions are released between narrative enhancement and human disability when they are so inextricably connected that there is no telling one from the other?

In *Mr. Robot*, the reasons behind Elliot's activism against E-Corp lie in his personal vendetta for his father's death from a leukaemia that was caused by the corporation's environmental malpractice. Along most of the four seasons, this is presented as the traumatic origin of Elliot's mental disease; his social alienation, his addiction to drugs and the blackouts he suffers as his personality splits to develop the cyber-hero Mr. Robot (who coincidentally, looks like Elliot's deceased father). The story is homodiegetically narrated by Elliot himself as he navigates physical and psychological disability in the infosphere on a social background of extreme precarity. So to Elliot, the "E" that stands for "electronic" means "Evil," which justifies Mr. Robot's luddite terrorist project to destroy E-Corp's infosphere. Since the 4IR interconnectedness that allows E-Corp to inflict precarious conditions on the population (unhealthy life conditions, bad health insurance) is also the origin of Elliot's child trauma, the return to an analogical economy that would redistribute wealth to the world precariat becomes a means to restore Elliot's pre-4IR, healthy analogical ontology.

The many symptoms of Elliot's many physical and psychological impairments thus become a metaphor of a structural social disability that is materialized through Elliot's tangible body. The most evident of Elliot's impairments is his split personality, which he develops as an instrument to restore social justice as a night vigilante—his disability ambiguously standing as the symptom and cure of his individual and the extended social bodies. The nature, cause and cure of Elliot's psychological impairment lies in the fusion of the biological, technological and digital through which corporate powers enforce social oppression on the precariat. In the series, this is visibilized through Elliot's alternative personality of Mr. Robot, who looks physically sound enough to Elliot as to physically fight him in several episodes, digital enough to exist as mere code in Elliot's handwritten journal and technological enough to disappear when Elliot has no access to computers. As an impairment, Mr. Robot's existence can be treated with drugs and therapy, but as an integral part of Elliot's singular and multiple personality he can never be cured off Elliot's onlife.

But Elliot's disabilities are far from being just psychological. His diagnosed dissociative identity disorder combines with his social phobias and inability to engage emotionally with people. At the chemical level, he is addicted to both legal and illegal drugs that like his psychological disorder, blur the difference between cure and

impairment and affect his mind as well as his body. He also suffers from sleep and food deprivation that noticeably shows in Rami Malek's make-up and facial expression, which twists in physical pain (as much as despair) for scraps, cuts, bruises and more severe injuries, as he is shot, pushed or beaten by himself and others. How much of this happens for real and how much is part of Elliot's hallucinations is irrelevant for plot development, which is more intent on spectacularizing Elliot's disabilities than on plot plausibility. Plot implausibility can in fact, be considered one more symptom of social and individual collapse in *Mr. Robot*'s cyberpunk depiction of the 4IR.

In the series, Elliot's body is neither tangible nor metaphorical, but literally fused with the system, or rather, identical with the whole system. His physical and psychological impairments are literally caused by the non-distinction between the biological, the technological and the virtual. These impairments are not a metaphorical representation, but a literal onlife embodiment for which disability is the norm. In this context, visibilizing human precarity cannot make onlife matter beyond its mere presentation, while it ambiguously positions the audience as spectators as well as participants in the experience of vulnerability. But the inherently prosthetic "nature" of onlife shared subjectivity is not only a disabling one. Although the very incorporation of (technological and digital) prosthetic extensions to biological organisms always already signals the existence of the disability that such prostheses compensate for, in the transhumanist context of the 4IR, the prosthetic component is often presented as an enhancement to bare humanity consisting in eradicating human vulnerability. In Esmail's series, the same Mr. Robot that embodies Elliot's psychological impairment is a comic-book cyberhero for the 4IR infosphere of the new millennium. Like the traditional comic-book superhero, Mr. Robot is the onlife secret identity of a vulnerable, young American everyman who brings computerized justice to an infosphere full of villains operating online (not just E-Corp's financial crime, but also child pornographers, human, drug and weapon traffickers in the dark web, or people who cheat on their wives in dating sites). In the infosphere, disability is ambiguously acknowledged as an enhancement and a necessary condition to enhancement. So impairments are not the object of pity and empathy, but also the means to empowerment.

In the 4IR, neither the system nor the individual can be healed from themselves because their disability—as well as their prosthetic digital enhancement—is the norm. Both the infliction and experience of disability, as well as the enforcement and suffering of structural precarity are vulnerabilities and responsibilities to be deal with, rather than without, once the narrative is set in motion. As most cyberpunk fiction, the series is dystopian in its presentation of disability and social collapse in the 4IR, yet by preventing the victimization of the disabled/precariat who participate in and contribute to enforce disability and social oppression on themselves and others, it also blunts the audience's empathic or sentimental response towards the oppressed. In episode "eps1.7_wh1ter0se.m4v" of season 1, Elliot addresses his second-person imaginary "friend" in the following terms:

> I wish I could be an observer like you. Then I could think more calmly. This is comfortable. Less stressful. In fact I feel like I can see everything, know everything this way. Do you know more than me? That wouldn't be fair; my imaginary friend knowing more than me. So what would you do now?" (2015: 25'41''-26'14'').

Then *he* decides what he is going to do, establishing not only a continuity/identification between his metadiegetical friend-audience and himself, but also between the alleged reality of the story's fiction and its "imaginary" extratextual continuum.

2.3. **Textual Vulnerability**

In Esmail's series, social collapse and human disability also find expression through a corresponding narrative vulnerability. In his analysis of *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Fiction* (2015) Ganteau identifies four main generic or modal constellations typifying what he has called the poetics of vulnerability. These include: 1) witnessing as a powerful experience that acts on the subject and of which individuals and groups become the hostages; 2) openness to failure and uncertainty as a modality of anti-totalisation following an ethics of care; 3) images of the body and of bodily frailty that are presented as the most basic common denominator of humanity (signalling the temporal disarray of the scar), and 4) the performative nature of the vulnerable text (Ganteau 2015, 168-170). Ganteau's features of vulnerable poetics can certainly be traced in *Mr Robot*, but the digital context of the TV series as a 4IR genre (the fact that its cyberpunk themes, settings, characters and plot as well as its reception develop in and about onlife in the infosphere) complicates what is understood as witnessing, failure, human ethics of care, bodily frailty, and performativeness.

In the previous sections, I have already discussed human precarity and disability as representations of bodily (and systemic) frailty. In terms of plot and character description, Elliot's bodily frailty is the most salient one in the series. To Rami Malek's slim body, make-up artists add darkened eye bags denoting sleep deprivation and drug abuse. Along the series, his already frail body is repeatedly scarred, bruised, shot, beaten and abused by actual people or paranoid projections of his anxieties. Together with his father's cancer, Elliot's frailty is the traumatic narrative prosthesis that sets the series' action into motion and holds the audience's attention along four seasons under the promise of full disclosure of the origin and nature of his disabilities. But as also discussed above, and despite the requirement that the audience fully identifies with the only narrative focus of the story so they can see themselves as similarly impaired by systemic collapse, it is not so clear that the audience's interest in Esmail's plot (its narrative tension and disclosure) is not at the voyeuristic expense of spectacularizing human disability.

Still, while the series' audience bears witness to Elliot's pervasive suffering from the other side of the screen, they do so in a way that is not so different from the way

Elliot himself witnesses his own experience from the distance of his dissociative identity disorder (resulting from 4IR). Instead of acknowledging his physical and psychological traumas as an integral part of his embodied experience of disability, Elliot pushes them away into physical and subjective projections that he regards not only as alien to himself, but also as adversaries to be terminated. The nature of Mr. Robot being chemical as well as digital, Elliot strives to keep him off his body and mind by abusing drugs and staying analogical. In season 3, this dissociation is dramatically represented as Elliot violently attacking *himself* (an obvious filmic reference to David Fincher's classic *The Fight Club*) as an invisible Mr. Robot tries to prevent him from stopping the explosion in the Stage 2 target building (eps3.5_kill-process.inc), but in the first season, the audience witness him pushing a very physical Mr. Robot out of a window (eps1.8_m1rr0r1ng.qt) or Mr. Robot pushing Elliot off a railing and into a rocky beach—as two different people. Elliot's dissociation from Mr. Robot as a consequence of the fusion of his wetware identity with the digital and technological, is often represented in the series as a digital interference signalling the transition between both personalities. Because the audience witness this transition online (on a screen) the interference operates metadiegetically in the physical and digital worlds of both character and audience, which become an undifferentiated 4IR continuum.

That Elliot addresses both the character of Mr Robot and the audience (the imaginary friend of Elliot's voiceover) in the second person singular suggests that the (both intended and actual) audience are also his alternative personalities, and establishes a relationship of subjective digital singularity that exists in the onlife experience of watching the series in the immersive experience of streaming. In fact, it is the audience's engagement in "playing" the series what literally sets action into motion and make them participants (as masterminds and characters) as well as witnesses (external audience) of the series' action. This is not so different from the way that Elliot himself witnesses his own Mr-Robot onlife as external to himself because of his dissociative identity disorder. In the interconnectedness of the digital, the biological and the technological, metadiegesis itself is flattened into an ongoing continuum in which the audience becomes hostage to witnessing as much as to experiencing Elliot's dissociative identity disorder as their own. Bearing witness of Elliot's trauma as an audience, thus becomes a symptom as well as a cause of Elliot's disability. Thus, despite the fact that as one 4IR singularity, all participants in the series' infosphere experience a shared precarity and disability, their empathic response to human vulnerability is blunted by the necessary dissociation required for the act of witnessing. The purpose of "developing" the alternative personality Mr. Robot was always after all, not just to stop precarity in the context of 4IR capitalism from happening, but also to stop feeling the effects of traumatic experiences. In the fusion of the technological and biological materialities with the digital virtuality, human beings *matter* as much as they do not—a feature that onlife shares with the metaphorical materialities of fiction.

As a vulnerable narrative, *Mr. Robot* also exhibits an extreme openness to failure and uncertainty that is most obviously developed in the series through focalization and the temporal arrangement of events within plot. From the very beginning of the series, as the audience is directly addressed as the second-person singular "friend" of Elliot's dissociative homodiegetic voice-over, the plot is presented in the same disarrayed order as memories and experiences come to him. It can certainly be argued that this makes the narrative of the series vulnerable to uncertainty because the audience cannot anticipate plot development according to any established narrative coherence or cohesive character subjectivity. Although there is a sense or promise of connection between events, the logical and temporal relation that might exist among them remains uncertain as the seasons develop without the series providing any final key to decode its encrypted message.

The series encryption is explained through Elliot's psychological disability and presented as pervasive memory lapses and time lags that force both Elliot and his audience to suspend certainty not only about what might have occurred during Elliot's blackouts or what caused his traumatic amnesia, but also about the events they visualize onscreen as they might just be Elliot's hallucinations, projections or drug-induced trips. In some cases, Elliot's memory lapses are visualized as photographs that bear digital witness of a past he cannot recollect (eps1.6_v1ew-s0urce.flv 13'46''). In episode "eps1.3_da3m0ns.mp4," Elliot's traumatic amnesia is dramatized by a paper sign reading "error 404 not found" (27'29'') that is stapled to a wooden lamppost standing on the empty space where Elliot's family house should have been. Yet the metaphor fusing (rather than analogizing) the digital and the biological experience of a broken link to the past might also be working the opposite direction to signify the loss of a narrative, historical coherence in the inescapable present of the infosphere. A cure, rather than an error, memory erasure safeguards the individual and collective subjectivity from past traumas that disable them in their precarious present. Since erasing world debt from the digitalized memory of an un-forgetting and unforgiving financial system is exactly Elliot's intention in hacking E-Corp's servers, the narrative structure of the series generates uncertainty about whether digital blackouts disable or empower societies or individuals.

Also, the fact that digital storage of information can grant immediate access to the past does not imply that such past will ever be revisited or that if it is, it may make any sense at all. Along the series, Elliot regularly destroys all evidence of his hacking by drilling and microwaving his hard drives. However, before doing it, he burns an encrypted copy in a CD he labels as music. The thick disc binder he keeps under his bed in his apartment thus remains an offline archive of his life, as well as a sort of cemetery of all the identities he usurped online that nobody ever checks.

On the basis of a previous literary tradition that can be traced back to narratives of detection or trauma narratives, the audience expects that some psychoanalytical

mastermind will resolve the mystery and return Elliot's subjectivity to a pre-traumatic healthy state that restores the narrative's logical and sequential order to enable some coherent and cohesive meaning to emerge. That is Elliot's purpose in keeping a handwritten journal (Red Wheelbarrow Composition Book) that would allow him to identify whether he had any blackouts indicating Mr Robot's taking over his consciousness (season 2) so as to be able to construct and gain control over a coherent narrative of his own subjectivity. But as the audience witness Elliot handwrite an analogical temporal record of his memories in plain English, in episode "eps2.1_k3rnel-pan1c.ksd" (2016 38'32''), the journal pages show that it is actually handwritten in encrypted code they cannot make any sense of.

Although the series justifies its plot encryption in the frame of Elliot's disability, in fact, its vulnerability to uncertainty and its failure to signify coherently follows the pattern of onlife narrative experience in the 4IR. Unlike the linearity of print narratives, the onlife cybernarrative experience is based on the random disposition of multiple, disconnected data packages in the form of snapshots of personal experience (Facebook), bits of news (Twitter), immediate perceptions or impressions (Instagram) or decontextualized reactions in search for a cause (GIFs). Onlife participants in social media are immersively exposed to a similarly failed narrative pattern as they construct their own subjectivity or the subjectivity of others within a range of normalcy, rather than disability. Without the coherence required to make meaning out of random data, this narrative vulnerability prevents such data from mattering in subjective terms that may allow for an empathic response from others; who rather stand as onlife voyeuristic audience.

Conversely, the vulnerability generated through sequential discontinuity and other forms of narrative uncertainty like the flattening of metadiegesis in the infosphere, generates a strong tension in plot development pending on the promise of its decryption or resolution. Consequently, while in terms of cohesion and coherence, the series is vulnerable because it is open to failure and uncertainty (in terms of capturing the audience's sustained attention around the tension this arrangement creates), the series' narrative is much enhanced as super-narrative meant to thrive in an information-saturated infosphere. Together with systemic precarity and individual disability, the series' narrative vulnerability is thus spectacularized to prompt interest in its audience, who participate in paratextually extending the series beyond episode length and platform limits through online fandom discussion in social media.

The exposure of vulnerability as the most radical form of intimacy has been pointed out as one of the most salient constitutive features of onlife in the 4IR. Han (2015: 34) has recently theorized online overexposure of human intimacy in what he has called "the transparency society;" a sort of 4IR digital panopticon that economically exploits self-disclosure. Contrary to what Butler (2004) and Ganteau (2015) argue for the visualization of human precarity and vulnerability in an analogue context,

the onlife exposure of one's vulnerability, Han contends, dispenses with the distance or negativity of alterity that is required to encounter oneself in the other. "Intimacy," he claims, "eliminates objective room for play in order to make way for subjective stirrings of affect" that however, "eras[e] a sense of meaningful social encounter outside its terms" (2015: 36).

Esmail's series thematizes as much as performs the transparent exposure of onlife human and narrative intimacy in the 4IR. In episode "eps1.6_v1ew-s0urce.flv," Elliot analogizes people's true self to source code and rhetorically wonders whether the exposure of such code would ever lead to a meaningful human encounter in the form of friendship: "View source. What if we had that for people? Would people really want to see?" (2015: 10'59''-11'08''). What follows this question is a succession of images with people wearing signs that expose their most intimate vulnerabilities as the source code of their true selves while the soundtrack plays disquieting, technological music. "Find someone to be your honest self with?" he goes on, "Bullshit" (2015: 11' 19''-23'') he concludes, to sentence his question rhetorical.

A last form of cybernarrative vulnerability in the series is the transparent exposure of its own digital nature in the form of code. Not only are unpredictable transitions between Elliot's alternative personalities presented as glitches of the system (digital interferences) but even episode titles are cryptically presented as digital file names that are only partially decipherable and impossible to retain by their onlife audience. The appeal of this form of cybernarrative vulnerability in the form of transparency does not lie in empathic identification with onlife vulnerability, but in the spectacularization of its radical difference from the analogical. And still, in the context of the 4IR, the audience is challenged to acknowledge that there is no such radical difference anymore. When Elliot tries to dispel Mr. Robot's hallucination by claiming that he (Mr. Robot) is not real, Mr Robot answers:

> What? You are? Is any of it real? […] Look at it! A world built on fantasy. Synthetic emotions in the form of pills, psychological warfare in the form of advertising, mind-altering chemicals in the form of food, brainwashing seminars in the form of media, controlled isolated bubbles in the form of social networks. Real? You want to talk about reality? We haven't lived in anything remotely close to it since the turn of the century. We turned it off, took out the batteries, snacked on a bag of GMO's while we tossed the remnants in the ever-expanding dumpster of the human condition. We live in branded houses trademarked by corporations built on bipolar numbers jumping up and down on digital displays hypnotizing us into the biggest slumber mankind has ever seen." (2015 eps1.9_zer0-day.avi: 45'-45"54'')

In contrast with the series' narrative uncertainty and failure to make a coherent, meaningful narrative whole, Elliot's pervasive confessional voice-over stands as a strong lyrical frame that holds the cybernarrative together through Rami Malek's monotone recitation of its recursive metrical pattern, and the incredible beauty of its poetic language, the cumulative effect of which builds along episodes: "Like a

hard drive blasted by excessive voltage my mind is frayed. Close to fried. I can feel the static running through my brain. Serotonin receptors working over time" (2015 eps1.5_br4ve-trave1er.asf: 27′ 41″-51″).

Unlike the mere exposure of structural precarity, human disability and textual vulnerability, the beauty of the series' lyrical frame certainly elicits in its audience an empathic response that is heightened by the conceptual density of its text. Elliot addresses the audience through uneventful monological speeches about the complexities of his subjectivity and the ailments of his many vulnerabilities as well as his dense sociopolitical and economic analysis and criticism of the 4IR. Against all the chances that this kind of text and recitational mode can hold the attention of an informationally saturated audience in a digital environment, the series was a success. How much of it is due to the series' recourse to the spectacularization of vulnerability or to its performance of a meaningful encounter with radical alterity in the 4IR is however, very difficult to discern.

3. Conclusion

In *Mr. Robot*, the fusion of the digital, the mechanical and the biological in the 4IR is not only thematized as the leading plot of its cyberpunk aesthetics. Its dystopian depiction of global capitalism and its negative effects on onlife subjectivity in the infosphere as well as on the precarious life conditions of the world's population call for an empathic response in its audience that may trigger social activism by raising awareness and prompting social change. However, its reliance on an aesthetics of vulnerability that exposes as well as denounces structural precarity and human disability in the global interconnectedness of the 4IR also poses questions about their instrumentalization as narrative prosthesis to enhance its impact on the audience.

Empathic response to vulnerability is a double-edged sword regarding the materiality of the metaphors employed to visualize it. While visualization provides the materiality necessary to call for an empathic, meaningful response that would make its referent matter, it also runs the risk of desensitizing its witnesses by means of a sensational spectacularization that further stigmatizes its radical alterity instead. However, in the context of the 4IR, this radical alterity becomes the condition for meaningful human encounters that a transparent exposure of vulnerability would prevent from raising onlife subjective stirrings of affect. The global fusion of the informational, the mechanical and the biological promises a transhuman enhancement in exchange of a sameness that precludes meaningful difference.

In Esmail's series, meaningless sameness is countered by the internal difference or negativity of a split subjectivity that is both the symptom and–though dubious —remedy to the digital panopticon. This negativity is also formally conveyed by a textual obscurity resulting from the series' use of contrast in settings and character depiction, uncertainty caused by narrative focalization and temporal dislocation,

and textual obscurity in the form of undecipherable—though transparent—code and monological density. Whether this narrative strategies manage to elicit an empathic response in the series' digital audience or rather blunts it through the spectacularization of structural precarity and human disability is however, a question difficult to disentangle from the inextricably entangled fusions of the 4IR.

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Chapter 3
Techno-gothic anxieties in *Real Humans* and *Humans*: Robosexuals, posthumans and cyborgs

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Abstract

In this essay, I discuss how the Swedish television series, *Real Humans* [Äkta *Människor*] (Lundström, Baron, & Widman 2012-2014) and its British/US counterpart, *Humans* (Vincent, Brackley, & Fry 2015-2018) explore some of the complex ethical issues that arise from human-robot interaction. Specifically, my argument uses the concepts of robosexuals, posthumans, and cyborgs as heuristic devices to explore the following aspects of both fictional dramas: their depiction of artificially intelligent robots as fetishistic; the possible impact that sophisticated, self-aware machines could have on human (sexual) subjectivity; and the hybridization of the human and the robot through cyborgification. Using an interpretive framework that draws upon Kathleen Richardson's Campaign Against Sex Robots (CASR) as well as Donna Haraway's work, my intention is to reflect upon the implications of humanity's increased use of cybernetic technologies during the third millennium.

Keywords: television, techno-gothic, robosexuality, posthuman, cyborg, *Humans*.

1. Introduction

In this essay, I explore how the Swedish television series, *Real Humans* [Äkta *Människor*] (Lundström, Baron, & Widman 2012-2014), and its British/US remake, *Humans* (Vincent, Brackley, & Fry 2015-2018), interrogate some of the complex ethical issues that arise from human-robot interaction. More specifically, my argument uses the concepts of robosexuals, posthumans, and cyborgs as heuristic devices to analyse the following key aspects of both fictional dramas: firstly, their depiction of humanoid robots as fetishistic; secondly, the possible impact that these sophisticated, self-aware machines could have on human (sexual) subjectivity; and, finally, the cyborgification that results from hybridizing humans and robots. Using an interpretive framework that references Kathleen Richardson's Campaign Against Sex Robots (CASR) (2016), as well as Donna Haraway's work, my intention is to reflect upon the implications of humanity's increased use of cybernetic technologies during the

third millennium. In the analysis that follows, I regard *Real Humans* and *Humans* as techno-gothic texts because they depict uncanny, parallel-contemporary societies that refract long-standing gothic anxieties about otherness through a technological lens more often associated with science fiction (SF). In fact, although SF's inter-connection with the gothic has existed since its inception (Aldiss 1986: 18), a trajectory that can be traced back to the publication of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, in 1818, this hybridization is, I believe, crucial to how post-millennium techno-gothic dramas interrogate the alterity implicit in human-robot interactions.

Discussions of 'androids' frequently gloss over the term's implicit gender bias (Calvert 2017; Dinillo 2005: 8; Stableford 2006: 22-23), an omission that serves to diminish the visibility of the 'gynoid' from many critical accounts. In my analysis, the word 'gynoid' refers to a female-designated, non-human character that has been aesthetically designed to resemble a woman, and that has an equivalent status to that of her male-designated, android counterpart. In contrast, my use of 'robot' indicates artificially intelligent humanoids in general, without reference to gender assignations. The term references Karel Ĉapek's play, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, which, in 1920, first established a template for such technological beings as having a synthetic-machinic composition. In addition, I discuss a select number of robot characters as 'posthumans' because, in contrast to the technological capabilities that are available to us in the early twenty-first century, these robots not only look like people, but they also demonstrate physical and intellectual capacities that are similar (or, even, superior) to those of a human being.

Isabella Van Elferen (2014: 138) argues that one of the new specters of the modern techno-gothic is the presence of "all-too human machines". In the fictional diegeses of *Real Humans* and *Humans*, sophisticated humanoids have become widely available and socially normalized. These mass-produced "hubots" (in *Real Humans*) and "synths" (in *Humans*) have a degree of AI that allows them to better fulfil a wide range of instrumental purposes. They are commonplace not only in assemble line industries and administration, where they are deployed in factories, warehouses, and offices, but also in the domestic sphere, as personal caregivers to the elderly, children and the infirm.[1] However, in addition to the social visibility of these "willing slaves" (Vinge 1993: 16), both series explore the consequences of an illicit coding experiment by maverick programmer, David (Thomas W. Gabrielsson, *Real Humans*; Stephen Boxer, *Humans*) to create sentient robots through a modification of their

[1] That these jobs tend to be those that are also performed by immigrant workers is noteworthy but pursuing this observation in the depth that it requires falls outside the scope of my analysis here. For more on this topic, see DeFalco (2020), Hellstrand, Koistinen, & Orning (2019), and Yang (2018).

source code, an enhancement that provides them with a "soul" (*RH* 29:01 1.9).[2] In doing so, they are transformed from being humanoids into posthuman beings who experience the world subjectively. By establishing this particular narrative focus, *Real Humans* and *Humans* use television fiction to dramatize the "Frankenstein complex" (Asimov 1990: 442), the hypothesis that the development of sophisticated automata will imperil human survival through their superior intelligence and physical prowess.[3] Although the opening scene of *Real Humans*, in which David's posthumans invade the home of an isolated couple, plays upon the dominant techno-gothic trope of robots as a threat to human life, the series' long story arc allows for many of these characters to become more complex and sympathetic as the episodes progress.[4] In fact, the premise that a 'family' of rogue posthumans —the "children" (*RH* 48:11 1.9) of their Frankensteinian father/creator— seek to integrate into human society provides a compelling exploration of technologization in the early twenty-first century.

Television drama is a medium through which we can explore the implications of posthuman existence without having to engage with the many technical complexities that beset the real-world creation of such beings. Less focused on scientific logistics than on the ethical dilemmas that encroaching roboticism provokes, *Real Humans* and *Humans* use mainstream drama to "extrapolate from known technology and [project] a vision of the future against which we can evaluate [...] its direction" (Danillo 2005: 5). While both series tap into current anxieties about technology by problematising the boundary between (science) fiction and fact, they also provide a dynamic space to reflect upon the contemporary moment, the socio-cultural dilemmas that we face at the beginning of the third millennium. One of the benefits of the techno-gothic genre is that it allows for such an allegorical dimension: by contemplating parallel contemporary societies, we are invited to think more deeply about the *now* of the modern world.

[2] Citations from the television series will be indicated in the following manner: *Real Humans* (*RH*)/ *Humans* (*H*), time reference, season and episode.

[3] Variations on Asimov's Frankenstein Complex include Vernon Vinge's (1993) apocalyptic theory of the technological singularity, Richardson's discussion of "annihilation anxieties" (2005: 5), and Van Elferen's more recent work on the "Singularity gothic" (2014: 138).

[4] *Humans* ran for three seasons, each with eight hour-long episodes; while *Real Humans* ran for two seasons, each with ten hour-long episodes. Despite been sold to fifty countries and winning a host of television awards, a third season of *Real Humans* failed to materialize owing to budgetary problems. The series, nevertheless, represents a significant investment by SVT (Sveriges Television) in terms of the relatively limited financial resources that are available for Swedish television productions.

2. Human-Robot (Sexual) interactions

Real Humans and *Humans* are prestige, primetime productions that reflect the zeitgeist for speculative television fiction about the impact of technological mediation on society. Both have been commercially and critically successful, with the former, a stylish Swedish thriller proving that "it is possible to produce quality television for the Nordic region" (Koistinen 2015: 414). *Humans*, a twelve million pounds production that was broadcast on Channel 4, has also been lauded for its "multiple-plotline approach, a deft cast and its refusal to be simplistic" (Genzlinger 2015).[5] One of the complex topics that both series address is the impact of human-robot sexual interactions, an ethical scenario that led to the founding of the CASR in 2015 by Richardson and Erik Brilling. According to the former, the commercial development of sexbots "legitimises a dangerous mode of existence" (2016) that amplifies misogyny, violence against women, and the sexual exploitation of children.[6]

Although the CASR's paradigm is not unproblematic (Danaher, Earp, & Sandberg 2018: 50-51), particularly because, as Sara Martín asserts, it is "profoundly heteronormative" (2020: 200), it still provides a useful tool through which to assess the depiction of human-robot interactions in *Real Humans* and *Humans*. Specifically designed "sex hubs" (*RH* 54:08 1.1) are uncommon in both series, but Malte (Jimmy Lindström) has intercourse with one of them at "Hubot Heaven," an illicit club that is "the centre for all hub sex trading" (*RH* 54:45 1.1). With their synthetically enhanced breasts, limitless availability, and hardwired eagerness to please, these *man*-ufactured gynoids project troubling stereotypes about sexual attractiveness, consent, and behavior. In doing so, they embody the concerns that some feminist scholars have expressed about the production of real-world sexbots. For Sinziana Gutiu (2016: 187), such products "could diminish the role of autonomy in sexual relationships and dehumanize sex and intimacy between individuals." This notion is illustrated by a particular scene in *Humans*. Whilst at a party, a teenage boy, Kyle (James Backway), deactivates a domestic gynoid (without her consent) before telling his friends that he "wants to see her tits" and that he is going to take her upstairs "to have a go on her" (*H* 20:21 1.4). Although the boy does not follow through with his threat, this moment is disturbing because it symbolically parallels real-world incidents of date-rape in which women are rendered unconscious (or, as here, 'switched off'),

[5] The first episode of *Humans*, which was broadcast in the popular Sunday night drama slot, secured six million viewers, a 23% share of the audience, making it Channel 4's most successful original drama since 1992 (Plunkett 2015).

[6] According to John Danaher (2018: 5), a sexbot is differentiated from a sex doll or a sex toy by its combination of a humanoid form and behavior with some degree of AI that "may be minimal (e.g. simple pre-programmed behavioral responses) or more sophisticated (e.g. human-equivalent intelligence)."

in flagrant disregard for the notion of sexual consent. That the potential victim is a gynoid makes it no less shocking, given that Kyle's plan to molest her is motivated by the same underlying hostility towards (humanoid) women that fuels misogyny.

Echoing Richardson's (2016) argument that sexbots have a symbolic relation to human prostitutes, *Real Humans* and *Humans* envision the interactions between Malte/Kyle and gynoids as fetishistic. Thus, at Hubot Heaven, Malte can transfer his unrequited fantasies about Bea (Marie Robertson)—who he, mistakenly, believes to be human—onto one of the "Non-stop beautiful *ladies*" (*RH* 17:22 1.2) [emphasis added] that he encounters there. While his feeling of self-disgust at what he has done perhaps reflects Masahito Mori's (1970) hypothesis of the uncanny valley (the notion that, as robots become more human-like, our aversion towards them increases), his use of a non-sentient gynoid as an ersatz 'woman' also emphasizes how human (as opposed to robot) prostitutes can be objectified by such a transaction. While Richardson (2016) argues that the proliferation of sexbots will cause more women to be dehumanized and violated, *Real Humans* and *Humans* insist that male violence against gynoids is a symptom (or anti-social effect) of existing misogyny.[7] Two of David's posthuman creations who masquerade as sexbots, Flash (Josephine Alhanko) and Niska (Emily Berrington), are sold into prostitution. The latter's experience in a brothel, where she is identified only as "Number Seven" (*H* 21:42 1.3), dramatizes specific feminist concerns that robot technologies can legitimize paraphilic behaviours, such as rape and paedophilia (Gutiu 2016: 205; Richardson 2016). A client tells her that, having paid "one hundred pounds upfront," she must "do whatever [he wants her] to," including acting "scared [and] young" (*H* 33:54 1.2). While *Humans* suggests that the men who have sex with Niska do so fetishistically, unaware that she is conscious and, therefore, able to experience suffering, the series, nevertheless, highlights the ethical responsibility upon sexbot manufacturers to create intelligent machines with the capacity to refuse inappropriate sexual demands. This idea is enacted when, to the shock and outrage of her paedophilic client, Niska defiantly states: "No, I won't do that [...] I don't belong to anyone" (*H* 33:51 1.2). Her reaction here, implicitly, overrides Asimov's Second Law of robotics, which states that "[a] robot must obey the order given to it by human beings except where those orders would [injure a human being]" (1990: 424). Although, in this case, no actual injury to human beings would be caused by the client indulging his fantasy, symbolically, it could create *potential* harm (to both children and for himself) through disregarding

[7] Knox (2019: 23) reports that, following the presentation of the sex robot, Samantha, at the 2017 edition of the Ars Electronica exhibition in Austria, it was groped, mistreated, and soiled by festival goers. Creator, Sergei Santos, later complained that the public had behaved "like barbarians [...] breaking its fingers and causing other damage."

"normative consent standards in society at large" (Danaher 2018: 106). As a result, this scene demonstrates the importance of sexbot designers thinking carefully about the ethical implications of the fetishism that is involved in human-robot interaction.

In both series, the character of Anita (Lystette Pagler) is abducted and modified by robot traffickers.[8] Later, she is sold as a domestic service gynoid with an additional "adult mode" (*H* 18:49 1.4) that can be activated on demand. Anita is a beautiful, slim, and oriental-looking humanoid with unblemished skin, a visual embodiment of Leyda's concept of "machine cuteness" (2017: 152). Whilst the decision to cast such an attractive actor for the role says much about the industrial practices of television, it also indicates how gynoids manifest the (patriarchal) aesthetic values of their creators. Objectified as a fetishistic artifact, a "machine" and a "thing" (*RH* 53:53 1.2), Anita is almost gang raped by "junkers" (or robot traffickers) in *Humans*, who want "to have a bit of fun" (*H* 09:44 1.2), while her parallel character in *Real Humans* is sexually assaulted by a group of teenage boys. Later, she is a victim of work-based harassment when, having become Sweden's first "legal analyst hubot" (*RH* 40:51 2.5), her co-worker Magnus (Niklas Jarneheim) verbally accosts her by saying "Can I get a kiss?" (*RH* 14:24 1.3) and "Be a good doll" (*RH* 14:58 1.3).[9] Although the perception that Anita is not human seems to grant some male characters the licence to abuse her, as spectators, we are, nevertheless, appalled by way in which she is demeaned. Indeed, our awareness that she is, in fact, a sentient posthuman serves as a clever narrational device to heighten our shock at how she is violated. After all, we know that she is much more than just "an appliance" (*RH* 22:45 1.8). While spectators are alarmed when Anita is inappropriately touched by the teenage character, Toby (Theo Stevenson), we are even more appalled when his father, Joe (Tom Goodman-Hill), activates her adult mode so that he can have sex with her. Done in revenge against his wife, who, he believes, is prioritizing work over family time, Joe's statement that he does not "give [her] permission to mention this to anyone" (*H* 19:04 1.4) demonstrates the exploitative power dynamic on which his actions are based. In consequence, Anita's statement that Joe can do "anything that [he] want[s]" (*H* 17:20 1.4) draws less attention to her consent than to her required submission to the sexual whims of her male owner, a notion that is reinforced by a close-up of her passive facial expression as Joe lies on top of her (*H* 18:17 1.4).

[8] 'Anita' is the name given to the character when she is bought by the Engman family (in *Real Humans*), and the Hawkins (in *Humans*). However, she is, in fact, one of David's posthuman creations who is called Mimi in the former series and Mia in the latter. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to her only as 'Anita' throughout my analysis.

[9] "Doll" is a variant on "dolly," a pejorative word that is used in both series by those who oppose robot integration into society. Other "robophobic" (*H* 21:42 1.7) insults include "pacman" (*RH* 05:35 1.4), "dummies" (*RH* 47:31 1.1) and "son of a hub" (*RH* 25:24 1.10).

Unlike most televisual depictions of robots that characterize only gynoids as sexualized beings (Kakoudaki 2014: 82; Leyda 2017: 155), *Real Humans* also explores the subjective experience of the android character, Rick (Johannes Bah Kuhnke) with his human (female) lover, Therese (Camilla Larsson). Although not instrumentally designed as a sex robot—he is, in fact, an "X3," a personal fitness instructor model (*RH* 43:22 1.9)— Rick, nevertheless, provides a corrective to the CASR's disinterest in male-designated robots. Handsome with a muscular, toned physique, he becomes a sexual fetish object for Therese following the dissolution of her marriage. Yet, when she has Rick's source code illegally modified to "make him pretty good in bed" (*RH* 39:46 1.4), the process also provokes a range of emotions, such as jealousy, anger, and suffering, that were previously unavailable to him. Through being transformed into a "person-level robot" (Petersen 2018: 163), Rick becomes a posthuman character of "real ethical concern" (Petersen 2018: 155).

In seeking to understand Rick's relationship with Therese, *Real Humans* considers how the social and economic impulse to manufacture ever-more humanoid and human-like (sex) robots also raises important questions about their impact not only on people's subjectivity but also, potentially, on themselves. While the series, to some extent, reinforces Sheila Jeffreys' (2020: 05:55) suggestion that technological advances can be "used to advance men's sexual exploitation of women," *Real Humans* also illustrates Rick's objectification and misuse by his female partner. Therese reminds him that she is his "own[er]" (*RH* 52:16 1.8), but she, later, sells him to a hubot trafficker when she feels that he has become "a pain in the ass" (*RH* 33:42 1.8). This rejection leads Rick into sex work, where as an actor in the adult film industry he experiences physical and emotional degradation. When he is eventually liberated from his "sex slave[ry]" (*RH* 34:13 2.2), Rick reveals his trauma at having been "forced [...] to be filmed [...] they made me do things with people I'd rather not talk about" (*RH* 16:10 2.9). Although Richardson's CASR is principally (and problematically) focused only on men's use of gynoids, Rick's treatment as a "toy" (*RH* 04:33 2.9), an experience that leads him to self-harm (*RH* 11:00 2.9), nevertheless, illustrates her notion that such an "asymmetrical relationship" (Richardson 2016) between sex robots and humans reinforces the exploitative dynamics of prostitution. Despite being a male-designated posthuman, therefore, Rick suffers the same "enslave[ment] [and] humiliat[ion]" (*RH* 17:40 2.9) that many women do within a "prostitute-john exchange" (Campaign Against Sex Robots n.d.)

3. **Robosexuality**

While *Real Humans* illustrates how people's sexual (ab)use of gynoids/androids is, fundamentally, fetishistic, the series also emphasizes the objectifying potential of sex work by exploring the subjective suffering of the posthuman characters Flash, Niska, and Rick. However, it offers a more speculative exploration of how robots could

impact upon human sexual identifications. Tobias (Kåre Hedebrant), the teenage son of Inger (Pia Halvorsen) and Hans Engman (Johan Paulsen), identifies as "T.H.S.," or "transhumansexual" (*RH* 36:47 1.9), which is shown by his attraction to gynoids, and to Anita in particular, rather than to human beings. In fact, Tobias's attempt to perform heteronormatively by having sex with his schoolmate, Apan (Sara Linderholm), a behavior that is actively encouraged by his father who provides him with contraception, leads only to disappointment when he fails to become aroused (*RH* 34:50 1.8). Here, I resist the classification of Tobias as a robot fetishist because it implies an anthropocentric envisioning of sexuality through which gynoids are understood as ersatz people, rather than being desired in and for themselves. Indeed, *Real Humans* explores techno-gothic anxieties about human-robot sexual interactions by nuancing the distinction between "hubbies" (*RH* 32:00 1.3) or "hubot huggers" (*RH* 47:49 1.4), those people who have fetishistic sexual relations with gynoids/androids in lieu of human beings (such as Malte and Therese), and people, like Tobias, who are "turned on by hubots" (*RH* 36:51 1.9). However, rather than being transhumansexual —which, according to its standard definition, implies arousal from body modification, or even a transcendence of the sexual urge altogether— I believe that Tobias can be better understood as a robosexual because his desires relate, specifically, to the synthetic/machinic body. For example, he is attracted to the human character, Betty (Happy Jankell), only when he thinks that she is a gynoid (*RH* 10:00 2.2).

While *Real Humans* offers the possibility that, with the advent of posthuman sentience, authentic (as opposed to fetishistic) robosexuality could emerge, it also posits Tobias's experience in terms of contemporary understandings of subjective identifications. Betty's cruel teasing of Tobias by dressing up and behaving like a robot (*RH* 36:10 2.2), as well as her cynical attitude towards his sexuality ("For real? Or can't he get a girl?" (*RH* 35:31 2.2)) exposes the casual mistrust with which non-normative identifications are often treated. Hans is also worried by his son's reading of subcultural magazines such as "HubLove" and "Transmachine" (*RH* 07:48 2.1), an anxiety that prompts him to refer Tobias to a psychologist. Although Hans is clearly motivated by concern for the well-being of his son (and, throughout the series, he is characterized as being an attentive and loving father), his decision to seek professional assistance because Tobias is "in love with [a] hubot" (*RH* 22:05 1.9) is, presumably, also based on the belief that he is experiencing an emotional aberration that therapy might help to alleviate. Allegorizing the struggle for acceptance that non-heteronormative and transgender people continue to experience in the early twenty-first century, *Real Humans* thereby revises the trope of gothic alterity in terms of Tobias's robosexuality. As David Levy (2014: 227) suggests, "what we do not understand we tend to stigmatize."

Real Humans raises several interesting issues in relation to Tobias. Most immediately, we are invited to think about whether he is genuinely robosexual; or, as a teenager,

simply experimenting with an alternate and, perhaps, rebellious form of identification. In addition, the question of whether his sexuality is worthy of medical attention (and, possibly, cure) is also of paramount importance, a situation that, of course, recalls the historical experience of many homosexuals. Tobias himself feels socially induced self-doubt when he says that "There is something wrong with me" (*RH* 51:46 1.6), and that he doesn't "want to be like this" (*RH* 51:42 1.8). From a techno-gothic perspective, we are also provoked to question whether robosexuality is, in fact, another, more insidious version of the Frankenstein Complex, a dangerous dissolution of anthropocentric subjectivity that will damage the human species. Will intelligent machines, for example, overpower us not by brute force but by sexual seduction? This notion is, perhaps, gestured towards when Bea says to Roger (Lief Andrée), "You're my little human, and you'll do exactly what I say" (*RH* 48:57 2.9).

Despite leaving several of these issues unresolved, *Real Humans* does envision robosexuality as a significant form of non-normative identification. The series distinguishes between human-robot interactions that are purely sexual (and that tend to be fetishistic) and robosexual encounters that are part of mutually loving relationships. Although Tobias's declaration of love for Mimi remains unrequited following her bathetic response that he is "like a brother to [her]" (*RH* 51:23 2.1), it is apparent that this is not because she is incapable of such an emotion. Indeed, Mimi's romantic love for Leo (Andreas Wilson) is established at the beginning of the series' first episode. However, the narrative arcs for several posthuman characters do establish positive robosexual relations, including that between Douglas (Alexander Karim) and Flash, who marry despite the opposition that they face from the church authorities. In addition, Therese's ex-husband, Roger, also falls in love with Bea. Although he is, initially, both unaware that she is not human and, like Malte, embittered by the proliferation of hubots in society, Roger soon discovers that his attraction to Bea goes beyond her humanoid appearance. In fact, her invitation for him to touch her charging cable, rather than simply eroticizing Bea's otherness, acts as a moment of emotional intimacy that awakens Roger's robosexuality, and which leads to their declaration of mutual love (*RH* 48:35 1.8). It is an event that dramatizes their "bond[ing] in significant otherness" (Haraway 2016: 108), and that, in the words of Haraway (2016: 108), establishes the human and the posthuman as a "companion species."

Humans also positively valorizes robosexual romance, but only in the context of humans and posthumans who are capable of genuinely reciprocal affection. For example, Mrs Kennedy's (Emma Davies) love for her android partner, Howard (Matthew Tennyson) is shown to be unidirectional (and, therefore, inauthentic), as his limited AI allows him to only imitate her loving behavior towards him. However, in contrast to the sceptical view espoused by Hauskeller (2018: 214) that a robot's love for a person can never be truly correlative, *Humans* uses techno-gothic drama to "imagineer"

(Rossini 2017: 164) just such a (fictional) scenario. Karen (Ruth Bradley), who, like Bea in *Real Humans*, masquerades for much of the first season as a human police detective, falls in love with her professional and, later, romantic partner, Pete (Neil Maskell), while Niska forms a mutually loving partnership with Astrid (Bella Dayne), despite the prejudice that they face from anti-synth campaigners —a circumstance that parallels the real-world hostility suffered by some non-heteronormative couples.

4. (Post)human & Cyborg Subjectivities

In addition to speculating about the potential effects that sophisticated posthuman beings could have on people's sexual behaviors and subjectivities, *Humans* also explores their impact on gender identifications. During the first season, the young female characters, Renie (Letitia Wright) and Sophie (Pixie Davies) adopt the speech patterns and gestures of gynoids. This development, which the latter's father refers to as "acting...funny, in different ways," leads to Sophie being sent to see Dr Rose (Finley Robertson), a psychiatrist, so that she can be "checked out [...] as a precaution" (*H* 43:35 2.3). Medically diagnosed as suffering from "Juvenile Synthetic Over-identification Disorder," or "JSOD," this "new" condition is symptomized by "the *patient*'s [...] unconscious mirroring behavior" (*H* 06:08 2.4) [emphasis added]. Through blurring the boundaries between "what is considered synthetic and what is considered human" (*H* 06:50 2.4), Sophie's medical diagnosis leads her to believe herself to "be broken" (*H* 08:35 2.4), a judgement that is also accepted by her busy, working mother, Laura (Katherine Parkinson), who feels responsible for her daughter's "unhapp[iness]" (*H* 23:14 2.4). Advised by Dr Rose to spend more time with her family, rather than amongst robots, Sophie's 'condition' reflects how she "has bonded indelibly with the various synthetic life forms that have been brought into her home" (Weiss 2019: 27).

Through its exploration of JSOD, *Humans* engages with a debate about the impact of technology on human beings that has existed for many years. Recently, this has found expression in Andrew Sullivan's concerns about a "new epidemic of distraction" (2016), while Jean Twenge forecasts a looming adolescent "mental-health crisis" (2017) caused by young people's over-dependence on social media. However, by focusing its interrogation of technological mediation, specifically and innovatively, on the domestic environment, *Humans* poses thought-provoking questions about the effect of human-robot interaction in our homes, one of the most important spaces in which children learn about human behavior (Weiss 2019: 28). As Laura suggests, the presence of Anita as a live-in domestic helper has the potential to "mess with their heads" (*H* 07:46 1.1). *Humans* encourages spectators to consider for themselves whether Sophie's and Renie's experience of JSOD, like Tobias's robosexuality, warrants a medicalized intervention that will 'cure' (or normalize) them; or, alternatively, if it is

more appropriate to view their identification as a new form of (post)human subjectivity, one that disrupts the putative boundaries between the human and the technological. As Weiss asks, are they, in fact, "youthful vanguard[s] seeking a kind of Foucauldian limit experience in the dissolution of the subject?" (2019: 29).

As the series progresses, it becomes clear that Renie and Sophie model their behavior on gynoids because the robots that they see around them are more "perfect, kind [and] gentle" (*H* 06:36 2.4) than the people with whom they live. As Sophie's psychiatrist explains, "They never fight, they never get upset, they never worry or let you down" (*H* 06:41 2.4). In preferring to act like "the reliable artifact [rather than] the never completely reliable human" (Hauskeller 2018: 213), *Humans* challenges the myopic belief in human exceptionalism that is inherent to an anthropocentric paradigm. This idea is also explicitly expressed in *Real Humans* when Mimi-Anita asks Inger, "What makes *you* so special?" (*RH* 17:04 1.9) [emphasis in original]. In fact, central to the Swedish series' exploration of human-robot interaction is an awareness that the boundaries between organic and technological beings are less clearly defined than many people might want to accept, a blurring that is even more pronounced when the sentient machines of techno-gothic drama are taken into consideration. As the posthuman character, Gordon, suggests: "It is us that are real and it is you who are the fake people" (*RH* 05:00 2.6). Diffused within *Real Human*'s depiction of a parallel, highly technologized society is an awareness that human beings are "a kind of machine too" (*RH* 43:31 1.7) and that, in the words of Betty, "Technically, we're all hubots. [We]'re a bio-hub. [Our] brain is a chemical computer" (*RH* 34:40 2.2).

Van Elferen (2014: 138) believes that "the most terrifying" modern gothic specter is the "techno-human hybrid," an amalgam that represents "a new type of being, the indistinguishable Third that is neither Self nor Other but an uncanny blend of both" (Van Elferen 2014: 139). While, in *Humans*, both Sophie and Renee illustrate how human-robot interaction can manifest itself as a psychological affinity, both series also use the cyborg character, Leo (Colin Morgan in *Humans*), to visually embody this uncanny, posthuman condition. While, in the Swedish series, his description as a "disgusting thing [...] A fucking zombie" (*H* 33:18 1.5) reflects the conventional way in which cyborgs are negatively depicted on television (Calvert 2017: 14), in *Humans*, Leo's deconstruction of boundaries between the organic and the synthetic is valorized as a positive example of posthuman hybridisation. Rather than an object of fear and revulsion, he comes to exemplify a new and beneficial form of cyborg subjectivity that overcomes divisive binary thinking. More so than in its Swedish counterpart, therefore, the British/US series uses the dramatic possibilities of techno-gothic fiction to rethink alterity by problematising "the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual entity, or body" (Haraway 2016: 61).

Humans explains that, although Leo was born human, the only child of David and his wife, he was killed aged thirteen when his mentally ill mother drowned them

both in a lake. However, through inserting technological implants, David brought his dead son back to life as a cyborg. Although, later, his father's misgivings about this decision are made clear when he describes Leo as "an aberration" (*H* 18:10 3.6), he, nevertheless, embodies a revolutionary form of being that is neither "one of us [...] [n]or one of them" (*H* 31:40 3.7). As a posthuman, therefore, Leo demonstrates "the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions" (Haraway 2016, 53). This is depicted most specifically through his robosexual relationship with the human character, Mattie (Lucy Carless). When, at the end of the third (and final) season of *Humans*, Mattie becomes pregnant, her unborn child represents a "unique [....] coming together of man and machine" (*H* 45:28 3.8), a baby that "will be the first of a new kind" and that "will change the course of history" (*H* 45:31 3.8). Indeed, as Haraway suggests (2016: 52)., such a being has the potential to move humanity beyond the reductive, phallic anthropocentrism of our current worldview by demonstrating "how not to be a Man."

Humans depicts Leo's relationship with Mattie as an empowering form of miscegenation and, as such, robosexuality offers a techno-gothic alternative to a reductive ontology that valorizes the distinction between organic and technological beings. Instead, by "no longer think[ing] in binary" (*H* 26:44 3.6), humans and robots can "share the same path" (*H* 40:18 3.8), a circumstance that allows for mutual benefits. As Anita states, "I see a world where we live among you, each of us learning from the other, building towards a peaceful future" (*H* 27:40 3.6). This emphasis on posthuman/cyborgean hybridity and community provides *Humans* with the same positive conclusion that is found in *Real Humans*. In the final episode of the Swedish series, Anita and Flash are granted legal personhood so that they can benefit from "the same rights [as humans]" and be "treated like citizens" (*RH* 53:37 2.10).

5. Conclusion

Overturning the apocalyptic vision of Asimov's Frankenstein Complex, *Real Humans* and *Humans* use techno-gothic television fiction to imagine a parallel world in which sentient posthumans productively challenge our contemporary understanding of (sexual) subjectivity. Indeed, as the ambiguities implicit in the titles of both series suggest, they interrogate the very notion of human identity itself. According to Sherry Turkle (2017: 138), "We are authentic in the way a machine can be, and a machine can be authentic in the way a person can be." Throughout my analysis, I have explored various facets of robosexual, posthuman, and cyborg existence, from their connection to fetishism to their more subversive challenge to anthropomorphic, hetero-normative, and binary paradigms of identification. By emphasising the importance of reciprocity in human-robot (romantic/loving) relations, they "present untold opportunities to diversify sex, gender, and sexuality. They are vitally important in

shaping future subjectivities" (Knox 2019: 21). While both *Real Humans* and *Humans* dramatize many of the concerns that are expressed by the CASR, particularly the need for sexbot designers to consider the ethical impact of their products, they also encourage a positive view of cyborgification as a means of overcoming the harmful and misogynistic attitudes that remain in early twenty-first century society. As Laura, the mother of Sophie and Mattie In Humans, suggests: "It's not the synths who are a danger to humanity, it's ourselves" (*H* 23:21 3.8).

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Chapter 4
'Walter', 'Walt', 'Mr. White', or 'Bitch': The Stylistic Use of Terms of Address in *Breaking Bad*

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Abstract

The use of terms of address is a major component in the stylistic repertoire of fiction. Even though address forms, especially when they function as vocative phrases, have received little scholarly attention as stylistic devices, some studies situate them at the core of fictional discourse. As we shall see, the stylistic role of terms of address is a key element in American crime drama *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), where the social relationships and the conflicts among characters are punctuated by a specific use of these forms. Different terms of address signify aspects to do with power, closeness, conflict, and affinity.

The purpose of this essay is to gauge the stylistic significance of the terms of address that the main characters in *Breaking Bad* use in their interaction with the protagonist, Walter White. Through a close analysis of these units, we shall see how the linguistic behaviour of each character in their choice of address forms characterizes their relationship with the protagonist. In addition, as their relationships change, so does the use of terms of address—alongside other discursive elements.

Keywords: stylistics, *Breaking Bad*, terms of address, pragmatics, TV discourse.

1. Introduction

The use of terms of address has always been a major stylistic device in literature, especially as a characterizing device. Thus, when Gatsby, the eponymous protagonist in Fitzgerald's novel, systematically uses "old sport" to address his interlocutors, we immediately take this vocative phrase to be his trademark term of address. This, in turn, shapes the character in sociolinguistic terms as well as in his personal attitudes, for the phrase provides information about the cultural and social spheres he belongs to (Graham & Heggestad 2018).

But the way characters address other characters also have stylistic effects that circumscribe to particular moments. To quote but a single example, the use of different

second-person pronouns (you/thou) marks the difference between the words of Queen Gertrude—who uses "thou" to emphasize her role as a caring mother—and those of Hamlet—who chooses the polite pronoun "you" to address the Queen in order to establish a formal relationship with her—in the following exchange:

(1)
Queen Gertrude: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.[1]

Indeed, much can be known or inferred about the nature of characters in any work of fiction by looking at their use of terms of address in verbal interaction.

Along these lines, this chapter looks into the use of terms of address in the American television series *Breaking Bad*. Specifically, this essay investigates how three of the main characters (Skyler White, Mike Ehrmantraut, and Jesse Pinkman) use different terms of address in their interactions with the main character, Walter White. There are several aspects to be considered in this study. First, the choice of address forms by the three characters is largely systematic. This systematicity offers invaluable insights into their personality—as well as into their relationship with Walter White. In addition, these patterns in address behaviour also shape the plot of the series and, at the same time, frame the scenes where they are used. Finally, there are occasional instances that deviate from the usual patterns that are conventionally used in the exchanges with Walter White. This deviation signals a major rupture in the relationship between characters and usually marks a critical moment in the storyline. All of these aspects play key roles in the configuration of the discourse of *Breaking Bad* and its stylistic effects. The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the theoretical framework of address theory, especially as it pertains to the stylistic study of fictional discourse. Section 3 consists of three sub-sections where the way characters use terms of address is analysed and discussed.

2. Literature review on address theory and its stylistic implications

This study focuses on the linguistic concept of 'address'. Address is here defined as "the speaker's linguistic reference to his/her collocutors." In this regard, forms of address "contain a strong element of deixis" (Braun 1988: 7). Address, in this sense, is used here as the direct reference to an interlocutor—the protagonist of *Breaking Bad*. General definitions of terms of address often focus on the importance of instantial[2] use as well; i.e., to the fact that the actual choice of an address term has to do with the particular linguistic and pragmatic context of the exchange. Thus, Parkinson (1985: 1)

[1] *Hamlet*, Act II, sc. iv.

[2] The term "instantial" and the phrase "instantial stylistic use" are used here following Naciscione (2010).

notes that terms of address are "words used in a speech event that refer to the addressee of *that* speech event" (my emphasis). This brings to the fore a notion that is fundamental for stylistic analysis: regardless of the systematic use of terms of address that a person may have made in the past, a specific address choice in a specific "speech event" may provide relevant information about that person and about his/her intended meaning. Furthermore, within address theory, the following pages essentially investigate the use of "nouns of address" (Braun 1988: 9), which include "personal names" and derivative terms. The choice of nominal address forms as the basis for the analysis here should come as no surprise, for they are "the only type of address available for study in languages like English which lack (at least in most dialects) a distinction in address pronouns" (Dickey 1997: 255).

In real-world interaction, terms of address are the linguistic manifestation of a number of social factors that shape the linguistic behaviour of interlocutors and their relationship. These terms also help characterize speakers. Indeed, as Parkinson (1985: 1) suggests, address terms encode "much information about who the speaker believes he is, who he believes the addressee is, what he thinks their relationship is, and what he thinks he is doing by saying what he is saying." On a related note, specific address variants may have to do with social status, education, regional dialect, ideology, religion, etc. At the same time, the fact that address variants may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal (Braun 1988: 19) partially accounts for the perception of "mutual distance" or "status differences," respectively. However, it must also be noted that the expression of "politeness" in address may be deceptive—with "polite" forms sometimes used for admonition and "impolite" forms sometimes showing closeness and respect.

On the whole, terms of address (especially in their vocative form), usually fulfil one (or more) of these three pragmatic functions (Leech 1999: 108–109): getting the attention of the addressee; identifying someone as the intended recipient of the message in multi-party conversations; and creating, maintaining or emphasizing the relationship between speaker and addressee. This last function is the most significant for a study such as this one for, as discussed later, the terms of address exchanged between the protagonist and the other characters shape not only their interaction but also the whole storyline in the series.

Let us look at those potential patterns when it comes to terms of address. If we consider the dyad First Name (FN) - Title and Last Name (TLN), we are left with only three possible combinations: "the reciprocal exchange of FN, the reciprocal exchange of TLN, and the nonreciprocal pattern in which one person uses FN and the other TLN" (Brown & Ford 1961: 376). Apart from these recurrent patterns of address in English, it must be mentioned that there exist other terms of address that occasionally punctuate conversational exchanges with singular expressive force. Most notably, "insulting terms" and related vocatives are often considered here together with the

other terms of address, especially as they function as signals for the "contextual bias" of the stretch of discourse considered (d'Avis & Meibauer 2013); i.e., how the situation may trigger the expression of certain emotions.

Regardless of the ramifications of address theory in naturally-occurring speech, it should not be forgotten that this study concentrates on the discourse of fiction. More specifically, on how terms of address may have concrete stylistic functions and serve as a device for characterization and character construction. Thus, Culpeper (2001: 193) mentions "terms of address" as one of the linguistic features that can contribute to characterization. In his own words, "terms of address, including vocatives and pronouns, can be an important means of signalling social information. Characters can be rapidly placed within particular social groups, and their social relations with other characters can be indicated." Similarly, Bednarek (2018: 127) includes terms of address in three of the five major "pragmatic and stylistic categories" she identifies in TV dialogue, namely "interaction in the here-and-now," "formality," and "expressivity." These three categories cover practically everything that this study covers, since they include the instantial configuration of the relationship between characters ("interaction in the here-and-now"), the perceived distance between them ("formality"), and the manifestation of feelings and ideas ("expressivity").

These stylistic ramifications have been the source of specific scholarly endeavours that concentrate on the many forms that terms of address may have, and their stylistic significance. In this regard, for example, Gregori-Signes (2020: 43) elucidates the importance of naming terms in order to examine "the structure of narrative plots" that "are developed in the form of dialogue." Indeed, address terms in general also play a fundamental part in the narrative of *Breaking Bad*.

On a related note, it should be mentioned that previous research has shown that the use of vocatives is a recurrent device in films (Formentelli 2014). Formentelli's work also mentions the notion that the use of terms of address lies at the intersection between the general patterns of the language and the stylistic needs of fiction. Indeed, in "the language devised for characters on screen there is more than the mere attempt to imitate naturally occurring talk, as…scriptwriters' personal style and creativity are often a prominent component in dialogue construction" (Ibid.: 54). Still, there is always a dialectic connection between "imitation" and "creativity" and, consequently, one must not forget that the stylistic construction of fictional discourse follows the patterns of naturally-occurring speech—even if those patterns are subverted for specific purposes. For example, there is a noticeable disparity between the use of certain forms of address in everyday speech and in "staged orality," as Heyd (2010) showed for the case of the sitcom *Friends*. Thus, stylistic effect is usually derived from the distance between the general pattern and the concrete manifestation of fictional speech.

In the case of the three characters whose use of terms of address towards the protagonist is studied here (Skyler White, Mike Ehrmantraut, and Jesse Pinkman),

each of them follows—at least, initially—a pattern that is largely expected given their relationship with Walter White. For example, Skyler (Walter's wife), corroborates what has been observed between "family members of the same generation" and spouses, who tend to use First Names (FN), nicknames, and terms of endearment consistently (Dickey 1997: 261). Thus, Skyler's addressing her husband as 'Walt' is in line with this natural pattern. This is not to mention the fact that in American English (Brown & Ford 1961: 376) male first names "very seldom occur in full form (Robert, James, or Gerald) but are almost always either abbreviated (Bob, Jim) or diminutized (Jerry) or both (Bobbie, Jimmy)." Also, as one would expect, the distribution of FN as the preferred address term is reciprocal between both spouses in the series.

In the case of Mike Ehrmantraut, we find a quasi-reciprocal dyad where Walter addresses him as 'Mike' and Mike, in turn, usually refers to the protagonist as 'Walter'. This is to be expected between two people of the same sex and comparable age and social status (Brown & Ford 1961: 377). The reciprocity, however, is not complete, because Walter chooses to use a shortened and diminutized FN ('Mike') as opposed to the full FN Mike utilizes ('Walter').

In the case of Jesse Pinkman, a similarly predictable use of address forms occurs. However, as opposed to the previous two examples, the address dyad is far from reciprocal, for the protagonist addresses Pinkman as 'Jesse', whereas he calls Walter 'Mr. White'. This has to do primarily with the fact that Jesse was a former student of Walter's. Indeed, as Dickey notes (1997: 263), different hierarchical positions account for students addressing teachers by a title and their last name (TLN), whereas teachers use FNs to address students. Given that, as we shall see, Jesse's relationship with Walter is that of student-teacher in many ways, his addressing Walter White as 'Mr. White' is but a manifestation of that hierarchical imbalance within an unusual educational environment. In the case of the terms of address exchanged between Jesse and Walter, it should also be noted that some of their conversations take the form of a classroom exchange, where they copy the structure Initiation-Response-Follow-up.

The IRF model was first described by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard (1975). As Sinclair (2004: 65) himself summarizes later on,

In classroom discourse as a whole the characteristic teacher–pupil exchange, as reported in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) consists of three moves: Teacher Initiation - Pupil Response - Teacher Follow-up. The Follow-up move has several functions, but all of them are associated with evaluating the Response. If the Initiation is an elicitation, perhaps a question, and the Response is an attempt at an answer, the Follow-up will evaluate the answer according to the teacher's moment-by-moment appreciation of the lesson. This triad seems to be a microcosm of the most general pattern in discourse—two successive units in some recognizable relationship with each other, followed by a third which expresses and/or evaluates the relationship.

This model should be taken as the basis for some of the conversations between student (Jesse) and teacher (Walter)—on some occasions more ostensibly than others, as we shall see—and for their use of forms of address.

In sum, the analysis of the stylistic use of terms of address in *Breaking Bad* among the characters listed above has to do with the adherence or deviation from the sociolinguistic norms that have been outlined. Specifically, where characters follow the general expected pattern, we observe an unchanging status quo. However, whenever a character deviates from the expected pattern, we normally find a stylistic effect that reinforces a turning point in the plot and/or a disruption in the relationship between the characters. Thus, in the following section, the chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the use of terms of address by the three characters in the series that interact with Walter White most often and across the five seasons of the series[3]: Skyler White, Mike Ehrmantraut, and Jesse Pinkman. Each of these characters will be dealt with in a separate sub-section, where the focus will be placed on a) the terms of address they systematically use in their conversations with Walter; b) the stylistic implications of their address behaviour with Walter; and c) the specific stylistic effects brought about by occasional changes in their address behaviour towards the main character.

Before moving on to the individual analysis of the three characters, a brief note on methodology is in order. The data utilized here was initially gathered from the scripts and screenplays available at www.8flix.com.[4] These transcripts, in .pdf format, allowed for a simplified search of each of the terms of address that were to be analysed. In addition, each script contained both the transcription of the dialogue and the time reference within each episode when the dialogue takes place. Thus, for instance, we can determine at a glance that in Episode 213[5], Skyler asks her husband to thank his son for the success of his fundraiser to cover the cost of his cancer treatment ("Walt, don't you think a little thank-you is in order?") between the 11:57 and 12:00 mark. This reference has been used to corroborate the phrasing and timing of each example by viewing the relevant fragment in each episode. In other words, the scripts have not been taken on faith.

[3] Mike Ehrmantraut appears at the beginning of the second season.

[4] See https://8flix.com/collections/transcripts/breaking-bad/ for individual scripts and screenplays.

[5] References to all episodes consist of a 3-digit number, the first one indicating the season and the last two indicating the episode number within that season. Thus, Episode 207 refers to the seventh episode of the second season.

3. The Stylistics of terms of address by character

As noted above, American TV series *Breaking Bad* features an ensemble of recurring characters whose roles largely depend on their relationship with the main character, Walter White.[6] As we shall see, the way they address the protagonist in their dialogues frames and shapes the relationship they have with him. In addition, changes in the patterns of their linguistic behaviour regarding how they address Walter White point towards specific stylistic effects that will be discussed in the following pages. At this point, it can be said that, in general terms, all the major characters discussed here begin by establishing a recognizable term of address for Walter that marks their idiolect and adds a personal touch to their relationship. Later on, usually in a critical moment between them in the plot, that specific address term is either discontinued or replaced by another term. This reveals itself as a means to underscore how the circumstances of the story affect the interpersonal linguistic behaviour of the characters. Let us look at this phenomenon in the three individual instances mentioned above; i.e., the way Skyler White, Mike Ehrmantraut, and Jesse Pinkman address Walter White.

3.1. **Skyler White**

Walter White's wife, Skyler, is a working-class woman who has had a series of low-paying jobs throughout her life, including being a hostess at a diner and a bookkeeper for a small local company. Skyler's usual address term for her husband is almost invariably 'Walt'. In the very first episode of the series, she already establishes this pattern when she tells off his husband for using one of their credit cards ("Walt, the Mastercard's the one we don't use"), when she is shocked that her husband should violently stand up to their son's bully ("Walt..?"), and when she expresses her concerns about his erratic behaviour ("Walt, I don't know what is going on with you lately"). Later, Skyler adheres to this form of address in all sorts of situations and discursive contexts. For instance, in Episode 104, she uses it to convince him to take a job offer he is reluctant to accept ("Walt, he wouldn't offer you a job if he didn't think you were qualified") and to initiate an intervention for her husband ("Sit down, Walt."). Likewise, in the pilot episode Skyler simply utilizes her go-to term of address to express amazement at her husband's renewed sexual energy ("Walt..."). This use of the shortened form of Walter's name is practically the only way she addresses her husband—other than the occasional concrete epithet (e.g., "birthday boy"). Within

[6] I must include a note of thanks to my loving wife, Rosario Silva, who watched the five seasons of *Breaking Bad* with me on three separate occasions and provided invaluable feedback on what, at the time, seemed only unconnected thoughts.

their family circle, it is also common to hear the address term 'Walt' when they are referring to the married couple. For instance, in Episode 401, Marie Schrader asks Skyler (her sister) if she and Walter are back together after their separation, because she saw his car in the driveway ("You and Walt?"). This throws into relief the fact that the use of 'Walt' in the family environment is quite consistent. It also corroborates the "intimacy" the term suggests.

In general terms, the use of shortened (hypocoristic, diminutive) forms is restricted to a person's close circle (Brown & Ford, 1961). In this regard, it is only natural to find it when Walter and Skyler are having conversations that concern their marriage, their family life, and other things they share. For example, when Walter falls asleep while he is receiving chemotherapy (Episode 106), Skyler gently wakes him up saying: "Walt…you alright?" In an equally intimate moment in Episode 201, Skyler is having a bubble bath and Walter is sat on the edge of the tub, pensive. Skyler is concerned that he may be hiding something and warmly asks: "Walt, would you talk to me, please?" To quote but another relevant instance, when Skyler is packing her things because she wants to be separated from Walter (Episode 213), she tells her husband "I want you to pack your things and leave." And when Walter asks why she is doing that, she retorts: "Because you're a liar, Walt."

This address pattern remains unchanged during their joint venture as partners in crime. To wit, in Episode 402, when Skyler and Walter are discussing whether they should buy a car wash to launder their meth money, Walter fears the line may be bugged and asks his wife not to mention the car wash over the telephone. Skyler, by contrast, thinks that he is being overly cautious: "Walt, it is a car wash, not a brothel." Similarly, when she fears for her husband's safety, she asks directly: "Walt, I need you to look me in the eye and tell me right now. Are you in danger?"

The case of Skyler is the most consistent of the three characters discussed in this essay. Indeed, Walter's wife calls him 'Walt' until the very last episode of the series (Episode 516), when he briefly returns to say goodbye to her and their baby child —avoiding the police, which is watching over Skyler's domicile. Thus, at the outset of their final conversation, Skyler begins by saying: "I don't want your money, Walt." However, it is interesting to note that, from that moment on, in the five minutes that elapse, Skyler does not address her husband directly —neither by 'Walt' or by any other vocative. And this 'eloquent' absence occurs even though she utters sentences where her usual address term for Walter would have been used in practically any other circumstances (e.g., "You look terrible!," "Why are you here?"). In addition, from the moment Walter requests to see her baby daughter one last time, no words are exchanged between Skyler and him until he leaves, despite the conspicuous farewell scene.

The progressive muteness that Skyler resorts to as the story comes to a close is a long way from the overly vocal woman we have come to know throughout the

series. Not only does she stop calling her husband 'Walt' —thereby disrupting her address behaviour— but she gradually ends up uttering no words at all. These two elements parallel the death of their relationship and to some extent foreshadow the protagonist's demise. In addition, the absence of terms of address towards her husband signals the absence of the personal connection (one of kinship and affection) that originated this address pattern. Thus, by the end of the series Skyler "has become fearful of Walt" (Holladay & Click 2019: 148) and she no longer recognizes in him the husband he used to be. This dehumanizes their final conversation and, specifically, it dehumanizes Walt— as she refuses to acknowledge him with a term of address while at the same time neglecting their status (they remain technically married until the end of the series). This dehumanization is perhaps a sign of poetic justice: Walt has used people throughout the series for his own purposes, "a graphic mark of a dehumanizing criminal world in which Walter has metabolized with excellence" (Echart 2015: 147), and now he feels equally dehumanized and shunned by his own wife.

3.2. **Mike Ehrmantraut**

Another major character in this ensemble series is Mike Ehrmantraut. He is a former police officer who works for drug overlord Gus Fring— with occasional jobs done for Saul Goodman— mostly as head of security and hitman. From the beginning of their acquaintance, Mike invariably addresses Walter White as 'Walter'. For example, in Episode 304, Mike agrees to remove all the hidden microphones from Walter's home, but he warns him: "You know, Walter, sometimes it doesn't hurt to have someone watching your back." Likewise, in Episode 402, when Walter is trying to convince Mike to get rid of Gus, Mike tries to cut the conversation short ("Drink up, Walter"). Moments later, he follows the same strategy by trying to change the subject ("You won, Walter. You got the job."). In a similar fashion, in Episode 405, when Mike is taking Jesse with him in a series of perilous jobs, he hangs up on the protagonist when Walter calls to express his concerns ("Goodbye, Walter"). Even towards the end of the series, when Walter, Jesse, and Mike are running the meth business, the term of address remains unchanged. For instance, when he arrives at one of their secret meetings, Mike condescendingly replies to Walter's worried complaints: "I would never come to the headquarters of our illegal meth operation dragging a bunch of cops, Walter."

Most of the time Mike uses 'Walter' as his trademark form of address for the protagonist as a means to display a sense of superiority, both morally and as a criminal. But, above all else, the fact that he does not abbreviate 'Walter', like most other characters, indicates an explicit and comparatively larger social distance that signals conflict and mutual mistrust. This is particularly blatant when we compare this

address pattern with that used by Mike with his former boss, 'Mr. Fring', whom Mike never addresses directly in the whole series. As he once outspokenly expressed in one of their meetings, Mike believes Walter is "trouble" and "a time bomb" (Episode 502). At the same time, Mike is the one who knows how to run the methamphetamine business and he will take no advice from Walter, who is simply "a cook" in his eyes. As he bluntly puts it in the same episode: "Business is my end. This is business. End of story." This deliberately patronizing way of addressing Walter is summed up when, at the end of the meeting, Mike tries to put things very clearly: "Listen, Walter. Just because you shot Jesse James don't make you Jesse James."

In general, this imbalance in the relationship between Mike and Walter is conveyed, among other things, by means of the aforementioned form of address. As stated in the introduction, male names in American English tend to be shortened or diminutized. However, the lack of intimacy, closeness, and trust accounts for the use of the full FN, 'Walter'. By contrast, Walter always addresses Ehrmantraut with the shortened form 'Mike'. See, for instance, the conversations between the two characters that have been discussed above (Episodes 402, 405, and 502), where we hear Walter say things like "Mike, I'm trying to tell you…," "Mike, tell me now exactly what is going on," and "Mike, I know you don't care for me."

At the same time, as noted above, there is a sense of superiority in Mike's verbal behaviour towards Walter. To draw but an illustrative comparison, let us not forget that Walter's two bosses (however different) also call him 'Walter'—thus signalling their higher position in the corporate ladder. Indeed, Amir (the owner of the car wash where Walter works on the side) asks him to stop working the register and wash some cars, thus: "I'm short-handed, Walter. What am I to do?" (Episode 101). Likewise, Gus Fring, the drug overlord Walter works for until the end of season 4, calls him 'Walter' systematically. As one can see, this address term buttresses the power imbalance between both characters. For example, when Walter is at first reluctant to accept his business offer (Episode 305), Gus (Mr. Fring) reminds him: "What does a man do, Walter? A man provides for his family." Similarly, in Episode 309, when Walter is resolved to confront Gus about the cartel's attempt to take the life of his brother-in-law, Gus remains calm and condescending: "Walter, you seem troubled."

In addition to the above, Mike adheres to this form of address until the very end of his appearance in the series. In Episode 507, when the DEA are on their heels and Mike needs to have his bag with fake documents and money brought to him so that he can leave town, Walter agrees to drive it to him. When they meet, Mike takes the bag out of Walter's hands and dryly adds: "Goodbye, Walter." However, as was the case with Skyler, Mike also changes his address behaviour when he last sees Walter. Seconds after delivering the bag, the two characters have a heated argument about who is to blame for the situation. Mike expresses his opinion with less than polite epithets, while also spelling out his opinion of Walter's attitude:

(2)

Mike: We had a good thing, you stupid son of a bitch! We had Fring, we had a lab, we had everything we needed and it all ran like clockwork. You could've shut your mouth, cooked, and made as much money as you ever needed. It was perfect. But, no, you just had to blow it up. You and your pride and your ego! You just had to be the man. If you'd done your job, known your place, we'd all be fine right now.

Resorting to verbal abuse in Example 2 is, first and foremost, a consequence of the circumstances. At this point, there is no hope for a continuing business partnership and everything has been reduced to a fight for survival, so Mike lets his resentment towards Walter loose. As we know, seconds after this conversation, Walter shoots Mike and, eventually he dies. When Mike is sat on a river bank, wounded, watching the sunset, he utters the following with his last breath: "Shut the fuck up... and let me die in peace." This is the last time that Mike swears at Walter. After this, in a move that parallels what happened with Skyler, Mike's last encounter with Walter is dominated by the urge to remain silent, even though that means resorting to a third address paradigm (FN, swearing, silence). Walter, as a character, evolves from a beloved family man to an egotistic criminal whom everybody despises and many fear. As other characters become aware of this transition, their forms of address change and ultimately refuse to communicate with him. Once again, Walter's presence is ignored by avoiding direct reference to him. He progressively becomes a ghost, a dehumanized entity. This, in turn, once again foreshadows his ultimate doom.

3.3. **Jesse Pinkman**

Jesse is a former student of Walter White's (he taught him chemistry in high school), and they start a meth-cooking business together. He is the only character, apart from Walter White, to appear on every episode of the show, and together they have the largest amount of verbal interaction in the series. Consequently, the terms of address they use for each other constitute a particularly significant case-study.

When they meet again years after Jesse left school— as he narrowly escapes a police raid— Jesse continues to call Walter 'Mr. White'. At the beginning, at least, this form of address is probably a remnant habit from his high school days. As we know, this is common linguistic behaviour between teacher and student in most contexts. Furthermore, Jesse's systematic use of the honorific 'Mr. White' is a phenomenon that has been noticed by other scholars (see Diehl, 2016), although it has not been analysed in detail until the present study.

In the series, even when Jesse is using his street slang, he continues to resort to 'Mr. White'. For example, in Episode 201, when he wants to know Walter's plan to kill Tuco, he asks: "What is it, Mr. White?" This pattern is not broken even when the situation is exceptionally dangerous and one would be allowed to suspend the general rules of linguistic politeness because of an impending critical situation.

Indeed, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 282) put it, "the need for efficient or urgent communication takes precedence over face redress." For instance, when Walter turns delusional in Episode 310 and becomes obsessed with killing a fly that has gotten into the laboratory, Jesse tries to find out what is happening and shouts: "Mr. White? Talk to me here!" Likewise, when they are trying to destroy evidence from the police vault by using an industrial magnet to erase the memory of a laptop computer (Episode 501), Jesse becomes anxious and urges him: "Mr. White, let's get out of here." Even at his sanest, in Episode 301, right after a period of rehabilitation, Jesse confronts Walter and his attitude in a similar vein: "You either run from things or you face them, Mr. White."

The fact that Jesse systematically uses "Mr. White" as an (almost) exclusive term of address for Walter stems, to begin with, from a habit that is difficult to break. As we know, speakers are often reluctant to change the terms of address they have always used for a particular interlocutor, even when the circumstances have changed completely. For instance, we have all experienced the moment when, at some point in the transition from childhood to adulthood, one is asked to stop talking to adults in your close social circle as Mr. X or Mrs. Y. But the fact that Jesse fails to grow past this point in linguistic behaviour reveals itself, to begin with, as a linguistic parallel for their relationship. Indeed, Walter was Jesse's teacher in high school and now he is his teacher as a meth cook. His role as a mentor is unquestionable. In this regard, Jesse addresses Walter as someone for whom he has a lot of respect because of his technical and intellectual superiority—someone he looks up to and who he is going to learn from. Not for nothing do these two characters begin their business arrangement with clear-cut, separate domains: "You know the business, and I know the chemistry. I'm thinking…maybe you and I could partner up" (Episode 101)—later to have Jesse learn how to cook methamphetamine just like Walter, to the extent that a drug cartel tries to hire him. In this process, Jesse almost invariably shows this feeling of respect and admiration by calling his 'teacher' 'Mr. White'. For instance, when they cook their first batch (Episode 101), Jesse is so impressed by the quality of the product that he cannot help but exclaim: "You're a goddamn artist. This is art, Mr. White." Likewise, Jesse at first cannot understand much of what is happening at the lab or many of the words Walter uses (e.g., "Yo, Mr. White, I can't even pronounce half this shit"), but he glows with joy and admiration when he understands that Walter has a plan to increase their productivity (Episode 107), and solve their problems: "Yeah, Mr. White. Yeah, science."

Let us not forget that the teacher-student relationship between Walter and Jesse is an integral part of the series, especially in the first three seasons. In fact, several scenes can be read as a classroom environment where Walter plays his role as a teacher as well. In them, we find all the conventional discursive elements of a lesson. Take, for example, the sequence in Episode 209 when both characters are

stranded in the desert after the battery of the RV they use as a lab dies. Despaired and dehydrated after an unsuccessful attempt at trickle charging the battery, Jesse tries to cheer Walter up and encourages him to use his intellect to come up with an ingenious solution: "Okay, you need to cut out all your loser crybaby crap right now and think of something scientific." In a moment of sudden epiphany, Walter comes up with the idea of building a makeshift battery with some scrap metal and other chemicals they have in their meth lab. Instead of describing his idea straightforwardly, the ensuing conversation takes the form of concatenated IRF (Initiation, Response, Evaluation) exchanges.

In the scene under scrutiny here, Walter describes a scientific phenomenon and tries to elicit a response from Jesse. The ensuing conversation corroborates that the teacher-student relationship is fundamental between the two characters, especially if one considers that there is no need to make the process a learning opportunity in such a critical situation. At any rate, after every elicitation by Walter, Jesse's response, either wrong or plainly absurd, gets a subtle negative feedback from Walter, who usually rolls his eyes or sighs. This comic strain sublimates the desperation of the situation and the tragedy of the criminal environment. Let us look at two illustrative fragments from this scene:

(3)

Jesse: [*After asking Jesse to remove the brake pads from the wheels*] What are we building?
Walter: You said it yourself.
Jesse: A robot?
Walter: A battery.

(4)

Walter: A battery is a galvanic cell. It's no more than an anode and a cathode, separated by an electrolyte, right?
Jesse: Right.
Walter: Yeah, well, anyway. Here. On one side, you have mercuric oxide and graphite from your brake pads. This is the cathode. This is the positive terminal. This is where the supply of current flows out from, you see? Then.... Here, I'll show you. On the opposite side is our anode. This. It's zinc. It's what we find in our coins and anything galvanized.
Jesse: So the sponge is the electrolyte?
Walter: Yeah. Well, no, the potassium hydroxide is the electrolyte. But, yes, that's what I'm soaking the sponges in.
Jesse: Good.
Walter: Good. And now, what shall we use to conduct this beautiful current with? What one particular element comes to mind?
Jesse: Wire.
Walter: Copper.

In Example 3, Walter has inadvertently initiated (I) the learning exchange by making clear that he has come up with a solution, although he does not disclose his idea. He simply asks Jesse to gather coins, bolts, and other pieces of galvanized metal. This prompts Jesse's question and Walter's second initiation (I), where he simply refers Jesse to the list of ideas he had just blurted out. Jesse, unaware of the real technical options they have, chooses the most preposterous option ("a robot") for a response (R), and Walter provides the feedback (F) in a disappointed follow-up move ("a battery").

Example 4 is quite similar to the previous one, but in this case Walter's initiation (I) is rather lengthy, punctuated by a few backchannel signals from Jesse, checking for understanding (e.g., "right," "good," "so the sponge is the electrolyte?"). At the end of his exposition, Walter tries to elicit Jesse's response (R) with a couple of direct questions. Unsurprisingly, we find again Jesse's absurd answer ("wire") and Walter's dismayed feedback ("copper").

It should be noted that this learning process is a two-way street on occasion, although Walter does not seem to care much for what Jesse teaches him—mostly his street savvy and jargon. For instance, in Episode 207 (Example 5), Jesse has to make an effort to show Mr. White that he is speaking about the promising economic turnover of their business when he uses the florid metaphor "cheddar."

(5)

Jesse: Well, we're set. Our boys are ready. Gonna be some mad cheddar, yo. [*Walter looks puzzled*] Cheddar, Mr. White. Fat stacks, dead presidents, cash money. Gonna own this city.

However, this reversal of roles between teacher and student is not common and, in addition, it is usually restricted to folkloristic elements of urban culture. By now, it should have become apparent that the inadvertent mixture of street slang and the polite term of address 'Mr. White' constitutes the trademark combination of Jesse's discourse throughout the series. This throws Jesse in a somewhat risible but honest light, which makes him a likable character.

In light of the foregoing examples, it is worthy of note that Jesse continues to call Walter 'Mr. White'—even after spending months working together and even in the most emotional circumstances. Take, for instance, when Jesse (who lost an aunt to cancer) displays true concern for Walter's health and is truly happy to hear that his cancer is "remitting" (Episode 210): "Mr. White, you kicked its ass, yo!" On a similar occasion, Jesse is also preoccupied about Walter's lack of sleep and obsessive behaviour (Episode 310), but he continues to call him 'Mr. White':

(6)

Jesse: Hey, Mr. White. [*no response, louder*]. Mr. White!
Walt: Huh?
Jesse: Are you okay?

Under the most terrifying circumstances, like in Episode 313, when Walter asks Jesse to kill the other methamphetamine cook (who they fear will replace them when he learns the recipe), Jesse's terms of address remain unchanged: "I-I can't do it, Mr. White." To quote but another example that speaks to the systematicity of Jesse's terms of address in this context, when a Mexican cartel offers Jesse a job as their lead meth cook (Episode 409), he keeps referring to Walter White in the same terms even in the third person, despite the obvious recognition that his own work as a methamphetamine cook has earned him: "You're asking me if I can cook Mr. White's crystal? Without him? Me?"

However, there are a few instances that punctuate Jesse's speech throughout the series in which he alters this pattern. As we shall see, they speak to Jesse's evolution as a character and to changes in his relationship with the protagonist. To follow a chronological sequence, in Episode 205 (fittingly entitled "Breakage"), Jesse is angrily complaining about all the bad things that Walter has brought to his life ever since they partnered up. Jesse explodes: "I sure as hell didn't find myself locked in a trunk or on my knees with a gun to my head before your greedy old ass came along. All right?" If the epithet "greedy old ass" was not enough to qualify the scene as a paradigm shift in their relationship, Jesse alters for the first time his FN form of address: "…we do things my way this time or I walk. You need me more than I need you, Walt." In the scene, his intonation highlights the word 'Walt' with a brief dramatic pause. Furthermore, the term of address is placed at the end of the sentence and the conversational turn for additional emphasis.

This example from Episode 205 illustrates Jesse's growth as a character, and it marks the beginning of his ambivalent relationship with Walter—ultimately resulting in open conflict. This conflict is further developed in later uses of alternative terms of address outside the monolithic 'Mr. White' pattern. Towards the end of the series, when Jesse is cooperating with the DEA in order to arrest Walter (Example 7, Episode 512), they agree to have a meeting in a public place. Jesse calls Walter from a payphone (while hiding from his sight) and displays his feeling of tactical superiority (Jesse feels they have the upper hand and will finally catch him) by calling him 'asshole' repeatedly:

(7)

Walter: Hello?
Jesse: Nice try, asshole.
Walter: Jesse, where are you? I just wanna talk.
Jesse: No. I'm not doing what you want anymore. Okay, asshole? This is just a heads-up to let you know I'm coming for you.

This disruption in the address pattern will become one of the trademark elements in the last few episodes of the series, leading to the finale. In Episode 513,

Jesse sends Walter a picture of one of the barrels of money that Walter had buried in the desert, and he threatens to burn the money. His phone call does not showcase his earlier attitude towards Walter: "Got my photo, bitch?" For someone like Jesse, who uses the word 'bitch' very often, and who had not used it to address the protagonist until then, the change is most significant. And it all spirals down from there. Later in the episode, when Walter is driving to where the barrels are, while speaking to Jesse on the phone, he enquires: "Jesse, I don't know what you plan on doing here, but…" Jesse interrupts him: "Well, I'll give you a hint, Walt." Once again, with a 'Walt' that is clearly uttered with emphasis, Jesse illustrates how he has lost all respect for the protagonist and is hell-bent on making him pay for what he has done. There can be no misunderstanding in Jesse's attitude, for he continues to use vocatives and terms of address (Example 8) that he had not used to refer to Walter until that point:

(8)

Walter: No, no, no! Jesse, please, listen to me.
Jesse: No, you listen to me, bitch. You get your ass out here as fast as you can.

It has become apparent by now that all the elements that framed the relationship between Jesse and Walter have completely disappeared. To begin with, Jesse does not see Walter as a mentor and a father figure anymore. In addition, he has declared open war on him, even if that means risking his own life—for he knows Walter will not hesitate to have him killed if it need be. All of this is reified, alongside other stylistic devices, through Jesse's resorting to different (and offensive) terms of address for Walter. And he does not use them in their most common pragmatic sense. Indeed, whereas he uses 'bitch' to refer to friends and associates as part of their friendly banter, and he uses shortened FNs to denote intimacy, the pauses and emphases he utilizes when using these terms to refer to 'Mr. White' clearly show that they are meant to be offensive —particularly by contrast with his earlier linguistic behaviour.

However, in the series' finale, the same pattern of silence and dehumanization emerges—albeit with a twist (Example 9). Walter comes to the hideout where Jack and his men force Jesse to cook for them under torture. He claims to have unresolved issues with Jesse and, when he tackles him to the ground, pretending to start a fight, he uses a remote-controlled machine gun to kill everybody in the room, except for Jesse and himself (Jack and Todd are not killed either, but Walter shoots an agonizing Jack and Jesse strangles Todd with his chains). In the exact seven minutes (perhaps an Easter egg for numerologists) between the beginning of the carnage and the moment Jesse rides off towards the 'light'—a very symbolic image— both characters only exchange the following words:

(9)

Walter: [*Gives his gun to Jesse, who picks it up and points at him*]
Jesse: Say the words. Say you want this. Nothing happens till I hear you say it.
Walter: I want this.
Jesse: [*Drops the gun*] Then do it yourself.

After this, for thirty seconds we see alternating shots of both characters, who are facing each other at a distance, in a 'Mexican standoff' of sorts—once again Jesse's face is lit, whereas Walter's remains in the dark for most of this scene. However, neither character resorts to verbal aggression or to any words at all, for that matter. One can only divine a couple of subtle nods and permanent eye contact, both of which seem to suggest that they know this is the end: the end of his life for Walter, the end of his captivity and criminal history for Jesse, the end of this long adventure for both. They have finally come to terms with each other and their relationship up to this point. After this, Jesse is left like a modern-day Horatio who will live on to tell (presumably the DEA) "with the occurrents more and less, / Which have solicited. The rest is silence."[7] Indeed, silence is what we are left with, broken only by the noise of the revving engine of Jesse's car and his histrionic, sobbing laughter. And this marks the end of the evolution in the patterns of address for Jesse. From his respect for 'Mr. White', to his abusive epithets to 'Walt', to silence. But this silence, far from dehumanizing Walter, foregrounds his part in liberating Jesse while anchoring his role as a father figure for him until the end. However subtly—through nods and intent eye contact, two things that Skyler and Mike deliberately avoid—Jesse is the only character who acknowledges Walter before they part ways and, in no small part, it allows the protagonist to die in peace.

4. Conclusion

The foregoing pages have provided an overview of how some of the main characters in *Breaking Bad* interact with the protagonist by looking at the way they use terms of address. In general, the series begins with a specific preferred term in the idiolect of each character. This term situates each of them as regards their relationship with Walter White. As we know, whereas his wife uses a shortened form ('Walt') to display the expected degree of closeness and intimacy, Mike refers to him as 'Walter' because of his refusal to be on explicitly friendly terms with him. Both Skyler and Mike end up suffering because of Walter's actions and, as tragic events unfold, they eventually ignore Walter and refuse to acknowledge him by avoiding all terms of address in contexts where they would be expected (i.e., farewells). In sum, it seems

[7] *Hamlet* V.ii (301-311).

the greatest offense is silence, not insults. Or, as one of Bernard Shaw's characters in *The Devil's Disciple* puts it, "the worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity."

A similar evolution can be seen in the relationship between Jesse and Walter. However, as they interact in much more complex terms, their ambivalent attitude towards one another calls for deeper analysis. First, because the evolution in the address patterns that Jesse uses is greater: from honorifics at one end of the spectrum ('Mr. White') to swearing at the other ('bitch'). Second, because their relationship also culminates in silence, but of the eloquent sort. Indeed, Jesse remains silent not because he dehumanizes Walter or wants to ignore him, but because he has now understood all his motivations and nothing else if left to say.

It must have become apparent by now that the way all of these characters interact cannot be fully understood without looking into the way they address each other: their choice of terms of address is a consequence of their behaviour, feelings, emotions, and the circumstances in their environment. In all, this study hopefully demonstrates that the choice of terms of address is a relevant stylistic device in the discourse of TV fiction in general, as illustrated in *Breaking Bad*.

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Chapter 5
Daenerys Targaryen's language and identity in *A Game of Thrones*: a corpus-analysis study of her military harangues

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Abstract

The present study investigates Daenerys Targaryen's linguistic choices when haranguing her troops and other subjects and what they say about her discursive identity. Also, we make a comparison between Daenerys's language and the language used by a selection of male haranguers from a variety of films to find out whether or not they approximate each other. For that purpose, we use Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) identity model and a self-developed scheme based on a combination of models dealing with the rhetorical strategies used to appeal to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (Hoey 1994; Jaffe 2007; Gravatt 2007; Pullman 2013; Daly & Davy 2016; Serra Alcega 2017). These serve to analyze the rhetorical strategies and patterns of Daenerys's speeches as well as those used in male speeches. The results indicate that Daenerys tries to distinguish herself from male commanders by using idiosyncratic elements: identity labels, positive evaluations of her propriety and veracity and negative evaluations of her contenders, claims backed up by examples (i.e. *logos*), appeals to her capacity (i.e. *ethos*) and the Problem-Solution-Evaluation pattern (Hoey 1994). However, she also follows the conventions of the genre, including summoning and commanding troops, gaining their confidence and supporting and motivating them with promises of a better future.

Keywords: Daenerys Targaryen, gender identity, rhetorical strategies, military harangues, character identity

1. Introduction

The military harangue, also known as "exhortation", "battle exhortation" and "military exhortation" (Yellin 2008: 1), is a "motivational speech given by a commander before [or during] the battle" (Gravatt 2007: 1) to persuade his troops to fight and, thus*, it is essentially rhetorical discourse* (Yellin 2008: 25, emphasis in original). Indeed, when haranguing there is "(1) a pressing need that prompts the discourse from someone; (2) an audience that can resolve the need if persuaded; and constraints […] that influence or complicate the exhorter's task" (Yellin 2008: 26). The speech

has been insufficiently studied (see Yellin (2008) for some likely reasons) and, yet, it is certainly a set-piece in pre-battle descriptions within histories.

The military harangue falls under the category of a deliberative speech, since it seeks to influence the soldiers' future actions (Quintilian 1921). Certainly, the military commander's purpose is "to persuade his men to fight their best in an upcoming or ongoing engagement and to win rather than to retreat or surrender" (Gravatt 2007: 12). The orator is usually "a king, noble or other military leader" (2007: 12), who needs to compel his troops to combat in the hope of victory, although on occasions combatants may address one another (Yellin 2008). The commander may say anything to get or keep his troops fighting, which suggests that the topics of battle exhortation are varied. Also, the exhortation is not limited to the spoken word, as troops may also be "reassured by one another's voices, their pipes, and almost certainly by the sound of their collective, measured step" (2008: 25), while [the commander's] "appearance [is] also meant to have a heartening effect" (Anson 2010: 317).

In fictional and non-fictional genres, the terms 'character' and 'characterization' (Culpeper 2001) have traditionally been used to describe "how characters are constructed in discourse and how readers infer characters' traits from discourse" (Bednarek 2012: 98). From a cognitive perspective (Culpeper 2001; Pearson 2007), studying a character implies looking at his/her, among other things, traits, physical behaviour and speech, while from a linguistic perspective (see Bednarek's (2012) and Culpeper's (2001) analyses) the interest is in revealing how dialogue "tell[s] viewers something about the characters' mental states and personality" (Bednarek 2012: 201). The present study takes a linguistic perspective in an attempt to analyze Daenerys Targaryen's harangues in *A Game of Thrones*, set in Medieval times, to find out what the linguistic choices attributed to Daenerys say about her character and gender identity. It also takes a contrastive perspective when comparing Daenerys's harangues with those made by some male commanders. Since harangues are a typically male genre, few have been delivered by women and, thus, they have not been studied (Serra Alcega 2017). This study intends to fill this gap. The following questions guide the analysis:

1. How does Daenerys build her feminine gender identity in a speech genre (i.e. military harangue) that has traditionally been delivered by men, both in real life and in fiction (see e.g. Serra Alcega 2017)?
2. What rhetorical strategies (*logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*) does Daenerys use in her harangues? What about male haranguers?
3. Does Daenerys use idiosyncratic elements in her speeches or do they follow general patterns and conventions? And male haranguers' speeches?

The present study intends to analyze how Daenerys Targaryen builds and negotiates her identity as a female leader and commander as a product of discourse interaction

with her troops (Bucholtz & Hall 2005; Ponton 2010), particularly in her addresses to her soldiers and subjects (i.e. military harangues). Since the military harangue is a genre typically delivered by men and for men, a collateral aim of this work is to discover whether Daenerys follows the conventions of her male counterparts (i.e. adopts heteronormative conventions of a stereotypically male gender), or constructs her own military speeches (i.e. builds her own idiosyncratic identity as a female commander in times of a male-dominated society). The hypothesis to be tested is that female leaders follow male discursive practices, as it happens with other types of discourse when females try to occupy traditionally male roles (see, for instance, García-Gómez (2009), where female adolescents follow androgenic behavioral patterns when reacting to love deception). The motivation behind this hypothesis is that, as a result of the lack of female models, empowered women tend to follow male models of power.

Section 2 describes the characteristics of military harangues, including common themes, appeals to *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* and the structure of battle exhortations. Section 3 deals with character identity and the linguistic features in the text that construe it. Section 4 concentrates on the character of Daenerys Targaryen, who is represented as challenging traditional social standards for medieval noble women. Section 5 explains the methodology used in the study, while section 6 describes the results of the analysis of a selection of harangues delivered by Daenerys as well of those delivered by some men in several films. This is then followed by the conclusions to the present study in section 7.

2. Military harangues: Characteristics

In military harangues, a leader exhorts his men to fight well in the face of combat, stirs their courage and mitigates their fears. They also have some common themes, such as the acquisition of fame and glory; appeals to the troops' sense of courage; appeals to luck, hope of victory and reward (Gravatt 2007, Yellin 2008). As Vegetius (1996: 92) expressed it: "say anything by which the soldiers' minds may be provoked to hatred of their adversaries by arousing anger and indignation". Gravatt (2007: 27) synthesizes the variety of subject matters military harangues are characterized by into six general categories, each having various subcategories:

1. Duty:
    a. To country and family (protectors of society)
    b. To God (protectors of faith)
    c. To self-preservation (protectors of self)
    d. To fellow soldiers (protectors of comrades)
2. Profit:
    a. Fame, glory, salvation (immaterial wealth)
    b. Riches or land to be won (material wealth)

3. Aversion to shame:
   a. Concern for the reputation of the nation or army
   a. Concern for personal reputation
4. Hope of victory / Advantage:
   a. The just and righteous win (conversely, the enemy is not righteous)
   b. We are better militarily or intellectually (conversely, the enemy is at a disada vantage in this respect)
   c. God is on our side (conversely, the enemy is a heathen)
   d. We have had previous success
   e. Courage enables outnumbered forces to win
5. Vengeance and hatred
6. Orders and tactics:
   a. Emulation of the commander
   b. Instructions on maneuvers

Although there may be dominant themes, military harangues often contain several of them (2007: 210).

Military exhortations further include appeals to logic (*logos*), to emotion (*pathos*) and to the speaker's authority (*ethos*), although emotional appeals predominate, including appeals to pride, vanity, fear, prejudice, greed, love of country, shame, and revenge (Gravatt 2007: 210). Cicero (1942: 325) also suggested that emotional appeals are stronger than the rest: "For men decide far more problems by hate, or love, or lust, or rage, or sorrow, or joy, or hope, or fear, or illusion, or some other inward emotion, than by reality, or authority […]". Despite the predominance of emotional appeals, "logic and the speaker's authority [have] their place within the classical and medieval harangue […] and, thus, a harangue does not need to be solely emotional" (Gravatt 2007: 210-211).

As regards the structure of harangues, battle exhortations may include elements from "other major genera of communication": from scientific discourse, there might be some instruction; from poetry, there might be "some pleasure, some order-giving, some obscuration" (Yellin 2008: 26). More specifically, battle exhortations present an endearing salutation, which is short, direct, has few to no adjectives and is intended to gain the goodwill of the audience; the battle interests are pointed out so that troops are stirred into action; the reasons for fighting are mentioned and victory is predicted; finally, the closing lines direct the men to prepare for battle and to fight gallantly. All this makes the military harangue a literary genre in its own right (Gravatt 2007: 211).

Military harangues have also been represented in films and have drawn large audiences. Such harangues "find [their] historical equivalent both in ancient as well as modern times" (van Ingen 2016: 17), since soldiers in older and later times have been addressed in a similar fashion. On-screen exhortations vary in length – ranging

from a phrase to a handful sentences -, content and speaker. However, unlike real-life military harangues, they can be delivered by non-human creatures (e.g. Treebeard in *The Lord of the Rings*), while also they rely on "the verbal language of the speaker and the visual language of the film" (2016: 32). Indeed, not only can the audience in the cinema be moved by the commander's use of language (i.e. sentence structure, figures of speech, appeals to *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*) in military harangues, but they can also be invited to share the characters' point of view by the use of different shots and, thus, identify with them. Also, they can be impacted by actors' changes in volume and pitch, powerful gestures or use of emphasis (2016: 32-36). Thus, battle exhortations in films are made more effective and appealing due to the combination of both the verbal and visual.

3. Character identity

While there is a wealth of research on language and identity which focuses on the identity of 'real', 'alive' people, little research has been undertaken on the identities of characters in fictional genres (e.g. drama, television drama) (what Bednarek (2012: 97) calls "character identities") (Chatman 1978; Bednarek 2012). This is surprising since one may think that characters are important in the study of literary works. Instead, much effort has been made in trying to elucidate the problematic concept of the fictional character; that is, whether characters are imitations of real people or even real people themselves (humanizing approaches) or whether they merely exist in texts (de-humanising approaches) (Culpeper 2001: 6-8). Also, attempts have been made to categorize characters in character typologies: 'flat' (simple) or 'round' (elaborated) (Forster 1987) in early classifications, while later categorizations (see Culpeper 2001: 48-52) focus on traits in binary opposites, such as male/female, good/bad and hero/villain.

Some key elements – "psychological traits/habitual behaviours, physical characteristics/appearance, speech patterns, interactions with other characters, environment, and biography" (Pearson 2007: 43) - serve to identify characters and make them "autonomous beings […], existing as a whole only in the minds of the producers and the audience" (2007: 43). Psychological traits/habitual behaviours and physical characteristics/appearance are especially important for the construction of a character. Indeed, the former contribute to creating a character that can be more or less real, while the latter (i.e. facial expressions, body posture, voice quality, the actor's performance (2007: 43), clothes, how a character is named in the text (e.g. with a proper name, a surname, a description) (Toolan 2001: 89)) also add to character meaning and make him/her unique. And yet, psychological traits/habitual behaviors stand out, since "what the character *does*, in the plot — turns out to be far less interesting to the reader than what the character is like" (2001: 86, emphasis in original). For example,

what kind of character s/he is (i.e. a killer, a helper, a victim, and so on) and how s/he conducts himself/herself throughout the story, since "we can always be judged by our deeds" (2001: 90). Dialogue and personal/professional interactions with other characters further help to distinguish one character from another. The location of the action also influences a character's behaviour, while his/her biography serves to boost the reality effect and to add plot lines (Pearson 2007: 43-9).

When carrying out a linguistic analysis of characters, "we are interested in searching for *what* in the text tells us (the viewers/readers) something about character and identity" (Bednarek 2012: 101; emphasis in original). In television, dialogue helps viewers to distinguish one character from another, as s/he may have a distinguishable accent or his/her voice may present unique characteristics. Above all, "dialogue lines are explicitly designed to reveal character" (Kozloff 2000: 44), since they "tell something about characters' mental states and personality" (Bednarek 2012: 101) and "make characters substantial, hint at their inner life" (Kozloff 2000: 43). Indeed, Bednarek's (2012: 108) corpus-linguistic analysis of the characters in *Girlmore Girls* reveals that Lorelai is characterized by the use of keywords related to her family (e.g. mom, dad, hon, kid, honey), workplace (e.g. inn, the inn), individual tastes (e.g. coffee) and a great emotionality (e.g. oh god, oh my god). The results reveal that she "does clearly have a unique voice" (2012: 107) and suggest that "scriptwriters are – at least intuitively – aware of the power of language to differentiate characters" (2012: 109). Other devices help to create character identities, including conversational structure; the degree of a character's verbal competence; the use of other languages, dialects, and jargon; and the use of stylistic variables, such as repetition, rhythm or the use of language to create a surprise effect (Kozloff 2000: 73-87). For example, the aliens' use of the Na'vi language in *Avatar* to talk to each other serves to portray the characters; it is a strategy to provide realism to the world known as Pandora and its inhabitants. For Bednarek (2012: 114), the ultimate aim of constructing unique characters through repeated patterns of language use would be for viewers to engage with them, a fact that is considered "crucial" in contemporary television.

4. Daenerys Targaryen in *A Game of Thrones*

Daenerys Targaryen is one of the most prominent characters of the TV series *A Game of Thrones*, which is based on George R.R. Martin's novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. She is a dominant female character in a predominantly male world who undergoes a drastic change along the story: she is first presented as an innocent child in the hands of her brother Viserys, who sells her to Khal Drogo in exchange for military support; however, over the following seasons, she becomes the leader of the Dothraki, a Mother of Dragons, a Khaleesi and the true heir of the Targaryen family. Daenerys is therefore the symbol of an empowered woman, as she breaks

traditional gendered female patterns and claims power and agency for herself. Indeed, she "combines emotions and elements that are stereotypically gendered male and female (male pride, a male dragonslayer, a damsel in distress) and then claims agency for herself and others" (Schubart 2016: 122).

Unlike the role traditionally reserved for Medieval women, which was one of submission towards men (Clapton & Shepherd 2017: 10), Daenerys's role is anything but traditional. She is identified as a physical mother, although she fails in her role when her son Rhaego dies but, as a noble woman, she is "responsible not only for the continuation of [her] blood, but of the furthering of society itself" (Schroder 2016: 56). This is the reason why Daenerys is represented as a figurative mother to her citizen children (and thus, her role as Mhysa, meaning 'mother'), but she is also represented as a symbolic mother to her dragons (and thus, her role as Mother of Dragons) (Schroeder 2016). When dealing with Daenerys as a figurative mother, Gresham (2015: 163) points out that a mother is one "who both leads and protects. Here the role is […] [aligned] with one who nurtures, cares for, and protects a community, an ambivalent figure who represents social regeneration". As a symbolic mother, Daenerys's connection with the dragons "define[s] Daenerys' maternity throughout the series, and connect[s] her with her figurative role as mother 'mhysa' to her people and eventually afford[s] her the ability to assume public authoritative power" (Schroeder 2016: 55).

And yet, Daenerys, as any woman of the Middle Ages, can only assume authoritative power if she has "proper rules of primogeniture, a single (and preferably chaste) status, and a figurative maternity" (Schroeder 2016: 88). This suggests that the laws of succession allow Daenerys the power of public authority when there are no surviving male heirs (i.e. after the deaths of her brother Viserys and her husband Drogo), she has to have a single status and follow sexual morality and is to be wed to her people and, thus, her maternity is accomplished by being a mother to her citizens (and a Mother of Dragons). For women rulers such as Daenerys, public ruling also means "internaliz[ing] masculinized characteristics", including "confidence, ferocity, aggressiveness and a capacity and a willingness to use force". These "characterize her development as a ruler and a wielder of authority" (Clapton & Shepherd 2015: 13).

It is precisely Daenerys's identity as a Mother of Dragons that "provides her the power she needs to emerge as a leader" (Schroeder 2016: 21). Indeed, "the Dothraki respect the tangible physical force of the dragons' real power and the Westerosi respect their connection to the Targaryen line" (2016: 91) which, together with Daenerys's symbolic connection to the maternity of her dragons and "their overwhelming force, which cannot be matched by her competitors to the Iron Throne" (Clapton & Shepherd 2017: 12), make her able to assume public authority. There is one necessary condition: "so long as she remains connected to the dragons and, the symbolic maternity they represent, she is able to assume the role of authoritative figure and

influence others" (Schroeder 2016: 92). However, Daenerys finds it impossible to manage her struggles between being a Mother of Dragons and Mysha, which leads her to protect her figurative children from her dragons, which she imprisons. Imprisoning them "destroys her public authority" over her citizens, because "she lacks any symbolic connection with her lineage" (Schroeder 2016: 99-100) and, thus, she needs to marry again, assuming a secondary position. When Daenerys's dragon Drogon escapes, she comes to remember "who she is and reclaim[s] her role as a mother of dragons" (2016: 105).

5. Methodology

In order to analyze Daenerys's discursive identity, Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) proposal was followed, which states that identity is the product of discourse interaction. Identity is in fact "a product which emerges, by degrees, during the discourse interaction, and can be modified at any stage of it. It therefore depends, crucially, on contributions of interlocutors to the discourse as it unfolds" (Ponton 2010: 196). Thus, the emergent identity is "a joint product" that is dependent on both interlocutors (2010: 197). To analyze the rhetorical strategies and patterns of Daenerys's speeches and those of male haranguers, a self-developed scheme, based on a combination of models (Hoey 1994; Jaffe 2007; Gravatt 2007; Pullman 2013; Daly & Davy 2016; Serra Alcega 2017), was developed (see below for further details about the aspects of each selected model). This analytical scheme addressed the structural parts of the harangue (the *moves,* so-called in Swales & Feak's (2009) terms, which conform the speech), the discursive functions of such moves (e.g. summoning the troops) and the rhetorical strategies (Daly & Davy 2016) used to appeal to Aristotle's persuasive techniques of *ethos* (i.e. credibility), *logos* (i.e. reason) and *pathos* (i.e. emotion).

As successfully applied by other researchers (see, e.g., Ponton 2010), the following strategies from Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) model were used to probe how identity was constructed in the speeches analyzed:

1. Overt mention of identity category or labels (i.e. how the speaker categorizes herself by means of the labels she uses)
2. *Implicatures* regarding one's own and others' identity positions (i.e. implicit expression of one's identity and how one relates to other identities); and
3. Evaluative language, according to Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework, particularly the category of *Attitude*, subdivided into *Affect* (i.e. emotional evaluation of an entity, process or state), *Judgement* (i.e. ethical evaluation of human behavior) and *Appreciation* (i.e. aesthetic evaluation of things, processes and states of affairs).

Of all strategies, for Bucholtz & Hall (2005: 594-5) identity categories and evaluation are a direct means of identity construction. The former serves speakers

to show themselves and others as particular kinds of people, whereas the latter is a window into one's thinking and positioning and, consequently, into one's identity. Implicatures contribute to identity construction less directly by using inferences that can be accepted or rejected by interlocutors.

For the analysis of rhetorical strategies, Daly & Davy's (2016) categorization of persuasive strategies (see below in Rhetorical strategies to appeal to *logos* and *ethos*) in business pitches was considered and adapted to meet the discursive functions of a different genre. The adaptation of the model to the new genre seemed feasible since both the business pitch and the harangue are similar in form (i.e. short monologues) and function (i.e. to persuade or move the audience to take a particular course of action); on the other hand, the sociolinguistic circumstances (intention, context, and weight of imposition of the request) of both types of discourse are different. The categories developed for analysis were the following ones (inspired by Jaffe 2007; Gravatt 2007; Pullman 2013; and Daly & Davy 2016)[1]:

— Rhetorical strategies to appeal to *logos*:
  - Personal branding (Daly & Davy 2016): What do you want to be known for?
  - Fallacy: Any kind of faulty reasoning (Jaffe 2007).
  - Fact: Has the speaker made a statement that sounds true? (Jaffe 2007)
  - Claim/support: Are claims adequately supported? (Pullman 2013)
  - Evidences/examples: Does the speaker tell you why you should believe him/her? Are arguments supported by evidence/examples? (Jaffe 2007)
  - Counterarguments (Pullman 2013)
  - Reasoning by analogy (figuratively or real analogy) (Jaffe 2007)
  - Deductive reasoning (syllogisms or enthymemes[2]) (Jaffe 2007)
  - Inductive reasoning (conclusion derived from the examples) (Jaffe 2007)
  - Causal reasoning (cause-effect relationships) (Jaffe 2007)

— Rhetorical strategies appealing to *ethos*:
  - Authority (Daly & Davy 2016): Showing expertise in a specific area either by appealing to capacity or professional experience and success to date as a commander.
  - Personal commitment to the fight (Daly & Davy 2016).
  - Name-dropping (Daly & Davy 2016): Making reference to key institutions or organizations that support their credentials.

[1] Except for reasoning by analogy, deductive, inductive and causal reasoning, the other rhetorical strategies are not specifically taken from a source, but derived from issues raised in literature on persuasion and traditional rhetoric. That's why the model is inspired by, rather than based on, those sources.

[2] Reasoning deductively in logic is when a premise (generalization or principle) is applied to a specific case. In the case of an enthymeme, one of the premises of the syllogism is not stated (Jaffe 2007: 338).

- Demonstrating good-sense (intelligence, sound reasoning or composure) (Jaffe 2007).
- Demonstrating good character (honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, sticking to convictions) (Pullman 2013).
- Demonstrating goodwill (Pullman 2013) by showing that commanders have their audience in mind or by identifying with them.
- Demonstrating dynamism (enthusiasm, liveliness, enjoyment) (Jaffe 2007).
- Affected modesty (Gravatt 2007).

— Rhetorical strategies appealing to *pathos* (these are mainly adapted from Daly & Davy (2016) for business pitches in order to check if some of the same strategies would work in this type of monologic persuasive speech. Jaffe (2007) for the appeals to positive and negative emotions and Gravatt (2007) for a list of emotions are also considered). The adaptation entailed taking into account the type of speech:
  - You-statements
  - Storytelling
  - Making comparisons
  - Personal/professional details
  - Introducing other people (e.g. the commander introduces another person-in-chief)
  - Building up expectations
  - Offering future vision (growth potential and vision of success).
  - Have/have-not statements: The commander stresses the complementarity of his/her expertise (what he/she has) and the soldiers' skills (what he/she needs).
  - Appealing to (other) emotions[3]: positive (e.g. flattery, sense of pride, self-righteousness, patriotism, pride, loyalty, joy, hope, courage), or negative (guilt, fear, prejudice against the enemy, vanity, greed, revenge, shame, rage, sorrow, threat, cowardice, treason, desolation).
  - Further pathetic issues: Manipulation, forceful language or imagery and using humor or irony.

To uncover the patterns and conventions followed in the harangues analyzed, the texts were fragmented into utterances (i.e. minimum meaningful units) and a discourse function was manually attributed to each segment according to harangue conventions found in the literature reviewed (Gravatt 2007; Serra Alcega 2017), and other more traditional or conventional patterns, such as Hoey's (1994) Situation/Problem-Evaluation pattern or Speech Act Theory (Searle 1969). Each member of

[3] The list of emotions has been mainly inspired by Gravatt's (2007) list of themes in harangues.

the pattern fulfills a discourse function: e.g. Problem establishes the problematic situation to be later on solved. These labels are interpreted both as elements/steps in the pattern and functionally (the function each step fulfills). The rationale of this phase of the analysis was to discover the function each utterance seemed to be fulfilling in the overall speech. In order to do so, discourse patterns such as Hoey's were used, since the utterances in the speech analyzed seemed to follow those steps in the Problem-Solution Pattern. On the other hand, utterances are pragmatic units that fulfill a given function in discourse and, thus, can be considered speech acts within the speech event (i.e. the harangue). Speech acts are not a close categorization, but can be expanded to adapt to the functions fulfilled in each speech. An example of a discourse unit and its corresponding function is provided in 1):

1. You will be my Kahlasar [FUNCTION: SUMMONING THE TROOPS] (Daenerys, S1, E10).

And, from the same harangue, the Situation-Problem-Solution pattern is illustrated in 2):

2. I see the faces of slaves [SITUATION/PROBLEM]. I free you! [SOLUTION]. Take off your collars, go if you wish [HOW TO IMPLEMENT THAT SOLUTION]. No one will stop you [EVALUATION].

The corpus collected for the present paper consists of 11 harangues: 6 by Daenerys, taken from the *Game of Thrones* series and 5 delivered by male characters from several films. Daenerys's harangues belong to the following sessions and episodes: Harangue 1 (S1, E10), Harangue 2 (S3, E4), Harangue 3 (S4, E3), Harangue 4 (S6, E6), Harangue 5 (S8, E6), and Harangue 6 (S7, E5). The male harangues are Tyrion's speech in *A Game of Thrones* (S2, E9), Aragorn's speech in *The Lord of the Rings*, General Maximus Decimus Meridius's speech in *Gladiator*, President Whitmore's speech in *Independence Day*, and William Wallace's speech in *Braveheart*[4]. Daenerys's harangues were selected because, among all her speeches, these were addressed to troops or a group of people. The male harangues were chosen taking into account their popularity. The corpus (a total of 1,185 words, 660 words for Deanerys's harangues and 525 from male speeches) was uploaded in text format to the freeware program UAM Corpus Tools 3.3h developed by Mick O'Donnell (available at http://www.corpustool.com/) and was annotated according to the in-built scheme for Appraisal (see Fig. 1) and the self-created annotation scheme for rhetorical strategies explained above; then, all texts were segmented into utterances and

[4] The male harangues were all extracted from *American Rhetoric: Movie speeches*: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/moviespeeches.htm>

discourse functions were attributed to each. Functions were attributed in an inferential fashion taking into account their role in relation to the other utterances; the typology of functions was kept to a minimum and, whenever possible, prototypical speech acts, such as "promise", were used. The rationale behind attributing speech act functions to utterances was to check which ones were more prevalent.

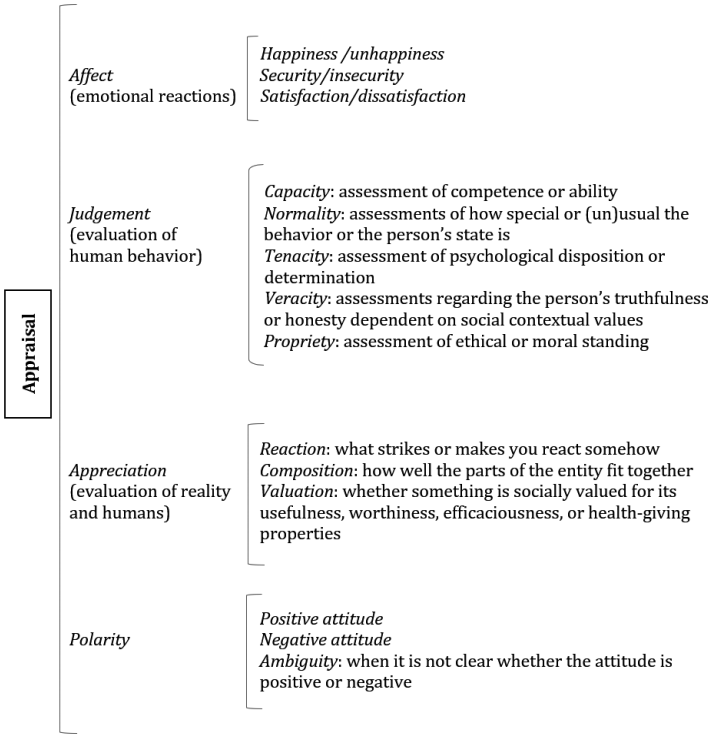

Fig. 1. The Attitude network

6. Results

For the first research question (i.e. *How does Daenerys build her feminine gender identity in a speech genre (i.e. military harangue) that has traditionally been delivered by men, both in real life and in fiction (see e.g. Serra Alcega, 2017)?*) the results reveal that Daenerys is prone to using a great number of identity categories or labels when referring to herself: *I am Daenerys Stormborn* (proper and family names); *of the House of Targaryen* (her linage); *of the blood of Old Valyris* (her ancestry); *Valeryan is my mother tongue* (her origin in terms of her mother tongue); *I'm the dragons' daughter, the mother of dragons, blood of my blood* (her kinship); *I am not a Khal* (what she is not, to distinguish herself from an opponent). In fact, in one of her speeches in the series she goes so far as to denominating herself with 10 identity labels (see 3) below):

3. I am Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons (Daenerys, S6, E1).

This insistence seems to reveal an earnest interest on the part of this female commander to empower her ethos by presenting herself as descending from a linage with the right to the Iron Throne and different from all other contenders. This eagerness to position her power and lineage may be both a sign of insecurity or a desire to recuperate her lost identity, since she finds it necessary to remind the audience of who she is and where she comes from in order to empower herself in front of the audience. In the case of the male harangues examined only two labels were found: one to self-present (*I am William Wallace*) and one to ironically self-refer (*the Quarter Man* by Tyron Lannister). Implicatures also contribute to Daenerys's desire to vindicate her identity as a non-authoritarian leader (e.g. *Any man who wishes to leave may leave and no one will harm him*, S3, E4), trustworthy (e.g. *I give you my word*, S3, E4), mothering (*blood of my blood*, S8, E6), and, all in all, an undisputed leader (*I offer you a choice: bend the knee and join me*, S7, E5).

When contrasted with her male counterparts, the following statistically significant results were gathered regarding the use of evaluative expressions and rhetorical strategies (see Table 1 below)[5]:

ATTITUDE	**Daenerys**		**Male haranguers**		**Significance**	
Feature	N	Percent	N	Percent	Chisquare	Signif.
JUDGEMENT-TYPE	N=100		N=78			
capacity	3	3.00%	9	**11.54%**	5.08	++
tenacity	8	8.00%	20	**25.64%**	10.29	+++
propriety	35	**35.00%**	13	16.67%	7.48	+++
veracity	6	**6.00%**	0	0.00%	4.84	++
APPRECIATION-TYPE	N=100					
composition	0	0.00%	3	**3.85%**	3.91	++
COMPOSITION-TYPE	N=100					
balance	0	0.00%	3	**3.85%**	3.91	++

++ Medium significance (95%); +++ High significance (98%)

Table 1. Statistically significant differences in Daenerys's and male haranguers' Appraisal features

[5] According to Dörnyei (2007: 210), a result is considered significant in social sciences if $p<.05$, that is, at a significant level of 95%. But this is a very small sample.

The results of Table 1 reveal that Daenerys targeted her evaluative remarks towards her own Propriety (p<.02) and Veracity (p<.05) (both subclasses of the category of Judgement), which served her to judge the moral standing of her actions positively. However, male commanders focused on Capacity (p<.05) and Tenacity (p<.02) (mainly of their troops) (see 4) below):

4. You will be my Khalasar [JUDGEMENT: NORMALITY: POSITIVE ATTITUDE]. I see the faces of slaves. I free [JUDGEMENT: PROPRIETY: POSITIVE ATTITUDE] you! Take off your collars, go if you wish [JUDGEMENT: PROPRIETY: POSITIVE ATTITUDE]. No one will stop you [JUDGEMENT: PROPRIETY: POSITIVE ATTITUDE]. But if you stay, it will be as brothers and sisters, as husbands and wives [JUDGEMENT: PROPRIETY: POSITIVE ATTITUDE] […] (Daenerys, S1, E10).

In 4), Daenerys is trying to convince the Dothrakis through the use of positive moral judgement that, after the Khal's death, they need to stay together as a Khalasar; she will be the new Khaleesi. Within Appreciation, the only category that was used differently was Composition: Balance, which assesses the harmony or organization of an event or action: "An hour of wolves and shattered [Appreciation: Composition: Balance] fields" (Aragorn, *The Lord of the Rings*). Male haranguers used this type significantly more than Daenerys (p<.02).

For the second research question (i.e. *What rhetorical strategies (logos, ethos or pathos) does Daenerys use in her harangues? What about male haranguers?*), the results indicate that both Daenerys and the male commanders use all three persuasive appeals in a similar and balanced fashion (around 30% each and by all chiefs). The differences can be observed in the types of strategies within categories: Daenerys prefers evidence and examples in her logical arguments (p<.05), while male haranguers favor reasoning by analogy (p<.02), particularly of the figurative type (i.e. metaphorical comparisons) (p<.02) (see Table 2 and 5)).

LOGOS	**Daenerys**		**Male haranguers**		**Significance**	
Feature	N	Percent	N	Percent	Chisquare	Signif.
LOGOS-TYPE	N=108		N=59			
evidences/example	11	**10.19%**	1	1.69%	4.12	++
counterargument	0	0.00%	2	10.00%	3.71	+
reasoning-by-analogy	0	0.00%	3	**5.08%**	5.59	+++
REASONING-BY-ANALOGY	N=108		N=59			
figurative	0	0.00	3	**5.08%**	5.59	+++

+ Low significance (90%); ++ Medium significance (95%); +++ High significance (98%)

Table 2. Daenerys's and male haranguers' use of rhetorical strategies appealing to *logos*

5. […] I am not your enemy. Your enemy is beside you. Your enemy steals and murders your children [LOGOS: EVIDENCE/EXAMPLE] (Daenerys, S4, E3).

[…] Perhaps it's fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom … Not for tyranny, oppression, or persecution … but from annihilation [LOGOS: REASONING BY ANALOGY: FIGURATIVE] (Whitmore, *Independence Day*).

In 5) Daenerys provides evidence to show she is a just leader unlike other previous leaders; on the other hand, the male haranguer Whitmore appeals to the precedent of the July 4th fight to justify the upcoming battle.

Daenerys also resorts to appeals to authority (i.e. *ethos*) (see Table 3), while the male commanders use appeals to goodwill (especially, identifying with the audience) (see 6)).

ETHOS	**Daenerys**		**Male haranguers**		**Significance**	
Feature	N	Percent	N	Percent	Chisquare	Signif.
ETHOS-TYPE	N=108		N=59			
authority	16	**14.81%**	2	3.39%	5.18	++
good-will	7	6.48%	11	**18.64%**	5.87	+++
GOOD-WILL-TYPE	N=108		N=59			
identification_ with_audience	0	0.00%	9	**15.25%**	8.91	+++

++ Medium significance (95%); +++ High significance (98%)

Table 3. Daenerys's and male haranguers' use of rhetorical strategies appealing to *ethos*

6. […] I am the dragons' daughter [ETHOS: AUTHORITY] (Daenerys, S1, E10).

[…] Don't fight for your king and don't fight for his kingdoms [ETHOS: GOOD WILL] (Tyrion, S2, E9).

In 6), Daenerys appeals to authority by resorting to her kinship; however, Tyron uses good will to identify with his audience.

Lastly, the male commanders prefer further pathetic uses, concretely, forceful language/imagery (e.g. metaphors), whereas Daenerys does not use any strategies (see Table 4). Examples of forceful imagery are vivid descriptions that appeal to the readers' senses to create a picture in their minds[6] such as the following:

7. What we do in life, echoes in eternity (*Gladiator*).
8. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days, from this day to that, for one chance – just one chance – to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives (*Braveheart*).

[6] Definition taken from https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-imagery-definition-examples/

When contrasting the types of emotions appealed to, male chiefs outstand in their appeals to the negative emotion of treason. Daenerys does not stand out in the use of any type of emotion when contrasted with her male counterparts, showing that she neither uses more nor different types of emotions than them (see 9)).

PATHOS	Daenerys		Male haranguers		Significance	
Feature	N	Percent	N	Percent	Chisquare	Signif.
PATHOS-TYPE	N=108		N=59			
Further pathetic issues	0	0.00%	6	**10.17%**	11.39	+++
NEGATIVE_EMOTION -TYPE	N=108		N=59			
treason	0	0.00%	3	**5.08%**	5.59	+++
FURTHER_PATHETIC _ISSUES-TYPE	N=108		N=59			
forceful language or imaginery	0	0.00%	4	**6.78%**	7.50	+++

++ Medium significance (95%); +++ High significance (98%)

Table 4. Daenerys's and male haranguers' use of rhetorical strategies appealing to *pathos*

9. […] We'll come out behind them and fuck them in their asses [the men laugh] [PATHOS: FURTHER PATHETIC ISSUES: FORCEFUL LANGUAGE/IMAGINERY] (Tyrion, S2, E9).

In 7) Tyron uses humor in a manipulative move to make his men fight gallantly.

For the third research question (i.e. *Does Daenerys use idiosyncratic elements in her speeches or do they follow generic patterns and conventions? And male haranguers' speeches?*), the results show that all commanders summon and command their troops (this can be considered an obligatory move in harangues), but the rest of the rhetorical patterns differ. Daenerys prefers the Problem-Solution-Evaluation pattern, while male contenders favor the Argument-Counter-argument pattern (see Table 2 above and 10)):

10. […] Unsullied! You have been slaves all your life [SITUATION/PROBLEM]. Today you are free [SOLUTION]. Any man who wishes to leave may leave and no one will harm him. I give you my word [EVALUATION] (Daenerys, S3, E4).

    […] A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship [ARGUMENT], but it is not this day! [COUNTERARGUMENT/REBUTTAL] (Aragorn, *The Lord of the Rings*).

Contrapositions (changes in the course of speech with *but* as a disclaimer) are common in all harangues as a surprising, motivating effect. Daenerys, as opposed to male haranguers, requests rather than commands her troops redressing her Face Threatening Acts with negative politeness (indirect requests)[7] (see 11)):

11. Will you fight for me? As free men? (Daenerys, S3, E4).

On the other hand, male commanders seem to resort to positive politeness strategies building rapport with their troops by identifying with them and resorting to humor; this strategy is also used to release tension (see 12)):

12. […] They say I'm half a man, but what does that make the lot of you?! (Tyrion, S2, E9).

Also, Daenerys proclaims her authority by reclaiming her identity as a commander in an effort to remind the audience of her power, while she also tries to distinguish herself from other contenders to the throne by using positive self-evaluation as opposed to negative other-evaluation (this resource of positive self-evaluation and negative other-evaluation is frequent in political discourse, e.g. see Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2014) (see 13). In contrast, male commanders justify their instigation to fight with reasons to support their claims (see 14)):

13. I know what Cersey has told you: that I've come to destroy your cities, burn down your homes, murder you and orphan your children. That's Cersei Lannister, not me [NEGATIVE OTHER-EVALUATION VS POSITIVE SELF-EVALUATION] […] (Daenerys, S7, E5).

14. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing […] to tell our enemies that they may take our lives [IRONIC REMARK], but [DISCLAIMER] they'll never take our freedom! [JUSTIFICATION] (William Wallace, *Braveheart*).

7. Conclusions

Results on identity show that Daenerys is constantly trying to identify herself as a charismatic and just leader. She resorts to varied and elaborate identity labels, many of them recalling her right to inherit the throne and her maternity; as aforementioned, Daenerys, as a fictional woman of the Middle Ages, can only assume authoritative power if she fulfils those pre-conditions of primogeniture and a figurative maternity (Schroeder 2016: 88). Thus, her insistence in establishing her authority and credibility. She focuses her evaluative remarks on herself by praising her propriety and veracity, and by positively presenting herself and negatively identifying her contenders (i.e. legitimizing her deeds and discrediting those of her opponents, what Bucholtz & Hall (2005) denominate *distinction*). Male commanders' evaluation is mainly targeted to their troops and value their tenacity and capacity as a way to reinforce their motivation; they also value harmony and organization (Appreciation: Composition).

As for Daenerys's rhetorical strategies, she backs up her claims (i.e. *logos*) preferably with examples, while male haranguers prefer figurative analogies. When establishing credibility (i.e. *ethos*), Daenerys prefers authoritative strategies (i.e. appealing to her capacity), while male haranguers demonstrate goodwill (by identifying with

their audience). Regarding emotions (i.e. *pathos*), Daenerys does not focus on any strategy specifically while male haranguers appeal to treason.

Regarding the most prevalent discourse functions, in general the male haranguers studied follow closely the rhetorical conventions of the genre (harangues, exhortations) according to the literature (Gravatt 2007; Serra Alcega 2017). In contrast, Daenerys's harangues frequently resort to the Problem-Solution-Evaluation pattern (Hoey 1994), but she also adopts discourse functions typical of the genre (summoning and commanding troops, gaining their confidence and support, and motivating them with promises of a better future). Contrapositions are frequent in all types of harangues, mainly to get a surprising effect on the troops (what they expect *versus* what commanders say) in order to encourage them to fight. Male haranguers prefer an argument/counterargument rhetorical pattern and make use of humour as a means to release the combat tension and build rapport (i.e. positive politeness strategies). Daenerys requests rather than commands, using indirect requests (i.e. negative politeness) in her desire to be considered a just and democratic leader.

We may conclude, then, that, although Daenerys's harangues follow the most characteristic genre conventions, she also distinguishes herself from male commanders by using some idiosyncratic rhetorical patterns. Following Bednarek (2012: 101), we believe that the linguistic analyses carried out have made patent the discursive strategies appealed to by scriptwriters to construct Daenerys's character and identity. The figure of Daenerys is a female leader that reclaims her empowerment by recalling her ancestry and her maternity side by side. However, she does not want to be identified with a heteronormative male commander imposing her power by coercion, but wishes to adhere freewill followers to her side by conviction.

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Chapter 6
Nosedive: A corpus pragmatics analysis of compliments and laughter

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Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed an increase in studies aimed to unveil the insights of the complex communicative process between the collective sender and the audiences in fictional TV series. This study explores the portrayal of complimenting acts and laughter in the dystopian fictional world represented in the episode *Nosedive* from the TV series *Black Mirror*. The main objective is to identify and discuss how these resources shape the interactional routines presented to the audience and serve the needs of the collective sender's communicative intention. The research is grounded on the pragmatics of fiction and applies corpus pragmatics methodologies that allow the quantitative and qualitative study of data. Results revealed that compliments were paid in character's dialogue and by means of computer mediated communication. Laughter was identified as multimodally presented and intended to enhance positive responses and agreement. The presence and interrelatedness of compliments and laughter as found in fictional dialogue could be interpreted as the interactional pattern that may serve to meaning-creation and meaning-interpretation purposes.

Keywords: TV series, corpus pragmatics, telecinematic discourse, complimenting acts, laughter.

1. Introduction

The analysis of fictional TV series discourse has gained attention from linguists and researchers due to its popularity among media consumers, which are, in turn, exposed to and provided with social, cultural, and ideological information (Bednarek 2018). Previous studies on the intricacies that the study of telecinematic discourse entails have identified different levels of communication between screenwriters and audiences (Jucker & Locher 2017; Messerli 2017) in addition to the role of characters' dialogues and their function in the communication of primary and secondary messages to the audience (Bednarek 2017, 2018; Kozloff 2000).

The award-winning TV series *Black Mirror* (Channel 4 2011-2014) (Netflix 2016-present), whose common thread is technology consumption and its possible side effects (Conley & Burroughs 2020), has been widely studied in the last decade.

Research has focused on the identification of the different technologies as present and enacted in the TV series, their future viability, and the risks that these involve e.g., cyberbullying, sexting, and losing control of personal life (Blanco-Herrero & Rodríguez-Contreras 2019). Described as "leaning against the techno-dystopia" (Conley & Burroughs 2020: 2), *Black Mirror* has been analysed from the point of view of social structure modelling and its changes, the values reflected, and the stereotypes depicted in the show (Geçer & Serbes 2018). Interpersonal technology-mediated relationships and the satire in the portrayal of humans' connection to technology in modern society sociologically construe the whole TV series. As Beiguelman (2013) suggests, this relationship has resulted in an extension of social dynamics in humans' interaction in the form of asynchronous interactions on mobile phones, computers, and tablets.

Despite the interest in *Black Mirror*, previous work has not addressed, to the best of my knowledge, the function of discourse as a resource to convey the core message of the TV series. This article contributes to filling in this niche by analysing how compliments are discursively designed and structured in the episode *Nosedive* [SE03EP01] from the TV series *Black Mirror*, since compliments are an essential element to grow in a society that depends on the star-ratings given by other people. The episode tells the story of Lacie, a young woman who tries to improve her social status in a dystopian society hierarchically based on a one-to-five stars scoring system. By means of accessing a social networking site (SNS) on computers and mobile phones, characters in the TV series episode score their daily interactions on a one-to-five stars rating in order to improve their social status.

This research follows a pragmatics approach for the analysis of fictional telecinematic discourse (Jucker & Locher 2017) as it is aimed to investigate how characters compliment each other and use laughter as a communicative resource to achieve positive score ratings. While taking into account that TV series are multimodal products (Bednarek 2010), the analysis focuses on the identification and study of i) laughter as a semiotic resource which functions as a positive politeness strategy, ii) synchronous face-to-face compliments in character's conversations, and iii) asynchronous computer mediated communication (CMC), all of these within the fictional world of the episode.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of the participation framework in fiction. Then, a definition of TV series dialogue and its functions is introduced. Section 3 provides a description of the functions of compliments' and laughter in everyday conversation and CMC from a pragmatics perspective. A description of the methodology applied for the study of compliments and laughter in the TV series is described in Section 4, and the results that emerge from the data are presented in Section 5. Section 6 and 7 are devoted to the discussion of the results and the conclusions that can be drawn from the study.

2. Audiences, TV series dialogues and pragmatics

Messerli (2017), based on Goffman (1979), describes the relationship between participants in telecinematic discourse communication as a dual participation framework that consists of two layers; the first entails the process of meaning communication between the collective sender and the audiences while the second refers to the fictional dialogues as represented in "inter-character talk" (Messerli 2017: 33). The author further develops on four main audience-participation models (Bednarek 2010; Brock 2015; Bubel 2006, 2008; Dynel 2011). Bubel (2006, 2008) classifies audiences as *overhearers* since audiences and characters are in different communicative layers and fictional dialogues are created to be overheard by the audience, yet not participating in interaction. Dynel (2011) conceives the term audience as ratified participants, that is, the audience are *recipients* as they take an active role in the interpretation of the meaning conveyed in telecinematic discourse. Brock (2015) refers to the term TV viewer in like manner, but adds that the recipient could be included in the layer of the characters' interactions (restricted to the cast), since the use of different camera shots, angles and voiceover aimed at directly addressing the audience may immerse the spectator in the fiction depicted. Last, Bednarek (2010) relies on Hall's (1994) notions of audience attitudes towards the interpretation of telecinematic discourse. These can be: i) dominant i.e., strictly adhering to the interpretation of the message as intentionally encoded, ii) negotiated, that is, adhering to a certain degree to the dominant-hegemonic message interpretation, but including "adaptive and oppositional elements" (Hall 1994: 210 as cited in Messerli 2017: 40) and iii) oppositional which entails audiences decoding of intended meaning(s) as self-perceived and not related to the intended interpretation as created by the collective sender.

Relevant to the communication process between the collective sender and the recipients is TV series dialogue, described here as "all character or narrator speech, whether this is by one speaker (monologues, asides, voice-over narration, etc.), between two speakers (dyadic interactions), or between several speakers (multiparty interactions)" (Bednarek 2018: 7) which are aimed at "the telling of a narrative, one which might absorb, entertain, inspire and move the viewer" (Toolan 2011: 181, in Bednarek 2018: 9). Hence, TV series dialogue can substantially assist the collective sender to achieve the communicative aims of a particular TV series and may be seen as a resource to convey the intended meaning. Bednarek (2017, 2018) takes Kozloff's (2000) research on film dialogue as the basis for her functional approach to television series in which she identifies, describes and provides meaningful examples of the five main functions of fiction dialogues as relating to: i) the communication of the narrative, ii) aesthetic and interpersonal effect of commercial appeal, iii) thematic messages and ideology, iv) realism, and v) the serial nature of the narratives (Bednarek 2018: 37-77).

Considering that the episode analysed portrays a dystopian social system in which the main character's eagerness to achieve five-star-ratings is what moves the plot forward, the function of fictional dialogue relating to *realism* (Bednarek 2017, 2018) deserves attention. This function is intended to achieve a sense of verisimilitude in the fictional world and is accomplished through the representation of everyday conversational routines and actions in TV series dialogue (Kozloff 2000). Such representation may contribute to the provision of a sense of authenticity whilst simultaneously aids in the episode plot development (Bednarek 2018). The need to compliment interactants and score positive ratings is what construes the episode as a whole and the development of the main character into a social nosedive which makes her feel excluded and downgraded.

The study of fictional telecinematic discourse, understood as "characters' communicative practices in feature films as well as in series and serials" (Dynel 2017: 457), has been approached here taking into consideration Jucker and Locher's (2017) conception of the study of pragmatics in fiction. The authors view pragmatics in fictional discourse as referring to "the social context in which communication takes place" (Jucker & Locher 2017: 1) and differentiate between two levels in the study of communication in fictional discourse i.e., intradiegetic and extradiegetic. The intradiegetic level of communication entails fictional characters' communication and their adherence to pragmatic norms. On the other hand, the extradiegetic level addresses the connection between the author of the audiovisual product and the audience. Despite the fact that these two levels of communication suggest different scopes of research, such a perspective might be seen as a continuum since screenwriters' intentionality may go beyond the audiences' interpretation of fictional discourse plots or narratives as a whole. Audiences as recipients also get immersed in the fictional dialogue due to their roles as meaning re-creators and their understanding of implied meanings (Mey 2001) that may be achieved by the communicative functions of dialogue (Bednarek 2017, 2018) and the multimodal resources used for that purpose.

Hence, pragmatics and its study in telecinematic discourse becomes multidirectional and multimodal. Multidirectional communication entails what it gets communicated to the audience by intradiegetic and extradiegetic means (Jucker & Locher 2017). That is, the collective sender communicative intention as reflected in characters' interactions, plot development, and the primary and secondary messages in a film or TV series. Additionally, multimodal communication is related not only to the audible linguistic production of characters or inter-character talk (Messerli 2017) but also the images, sounds and the non-verbal communication elements present in audiovisual products such as body language and other semiotic resources, e.g., characters' actions, laughs, sobs, tears, etc. (Bednarek 2010).

For the purposes of this study, I adopt Dynel's (2011) notion of audience as *recipients* in the communication process between audiences and the collective sender

on the grounds that their interpretation of a fictional product transcends their role as overhearers (Bubel 2006, 2008). Likewise, Bednarek's (2010) postulates of multimodality which may assist the collective sender meaning-creation and aid audiences' meaning-interpretation are considered, since TV series are after all a multimodal product. The present research is limited to the intradiegetic level, that is, it focuses on the interaction between the characters, and pays attention to compliment giving and laughter, two relevant conversational features in the field of pragmatics. In the next section, I review compliments in face-to-face and CMC as well as laughter from a pragmatics perspective.

3. Compliments and Laughter

Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) described face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". Face can be maintained or enhanced by means of face-saving acts i.e., acts that involve attenuation in the possible face threat and are achieved through positive politeness strategies. On the contrary, face can also be lost by means of face-threatening acts i.e., those acts that are opposed to a speaker face wants. Thus, the construction and maintenance of speakers' self-concept of face is achieved through *facework*, which entails the verbal and non-verbal processes embedded in socio-communicative interaction and "involves the reciprocal social attribution of face to the participants in social interaction…" (Watts 2003: 131). There are a high number of face-saving acts and different linguistic and non-linguistic resources used for this purpose[1], however, due to space limitations, this study pays attention to: a) complimenting acts and b) laughter as two positive politeness strategies used to preserve the addressee's positive face by means of showing "closeness and solidarity, appeal to friendship, making other people feel good, and emphasizing that both speakers have a common goal" (Cutting 2002: 48).

The speech act of complimenting is a communicative act which "(…) explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some `good´ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer" (Holmes 1988: 446). Compliments can refer to interlocutors' appearance and possessions, performance and skills, and personality traits with a number of pragmatic functions: i) greetings, apologies, thanks, congratulations, ii) used as devices to open and sustain conversation, and soften face-threatening acts, and iii) expressions aimed at reinforcing desired behaviour by assessing interactants' abilities and performance. As other speech acts, compliments

[1] For a more detailed description of face saving acts and resources see Brown and Levinson (1987) and Watts (2003).

can be directly and indirectly uttered. On that account, I adhere to Bruti's (2009) distinction, based on Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987), who differentiates between direct compliments as directed to an addressee (e.g., you look great today) while indirect are addressed to "a person who is associated with the addressee and therefore metonymically reverberating on him/her" (Bruti 2009: 95) (e.g., your wife is so welcoming).

With reference to CMC, Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Yus (2011) have recently addressed the act of complimenting in SNSs by analysing the most significant distinction between face-to-face and Facebook interactions. Maíz-Arévalo (2013: 52-53) identifies the following differences: i) *disembodiment* stands for the lack of access to interlocutors' body language which is sometimes supplied by emoticons and capitalization; ii) *synchronous/asynchronous* communication refers to the immediateness of communication in face-to-face interactions while CMC interactions can last for days; iii) *turn-taking* and *interlocutors* are described as partially uncontrolled in CMC if compared to face-to-face, since posts and comments allow a number of users to interact; iv) *hybridity* is characterized by the interactants use of written language combined with emoticons, punctuation marks, words repetition, etc., in an attempt to oralize their intended meaning. Thus, CMC communication in SNSs may be understood as the interactants' best communicative attempt to embody interpersonal relationships by means of using the resources available in SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Placencia and Lower (2013, 2017) establish the functions of compliments in SNSs as the resources used to open a communication channel, confirm and reinforce relationships, and construct everyday interactions. Additionally, these can show admiration and affection, build solidarity, open conversations, reinforce desired behaviour and soften trouble (Yusof & Hoon 2014: 85).

The second resource investigated in this paper is laughter. Laughter can be defined as an interactional resource which is "ambiguous and able to serve multiple functions depending on the social and linguistic context" and requires "highly developed pragmatic skills together with cognitive and emotional attunement to other people…" (Mazzocconi et al. 2020: 1). Mazzocconi et al. (2020) provide an insight into laughter not only as a non-verbal social signal but as a communicative resource for managing interaction, since they claim that laughter has a propositional meaning and is an automated learnt behaviour. Owren & Bachorowski (2003) argue in favour of the influencing scope of laugher, which may promote positive responses in interactants. Its aim would, in this case, be helpful in managing the "affective states in interaction and in establishing and maintaining social bonds" (Mazzocconi et al. 2020: 4). On that account, laughter as a semiotic resource can function as showing pleasantness and affiliation towards the interactants, softening trouble, inducing benevolence to generate agreement, reducing or resolving social awkwardness, or marking irony.

In sum, this research lies in the study of telecinematic discourse (Dynel 2017) on the intra-diegetic level of communication from a pragmatics perspective (Jucker & Locher 2017) to unveil how complimenting acts and laughter are represented in the episode. Let us not forget that compliments have a crucial social function in the fictional world portrayed in the episode, since they can make the life of a character a success or a nosedive. Thus, by adhering to Kozloff (2000) function of TV series dialogue aimed at achieving realism through the portrayal of everyday conversational routines, and based on the assumption that fictional telecinematic discourse and multimodal resources may aid to communicate the intended meaning of the episode analysed (Bednarek 2010), the research questions I aim to answer are:

> RQ1. How is compliment-giving portrayed on the intradiegetic level of communication in the episode under scrutiny?
> RQ2. What is the function of laughter in relation to compliments?

4. Methodology

The data for this study corresponds to the transcription of the episode *Nosedive* [SE03EP01] from the TV series *Black Mirror*. The transcript includes both the spoken dialogue and audio as found in 8FLIX.com (n.d.). An ad-hoc corpus from the transcript of the episode with a total of 5,499 word tokens and 1,179 word types was compiled and edited using *Notepad++* freeware. The analysis of the data is grounded on a corpus pragmatics approach (cf. McAllister 2015; Rühlemann & Aijmer 2015), that allows the study of pragmatic phenomena in a wider context. AntConc Freeware's (Anthony 2018) Concordances, File View and Concordance Plot tools were used to produce the search and interpretation of compliments and laughter.

For the search and classification of compliments, I adhere to Holme's (1988) definition of compliments, as discussed in section 3. A distinction is made between two types of compliments as present and enacted in character's dialogue: Type 1: synchronous face-to-face compliments and Type 2: asynchronous CMC compliments. Type 1 compliments typology is based on Manes and Wolfson's (1981) taxonomy for recurrent complimenting formulae. The morphosyntactic structures described by Manes and Wolfson (1981) are specified and exemplified in Table 1 below. Additionally, I differentiate between direct and indirect type 1 compliments on the grounds of Bruti's (2009) distinction. Thus, for a compliment to be considered as direct it has to be directly addressed and inherently linked to the addressee (e.g., you light up the room or you're a smart cookie), whilst indirect compliments are those which refer to a person or object associated with the person receiving the compliment (e.g., your wife is so welcoming).

Morphosyntactic pattern	Example
1. (NP is/looks (really) ADJ)	Your blouse is/looks (really) beautiful.
2. (I (really) like/love NP)	I (really) like/love your car.
3. PRO is (really) a ADJ NP	That's a (really) nice wall hanging.
4. (You V a (really) ADV NP	You did a (really) good job.
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV	You really handled that situation well.
6. You have (a) ADJ NP!	You have such beautiful hair!
7. What (a) ADJ NP!	What a lovely baby you have!
8. ADJ NP!	Nice game!
9. Isn't NP ADJ!	Isn't your ring beautiful!

Table 1. Compliment morphosyntactic patterns (adapted from Manes & Wolfson 1981: 120).

The categorisation and analysis of the multimodal resources is based on the labels originally found in the transcript to describe them. Table 2 below includes the audible representation of type 2 compliments and the sounds representing character's laughter.

Multimodal resource	Label
Type 2 compliments	Beep* (V)
	Ring* (V)
	Chime* (V)
	Chirp* (V)
	Play* (V)
	Ringtone (N)
Laughter sounds	Laugh* (V)
	Giggle* (V)
	Chuckle* (V)
	Ha ha ha*

Table 2. Multimodal representation of Type 2 compliments and laughter sounds.

The distinction presented in Table 2 corresponds to the audible representation of laughter sounds, i.e., the verbs *laugh*, *giggle*, *chuckle*, and the onomatopoeia *ha ha ha*. The sounds corresponding to the multimodal audible representation as relating to the use of technology are the verbs *beep*, *ring*, *chime*, *chirp*, *play* and the noun *ringtone*.

5. Results

The first research question was aimed at unveiling the resources used in the episode to convey compliments on the intradiegetic level of communication. The analysis of the corpus revealed two main resources used as complimenting acts in the episode. These entail type 1 compliments, that is, synchronous face-to-face compliments and type 2 CMC compliments. Quantitative results of type 1 compliments are presented in table 3 below, based on Manes & Wolfson's (1981) morphosyntactic patterns taxonomy along with qualitative data to exemplify evidence as found in the corpus.

Morphosyntactic pattern	Direct	Indirect	Total	%
1. (NP is/looks (really) ADJ)	11	6	17	43.58%
2. (I (really) like/love NP)	9	0	9	23.07%
3. PRO is (really) a ADJ NP	2	1	3	7.70%
4. (You V a (really) ADV NP	0	0	0	0%
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV	3	0	3	7.70%
6. You have (a) ADJ NP!	3	0	3	7.70%
7. What (a) ADJ NP!	0	0	0	0%
8. ADJ NP!	3	1	4	10.25%
9. Isn't NP ADJ!	0	0	0	0%
Total instances	**31**	**8**	**39**	**100%**

Table 3. Type 1 compliments: quantitative results.

As seen in table 3 above a total of thirty-nine type 1 compliments were found in the corpus, 79.49% were direct and 20.51% indirect. Examples of direct compliments are "*you look great today*" and "*you've got such cool friends now*". Indirect compliment instances in which the speaker positively comments on objects related to the addressee, more specifically an apartment and a pet cat are: "*it's actually a pretty cool place*" and "*it's hilarious*". As regards type 1 compliments instances, the most representative morphosyntactic pattern found is (NP is/looks (really) ADJ) with a 43.58% of the total compliments. Examples are "*the latest part of the speech is great*" and "*the restaurant is so cool*". The second most used is pattern 2 (23.07%) (I (really) like/love NP), as in "*I love the pink*" and "*I've always loved you*". Pattern 8 (10.25%) (ADJ NP!) examples include "*Good choice!*" and "*Great hair!*". The least used resources (7.70%) are patterns 3 (PRO is (really) a ADJ NP) e.g., "*that's a plus*", pattern 5 (You V (NP) (really) ADV) e.g., "*you're working hard with your socials*", and pattern 6 (You have (a) ADJ NP!) e.g., "*You've got a solid popularity arc here*". There were no instances of patterns 4, 7 and 9.

Type 2 compliments i.e., CMC compliments given on the SNS, were searched and identified in the corpus taking into account the technology-related audible sounds as present in the transcription of spoken dialogue and audio. Once identified these were classified as signalling CMC compliments or representing other technology sounds. The results are illustrated in table 4 below.

Label	Compliments	Other	Hits	%
Beep* (v)	46	4	50	73.52%
Ring* (v)	0	2	2	2.94%
Chime* (v)	0	2	2	2.94%
Chirp* (v)	0	3	3	4.41%
Play* (v)	0	7	7	10.3%
Ringtone (n)	0	4	4	5.89%
Total	**46**	**22**	**68**	**100%**

Table 4. Type 2 CMC compliments: quantitative results.

Concerning Type 2 compliments, different verbs and the noun *ringtone* were initially identified as the audible sounds intended to represent compliment-giving as listed in Table 4. Nonetheless, only the verb *beep* was found to be used as the audible sound that represents CMC compliment-given, i.e., stars rating on the SNS. Therefore, the verbs *ring*, *chime*, *chirp*, *play* and the noun *ringtone* are used for indicating the sounds of other electronic gadgets. Examples 1 and 2 below illustrate these other uses.

(1)

Lacie: Mm-hmm. [*phone rings*] [woman]
Carole: Pelican Cove.
Lacie: Carole, it's Lacie. Saw the place yesterday. I wanna take it.
Carole: That's fantastic! Uh Oh, I see you're still on a 4. 2. Is that, um.
Lacie: Yep, I'm on it, just gonna transfer the deposit now.
Carole: Well, okay. Yes!

(2)

Lacie: [sighs] [horn honks] Oh Hi. [*ringtone chimes*] Nay-Nay! [giggles]
Naomi: Hey, Lace! Just checking in.
Lacie: I'm on my way to the airport right now [giggles]
Naomi: Okay, cool, and you're all good for the rehearsal dinner?
Lacie: Oh, yeah. The flight's, what, an hour? That restaurant looks so cool.

Examples 1 and 2 above illustrate the audible sounds labelled as [phone rings] and ringtone chimes] which do not describe type 2 compliments but phone calls.

The first example presents a scene in which Lacie calls [phone rings] Carole, a state agent, to buy an apartment. Example 2 shows Lacie on a taxi answering to Naomi's phone call represented by the audible [ringtone chimes]. On the other hand, examples 3 and 4 below are instances of type 2 compliments that exemplify the use of the audible [phone beeps] to indicate that a compliment is being paid.

(3)

Paul: Thank you. No, thank you. [whooping]
Paul: Get over here! Get your ass over here
Anthony: Get in here, big boy. *[phones beep]* You're beautiful! [cheering] Yeah! Gimme five! Good choice!
Paul: You fucking earned it, man. You fucking earned it. [giggles nervously]

(4)

Chess: Lacie, I got you a smoothie. Got one for everyone, actually. Still a bunch of them for grabs. They're from the organic stall at the farmers' market.
Lacie: Sure. Okay. [gasps] Mmm! *[phone beeps]*
Chess: Thank you. Thank you. [whispers]

Example 3 is a fragment from Paul and Naomi's wedding scene. Anthony, Paul's best man, has just given his wedding speech and the attendees compliment on it with five-star ratings represented in the example as [phones beep]. Additionally, there are two type 1 compliments that intertwine with type 2 in the same sentence "*You're beautiful!*" and "*Good choice!*" Example 4 presents a short conversation between Lacie and Chess, one of Lacie's colleagues at work. Chess offers Lacie a smoothie and she compliments him on her mobile phone with a stars rating represented by the audible [phone beeps].

The second research question addressed how the multimodal audible resources of laughter intertwine with compliment-giving on the intradiegetic level of communication. Table 5 below presents the quantitative results of the labels used to represent laughter in the episode being [laugh] and [giggle] the most widely used labels.

Multimodal resource	Label	Word hits
Laughter sounds	Laugh* (V)	39
	Giggle* (V)	25
	Chuckle* (V)	1
	Ha ha ha*	1

Table 5. Laugher multimodal representation: quantitative results.

Once identified and in order to seek the co-occurrence of CMC compliments and laughter, the Concordance Plot tool was used to search for the instances of the key words [beep*] [laugh*] and [giggle*]. Figures 1 and 2 below present the Concordance

Plots for the key words [giggle*] and [laugh*] identified as the most representative samples of laughter sounds. Figure 3 corresponds to the sound [beep*] previously classified as the audible resource to convey type 2 compliments.

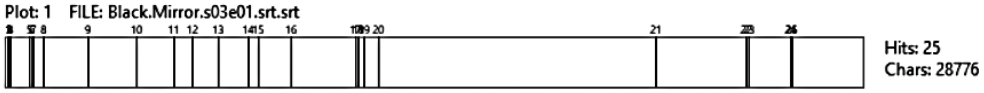

Figure 1. Concordance plot for the word *giggle* in Nosedive.

Figure 2. Concordance plot for the word *laugh* in Nosedive.

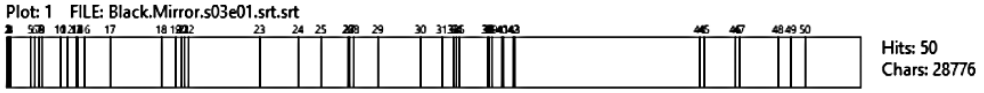

Figure 3. Concordance plot for the word *beep* in Nosedive.

As seen in the figures above, the distribution of the sound [beep*] in the concordance plot 3 seems to correspond to the moments in the episode in which characters [laugh*] or [giggle*] (concordance plots 1 and 2). This consistency is present in one-third of the episode and may indicate a relationship between CMC compliments and laughter as a face saving act that reinforces positive face wants. Examples (5) and (6) below show two conversation fragments in which laughter sounds, and type 1 and type 2 compliments co-occur.

(5)

JJ: …and that's one Brushed Suede. You want a cookie with that? It's on the house.
Lacie: Sounds awesome. [*Lacie giggles*] [*Phone beeps*]. See you tomorrow JJ.
JJ: See you Lacie.
Lacie: [laughs]

(6)

Lacie: [grasp] Oh, I saw your boy in the fire hat just now! So cute!
Man: Yeah, he's really something. [*laughs*] [*phone beeps*]
Lacie: [*chuckles softly*]
Man: [*laughs*]

The examples above present instances of laughter and compliment acts (types 1 and 2) given by characters on the SNS using their mobile phones. In example (5), JJ, a waiter serves Lacie a coffee and gives her a free cookie. Lacie answers with a smile

[Lacie giggles] and both compliment each other by giving a 5-star rating using their mobile phones' SNS [phone beeps]. Similarly, example (6) presents an instance of a short interaction in which Lacie compliments on a man's child "*So cute*" "*he's really something*" and both use their mobile phones to compliment one another [phone beeps] while laughing [laughs] and chuckling [chuckles softly].

6. Discussion

This study was aimed at the identification and analysis of compliment acts and laughter as portrayed on the intradiegetic level of communication (Jucker & Locher 2017). Compliments have a central function in the communication between the characters in *Nosedive* since, as explained above, the characters depend on compliments to socially improve. Furthermore, the function of laughter as the paralinguistic resource to manage affective states in interaction (Mazzocconi et al. 2020) becomes relevant since it contributes to achieve positive stars ratings.

Results from the first research question revealed that compliments were paid in face-to-face interactions (type 1) and as star-ratings in CMC on the SNS (type 2). Type 2 compliments were slightly more representative than type 1, which have been directly and indirectly uttered. Such predominance could be interpreted as the need to improve their social status by rating their interactions on the SNS. The characters use this type of compliment in order to show admiration and affection and reinforce desired behaviour in their attempt to obtain five-stars ratings. As for type 1 compliments, characters compliment each other to express congratulations mainly by assessing their abilities and actions (Holmes 1988). Hence, the pragmatic function of compliment acts could be interpreted as fictional character's joint endeavour to build solidarity and reinforce desired behaviour and social bonds (Holmes 1988; Placencia & Lower 2013, 2017; Yusuf & Hoon 2014).

As for the second research question, findings unveiled some consistency in the portrayal of compliment acts (types 1 and 2) and the function of laughter as a means to bolster positive behaviour. The co-occurrence of compliment-giving and laughter could be seen as an interactional routine intended to promote characters positive responses, agreement and pleasantness as suggested by Mazzoconi et al. (2020) and Owren and Bachorowski (2003). Thus, compliment acts and laughter may be identified as the positive politeness strategies (Cutting 2002; Watts 2003) that portray characters' facework and the use of pragmatic skills in pursuance of achieving five-star ratings.

7. Conclusion

The present study has illustrated how compliments and the way they are represented and distributed in the episode can be analysed from a pragmatics perspective taking also into account laughter as an interactional resource to heighten positive

reactions. Overall, findings seem to reveal a relationship between the pragmatic resources of compliment-giving and laughter in the episode. The representation of laugher and compliments (types 1 and 2) can be related to Kozloff's (2000) function of TV dialogue as adhering to the code of realism and aimed to provide a sense of authenticity. Thus, compliment-giving as an everyday conversational routine and by means of CMC communication can be understood as an attempt to establish parallelism between the interaction patterns as shown in the episode and those in everyday conversation, which are not restricted to face-to-face encounters.

Hence, the study of intradiegetic communication may have served to reveal the performative dimension of the TV series episode in the participation framework (Messerli 2017) since i) the adherence to the code of realism (Kozloff 2000); ii) the use of multimodal resources (Bednarek 2010); and iii) the performative function of dialogues (Bednarek 2017-2018) can be seen as the resources that make the plot advance steadily. In addition, emphasis should be placed on the merging of linguistic choices, paralinguistic means, and the pragmatic resources selected to strengthen scriptwriters' intention and message provision.

Our work clearly has some limitations since it has been restricted to the study of compliment-giving and laughter. Further work needs to be done in studying speech acts pairs e.g., compliments and compliment responses in an attempt to widen the scope as regards the interpretation of intradiegetic communication between characters. In the same line, secondary ideas or sub-plots can be analysed extradiegetically by undergoing a more exhaustive analysis of the functions of TV dialogue (Bednarek 2017, 2018; Kozloff 2000) considering the multimodal nature of the audiovisual product.

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Chapter 7
Only one chance to make a first impression: Characterisation in the opening scenes of TV series pilot episodes

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Abstract

Due to the centrality and stability of protagonists in TV series, their characterisation plays an important role for a series' reception. As a consequence, introducing characters is a central function of pilot episodes. While characterisation in TV series has been studied from various perspectives, the question of how exactly characters are introduced to the audience when they first appear has received little attention so far by linguists. This means that a number of questions require further investigation, such as: What kinds of verbal resources are used to establish characters in TV series? Who provides character definitions? And how does verbal information interact with visual information when presenting characters for the first time?

This study presents a linguistic analysis of how protagonists are introduced to the audience in the opening scenes of pilot episodes of 18 US TV series. The main focus of the study lies on direct characterisation, i.e. the explicit naming of information relating to a character's identity. The study shows that while almost all series rely very strongly on direct verbal characterisation, they differ considerably with respect to the ways in which this characterisation is presented. In addition, a case study demonstrates that characterisation in opening passages can be extremely effective, establishing a large proportion of central character traits within just a few minutes.

Keywords: Characterisation, Dialogue, Conversation Analysis, Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction

Characters are central to TV series. Most series are based on a premise that revolves around a small number of characters, who tend to remain stable over time (see Bednarek 2017: 144; Mittell 2015: 133). These characters are soon known to the audience for certain personality traits, patterns of behaviour and styles of speaking. Tensions that drive the plot are often created through contrasts between different characters (e.g., the nerd and the waitress) and through contrasts between personality traits and roles of individual characters (e.g., the CIA agent with bipolar disorder; the meth-cooking high-school teacher). Thus, rather than character development, most TV series employ

"character accumulation", which refers to the process in which characters gain depth and become more elaborate by accumulating life experiences, while not changing in fundamental aspects (Pearson 2007: 56). This central role of stable characters means that the way in which they are introduced is crucial for how a TV series is received by the audience. Adopting a linguistic perspective, this study takes a closer look at how exactly this introduction of characters takes place in pilot episodes of US TV series.

Pilot episodes of TV series have to fulfil a number of important functions. On a very practical level, they often function as "test runs" for the production of a series, and their success decides whether or not a series is actually realised (Mittell 2015: 55–56). From the point of view of the audience, the pilot needs to present the premise of a series quickly and convincingly, and it has to immediately raise the viewers' interest in the series (2015: 56). In order to introduce the audience to a new series, pilot episodes simultaneously need to present the main characters, communicate the key information about the setting and the rules of the fictional world in which the TV series takes place, and establish the main themes that drive the plot of the TV series. This requires extremely efficient strategies for presenting characters to the audience "such that their personalities and relationships are clear within moments" (Mittell 2015: 56).

In this study, I analyse how the protagonists of TV series are introduced in the opening passage – defined as the first two scenes or the first four minutes – of pilot episodes. Based on a selection of 18 pilot episodes from US TV series, I investigate two related aspects from a linguistic point of view. First, I establish what resources the pilots use for characterisation, focusing in particular on direct characterisation, i.e., the explicit naming of character traits. I compare how commonly direct characterisation through the narrator, the protagonist, and other characters is used across the pilots. In addition to verbal strategies, I also look at how visual elements contribute to direct characterisation, and I identify more specific characterisation strategies that can be observed across the series. In the second part of the analysis, I investigate the extent to which protagonists are established within the opening passage of pilots. In this case study, I compare the characterisation of Sheldon in the opening passage of *The Big Bang Theory* to previous findings by Bednarek (2012), who studied the characterisation of Sheldon in the entire first season of the series. The results of the case study indicate that many of the most central aspects of the protagonist's character traits are already communicated in the opening passage of the pilot. This shows that pilots in general – and opening passages in particular – fulfil a crucial function for the characterisation of protagonists and, as a consequence, they provide excellent data for studying characterisation.

2. Resources for Characterisation

Characterisation has attracted the attention of linguists working in the fields of literary stylistics and pragmatics of fiction for some time now (for an overview, see

Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017). While early work on the topic has mainly been based on literary works in the form of novels and plays (e.g. Culpeper 2001; Culpeper 2002a; Culpeper 2002b), the focus has shifted more recently to include fictional works from film and television series (e.g. Bednarek 2010; Bednarek 2011; Bednarek 2012; Bubel 2006; Schubert 2017). The approaches include quantitative corpus-based approaches (e.g. Bednarek 2011; Bednarek 2012) as well as close reading (e.g. Bubel 2006) and multi-modal discourse analysis (e.g. Bednarek 2010: Ch. 7), and most studies combine linguistic analysis with approaches from other fields, such as literary studies, film studies and psychology.

With respect to theoretical approaches to characterisation, the distinction between direct and indirect characterisation is important for the present study. Direct characterisation, also sometimes referred to as direct definition (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 60) and explicit characterisation (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017: 106), refers to instances in which a character's traits are stated verbally. In contrast, in indirect characterisation, also known as indirect presentation (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 61), implicit characterisation (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017: 106) and character revelation (Kozloff 2000: 43), a character's identity and traits are presented through their actions, their behaviour towards other characters, the attitudes they express and their style of speaking.

In this study, the focus lies on direct characterisation, which can be realised in different ways. In self-presentation, characters reveal information about themselves to others. Usually, this takes place in the form of dialogues between characters, such as in Example (1) from *Grey's Anatomy*, in which Meredith presents information about herself to another character (direct characterisation underlined). However, monologues are also possible, as in Example (2) from *Breaking Bad*, where Walter White records a message on a camcorder.

1) Meredith: I moved two weeks ago from Boston (*Grey's Anatomy*)
2) Walter: My name is Walter Hartwell White. I live at 308, Negra Arroyo Lane, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87104. (*Breaking Bad*)

In other-presentation, a character describes another character, either addressing the character who is described (Example 3) or in interaction with a third party (Example 4).

3) Luke [to Lorelei]: You're shameless. (*Gilmore Girls*)
4) Asher: Yeah, she's a ballbuster.
   […]
   Student: Dershowitz has the upper hand in the academic world, but Keating's clearly the better defense attorney. (*How To Get Away With Murder*)

Finally, direct characterisation can also take place through the narrator, usually in the form of voice-overs. The narrator can be a character-narrator, describing themselves from an outside perspective (Example 5), or it can be an extra-diegetic narrator (Example 6).

5) Narrator [voice-over]: I've always loved getting clean. I love baths, I love showers [...] (*Orange Is The New Black*)
6) Narrator [voice-over]: Our story begins 13.5 years ago, when Jane Gloriana Villanueva, was a mere ten years old. It should be noted, that at a mere ten years old, Jane's passions include, in no particular order, her family, God, and grilled cheese sandwiches. (*Jane The Virgin*)

As the examples above show, direct characterisation can present a wide range of character information, including a character's name (Examples 2, 4 and 6), age (Example 6), present and past place of living (Examples 1 and 2), profession (Example 4), interests and passions (Examples 5 and 6), and personality traits (Examples 3 and 4).

In addition to verbal characterisation, the visual representation of a character contributes a great deal to their characterisation in television series. This is in contrast to written works of fiction, which usually rely on verbal descriptions of appearance. In linguistic studies, visual representation has received far less attention than verbal characterisation so far, although it plays an important role for characterisation, both in isolation and in the interplay with verbal information. Visual aspects can be used for any type of character information and they can result in direct or indirect characterisation. In Section 3.3, I will discuss some examples of visual characterisation in detail. It will not be possible to cover all types of information that can contribute to characterisation in the context of this study. For instance, the role of paralinguistic information will not be covered and there are certainly other aspects of non-verbal information that would deserve further attention in future research.

3. Introducing Protagonists in pilot episodes of TV series

An empirical analysis of the beginning of 18 pilot episodes of US TV Series was carried out in order to establish the role that the different strategies play when introducing protagonists. The 18 series were selected based on a user-generated list of "Top 100 most watched tv shows of all time" on IMDb.[1] For the purposes of the current research project, only US series, released after 2000 and set in the present time were included. Excluded were, for instance, historical dramas, as well as fantasy and science fiction series which are set in an imagined past or future.[2] Animated

[1] https://www.imdb.com/list/ls095964455/?sort=user_rating,desc, accessed on 8 September 2020.

[2] For instance, the series *Game of Thrones* was excluded because of its setting in an imagined time, which affects the use of language in the series. In contrast, the series *The Good Place* was included in the study. While the latter can also be considered to be a fantasy series, it is set in present time, albeit in an imagined place. At least as far as the protagonists are concerned, they do not have a noteworthy use of archaic language, but they speak present-day English.

series were excluded, too. Of the remaining series, eighteen series were selected with the aim of achieving a balanced representation of male and female protagonists, while including a broad spectrum of comedy-oriented and drama-oriented series. The series are not perfectly balanced, though. There are slightly more series with female protagonists and, at the same time, there is only one series in the category "Drama" that has only female protagonists. Table 1 presents an overview of the 18 pilot episodes and the protagonist(s) whose characterisation was studied.

Series	Genre	Protagonists included in study	Gender	Duration (min)	Word count
Breaking Bad	Drama	Walter White	male	06:30	309
Brooklyn Nine-Nine	Comedy	Jake Peralata	male	04:00*	627
Desperate Housewives	Drama/Comedy	Lynette Scavo, Gabrielle Solis, Bree Van de Kamp, Susan Mayer	female	07:15	1,048
Gilmore Girls	Drama/Comedy	Lorelei Gilmore, Rory Gilmore	female	07:00	790
Grey's Anatomy	Drama/Comedy	Meredith Grey	female	05:00	658
Homeland	Drama	Carrie Mathison	female	04:15	436
House of Cards	Drama	Frank Underwood	male	05:30	454
How I Met Your Mother	Comedy	Ted Mosby	male	04:00*	668
How To Get Away With Murder	Drama	Annalise Keating, Wes Gibbins, Connor Walsh, Michaela Pratt, Asher Millstone, Laurel Castillo	mixed	04:00	517
Jane The Virgin	Drama/Comedy	Jane Gloriana Villanueva	female	04:00*	352
Mr Robot	Drama	Elliot Alderson	male	06:10	653
New Girl	Comedy	Jessica "Jess" Christopher Day	female	04:00	598
Orange Is The New Black	Drama/Comedy	Piper Chapman	female	04:10	278
Shameless (US)	Drama/Comedy	Frank Gallagher, Fiona, Lip, Ian, Carl, Debbie, Liam	mixed	04:20	462
Suits	Drama	Harvey Specter, Mike Ross	male	06:20	684

Series	Genre	Protagonists included in study	Gender	Duration (min)	Word count
The Big Bang Theory	Comedy	Sheldon Cooper, Leonard Hofstadter	male	05:45	767
The Good Place	Comedy	Eleanor Shellstrop	female	04:45	557
2 Broke Girls	Comedy	Maxine "Max" George Black, Caroline Wesbox Channing	female	04:40	575

Table 1. Overview of analysed opening passages

It should be pointed out that identifying the protagonist(s) was not entirely straightforward in many cases. For instance, I decided to focus on Sheldon Cooper and Leonard Hofstadter as the two protagonists in *The Big Bang Theory,* although one could easily argue that Penny (who is not given a last name, at least not before she is married to Leonard and adopts his name), Howard Wolowitz and Rajesh Koothrappali should be included, too, since they form an essential part of the character dynamic of the first season of the series. Likewise, the protagonists I included for *Desperate Housewives* are Lynette Scavo, Gabrielle Solis, Bree Van de Kamp and Susan Mayer, although one could argue that Edie Britt should be included, too. In some cases, my decision was based on the series title that puts emphasis on one specific character. For instance, the title of the series *New Girl* places a special focus on Jess over her three flatmates. In other cases, the decision was based on the focus that was given to the characters in the pilot episode. For instance, in *Desperate Housewives*, the four characters I included as protagonists are introduced one by one in an identical fashion, whereas Edie Britt is only introduced about ten minutes later and much more briefly. Still, alternative decisions would have been possible in some cases.

The analysis focused on the opening passage of each pilot episode. For the purposes of the present study, the opening passage was defined as the first two scenes of the pilot; in cases in which the first two scenes were very short (below four minutes), the first four minutes of the pilot were analysed instead (see times marked with * in Table 1). Due to differences between the pilots with respect to pace of the initial scenes and placement and duration of the opening credits, the opening passages I analysed range from 4 minutes to 7 minutes and 15 seconds and they include between 278 and 1,048 words.

3.1. **Overview of resources and strategies for direct characterisation**

In a first step, the presence or absence of direct characterisation was established. As discussed in Section 2, direct characterisation can take place through a narrator,

the protagonist's self-presentation, and other character's other-presentation of the protagonist. Some of the series employ character narrators. For instance, in *Mr Robot* the protagonist, Elliot, comments on events as a narrator in voice-over (see also Landert 2017: 504–509). In these cases, direct characterisation in the narratorial voice was only counted as direct characterisation through the narrator, not as self-presentation. In contrast, characterisation appearing within dialogue with other characters was treated as self-presentation. A special case is *House of Cards*, where the protagonist, Frank Underwood, regularly addresses the audience directly in what has been described as "asides" by Sorlin (2016: 106), thus adopting a narrator-like function while appearing in character. For the purposes of this study, Frank was treated as a narrator whenever he speaks directly to the audience and, thus, characterisation occurring in these passages is classified as narrator characterisation.

Distinguishing between direct and indirect characterisation is not always as straightforward as it may seem from the examples presented in Section 2. In addition to some common and clear patterns of direct characterisation, illustrated in Examples 1 to 6 above, there are also some utterances that clearly imply character information. Example 7 illustrates such an instance.

7) [at high IQ sperm bank:]

Sheldon: We are committing genetic fraud. There is no guarantee that our sperm is going to generate high IQ offspring. Think about that. I have a sister with the same basic DNA mix who hostesses at Fuddruckers. (*The Big Bang Theory,* direct characterisation)

In this passage, the combination of the setting, a high IQ sperm bank, and the character's statement that "there is no guarantee that our sperm is going to generate high IQ offspring" was classified as a character's self-presentation of having a high IQ. Since the characteristic is described verbally, rather than demonstrated, the instance was classified as direct characterisation, despite the fact that it is implied rather than explicitly attributed. In contrast, character revelation – indirect characterisation – can be found in an earlier utterance by Sheldon as illustrated in Example 8:

8) Sheldon: So if a photon is directed through a plane with two slits in it and either slit is observed, it will not go through both slits. If it's unobserved it will. However, if it's observed after it's left the plane but before it hits its target, it will not have gone through both slits. (*Big Bang Theory*, indirect characterisation)

In this passage, Sheldon demonstrates – rather than claims – knowledge of theoretical physics, which was treated as indirect characterisation. Instances of clearly implied direct characterisation, such as Example 7, were not encountered very frequently, but when they were, they were treated as instances of direct characterisation.

The analysis includes all types of character information that relate to a character's identity, personality traits, passions and interests, profession, and permanent appearance. Again, the distinction between temporary states and permanent traits

is not always clear-cut, especially when it comes to the description of emotional states and appearance. Example 9 includes two descriptions of another character's appearance.

9) Claire: You need a haircut.
Frank: You think?
Claire: A little trim. What are you gonna wear?
Frank: You mean for the meeting?
Claire: For the announcement.
Frank: I'll wear my navy blue, the one with the pinstripes.
Claire: Good. You look handsome in that suit. (*House of Cards*)

The first description, "You need a haircut", was classified as a temporary state and, as a consequence, it was not treated as an instance of direct other-presentation.[3] In contrast, the utterance "You look handsome in that suit" was classified as direct characterisation, because it describes a permanent aspect of the other character's appearance.

The results of the analysis concerning the use of direct characterisation through narrators, self-presentation and other-presentation are presented in Table 2. What the overview shows, first and foremost, is that there is a great deal of variation concerning who delivers the characterisation – indeed, all constellations that are possible can be found across the 18 pilots. In addition, there are no clear patterns with respect to genre of the TV series and gender of the protagonist. However, overall, direct characterisation appears to be a very common way of introducing protagonists. All pilots except for one, *Homeland*, use at least one form of direct characterisation within the opening passage, and most pilots combine two or even all three types of direct characterisation. For *Homeland*, direct characterisation appears for the first time in the form of other-presentation at the beginning of the third scene, just after the end of the opening passage studied here. Instead of direct characterisation, the first two scenes of *Homeland* rely on character revelation, for instance by presenting (extreme) behaviour by the protagonist, such as her disregard of her personal safety.

[3] Of course, the utterance is still relevant for the characterisation, albeit in the form of indirect characterisation. The fact that Frank is in a relationship with Claire, a woman who tells him when to have a haircut, reveals a great deal of information about both characters.

Series	Narrator	Self-presentation	Other-presentation	Types of direct characterisation
Breaking Bad	no	yes	no	1
Brooklyn Nine-Nine	no	yes	yes	2
Desperate Housewives	yes	no	no	1
Gilmore Girls	no	yes	yes	2
Grey's Anatomy	yes	yes	yes	3
Homeland	no	no	no	0
House of Cards	yes	no	yes	2
How I Met Your Mother	yes	yes	no	2
How To Get Away With Murder	no	yes	yes	2
Jane The Virgin	yes	yes	no	2
Mr Robot	yes	yes	no	2
New Girl	no	yes	no	1
Orange Is The New Black	yes	no	yes	2
Shameless (US)	yes	yes	yes	3
Suits	no	yes	yes	2
The Big Bang Theory	no	yes	yes	2
The Good Place	no	no	yes	1
2 Broke Girls	no	yes	yes	2
Total	**8/18**	**13/18**	**11/18**	

Table 2. Direct characterisation in the opening passages of pilot episodes

In addition to the presence of different forms of direct characterisation, the analysis of the opening passages revealed more specific characterisation strategies that are shared by many of the pilots. These include, for instance, the use of introduction sequences and the interplay between visual and verbal information. These two strategies will be further discussed in what follows.

3.2. **Introduction Sequences: Meeting strangers**

For TV series, it can be difficult to reconcile direct characterisation with the aim to present naturalistic dialogue. One way of solving this is by having protagonists meet strangers. For instance, in the second scene of *How To Get Away With Murder*,

two of the protagonists meet for the first time, providing them with an opportunity to provide information about themselves in a way that feels natural – or at least plausible – to the audience (Example 10). Likewise, in Example 11, Jessica introduces Harvey Specter to a client, providing an opportunity for other-presentation.

10) Wes: I'm not usually a first-row kind of guy, but I promised myself I wouldn't hide in the back of the class.
Michaela: I'm engaged. (*How To Get Away With Murder*)

11) Jessica: This is Harvey Specter. He is our best closer. (*Suits*)

Such introduction sequences are common in the opening passages of pilot episodes. Half of the pilots I studied, 10 out of 18, included an interaction between a protagonist and a stranger within the opening passage. In several series, this interaction introduces central characters to each other: In *New Girl*, Jess applies as a future flatmate, meeting Nick, Schmidt and Coach for the first time. Likewise, in *The Big Bang Theory*, the two friends Sheldon and Leonard meet their new neighbour Penny for the first time. In both these instances, the introduction sequences include direct characterisation of the protagonist(s), while simultaneously establishing the relationship dynamic between the characters.

Several of the pilots use the introduction sequences in a playful way. Prototypical introductions take place at the beginning of interactions and in them speakers reveal information about themselves to the addressee, but some pilots deviate from this for humorous and dramatic effect. In *Grey's Anatomy*, the pilot starts with a "morning after" scene between Meredith Grey and Derek Shepherd. They had met for the first time the night before and although they had spent the night together, they are still unaware that they are going to work at the same hospital. The scene ends with Meredith realising that she does not even know Derek's name (Example 12). Thus, the introduction sequence is placed at the end of the scene, foreshadowing the pair's complicated love live in later episodes.

12) Meredith: Look, I'm gonna go upstairs and take a shower, okay, and when I get back down here, you won't be here, so (..) um (..) goodbye (...) um (...)
Derek: Derek.
Meredith: Derek. Right. Meredith.
Derek: Meredith. (*Grey's Anatomy*)

A different kind of twist can be found in the opening scene of *The Good Place*, a series that takes place in the afterlife. Here, the pilot starts with the protagonist, Eleanor, waking up in the afterlife's waiting room, being greeted by the afterlife's "architect" Michael, who explains her death to Eleanor.

13) Michael: Eleanor? Come on in. Hi, Eleanor. I'm Michael. How are you today?
Eleanor: I'm great. Thanks for asking. Oh, one question. Where am I? Who are you? And what's going on?
Michael: Right. So, you, Eleanor Shellstrop, are dead. Your life on earth has ended, and you are now in the next phase of your existence in the universe. (*The Good Place*)

In this example, it is the new acquaintance who presents information about the protagonist, including her name and the fact that she is dead.

In sum, introduction sequences are a common and versatile way of providing direct characterisation of protagonists in the opening passages of TV series pilots. The fact that they are used so regularly in opening passages means that studying introduction sequences can be a good way of identifying and analysing direct characterisation.

3.3. **Characterisation through multimodal resources**

In the evaluation of direct characterisation strategies in Table 2, only verbal characterisation was included. However, visual aspects play an important role as well. For instance, in about half of all pilots (8 out of 18), the protagonist is visible in the first shot. These visual representations can provide a great deal of information about the character, ranging from physical attributes, such as height, skin colour and body build, to approximate age and gender. In addition, the context in which the protagonist is presented and the clothes they are wearing can provide further information about their character, profession and interests. For instance, in the first scene of *The Big Bang Theory,* Sheldon is wearing a T-Shirt of the superhero Flash and plaid trousers, revealing both his interest in comics, as well as his lack of interest in fashion. In principle, visual representations can also be divided into direct and indirect characterisation. For instance, while Sheldon's plaid trousers can be interpreted as indirect characterisation, revealing his lack of interest in fashion through his choice of clothing, Max's uniform in *2 Broke Girls* could be argued to define her as a waitress in a rather direct way. However, the distinction between direct characterisation and character revelation is less clear-cut for visual representations than for verbal characterisation.

In addition to physical appearance and clothing, there are many other ways in which visual elements can contribute to characterisation. The opening passage of *Breaking Bad* provides particularly rich examples. Compared to other series, *Breaking Bad* includes less spoken dialogue and relies more strongly on nonverbal communication and visual transmission of information (see also Schubert 2017: 29). The entire opening passage of 6 minutes and 30 seconds includes only 309 words. In comparison, the much faster paced sitcom *2 Broke Girls* includes the same number of words in the first 2 minutes and 45 seconds. Verbal characterisation of Walter White takes place mainly in the form of a character monologue by the protagonist himself, which he delivers when recording a message for his family on a video cam. Compensating for the lower reliance on verbal characterisation, visual elements present crucial pieces of character information.

The first visual representation of Walter White shows him wearing just his underwear and a gas mask, driving an RV at very high speed through the desert, in a highly agitated state (see Figure 1). This image of Walter White is contrasted in the second

scene with his presentation as a quiet family man having breakfast (see Figure 2). These images present the audience with some basic information about the protagonist, such as his family status, and, at the same time, they point to the complexity of his character.

Fig. 1. Walter White driving RV through desert in his underwear, wearing a gas mask (*Breaking Bad*)

Fig. 2. Walter White having breakfast with his family (*Breaking Bad*)

In addition, some of the shots in the second scene present very specific information about Walter White, including his education and his age. In one of the shots, we can see a plaque, honouring Walter's professional achievements (see Figure 3).

Fig. 3. Award plaque (*Breaking Bad*)

The text on the plaque provides the protagonists full name (which had been mentioned once before), his former profession and evidence of his past professional achievements and success (Example 14).

14) Science Research Center, Los Alamos, New Mexico, Hereby recognises Walter H. White, Crystallography Project Leader for Proton Radiography. 1985. Contributor to Research Awarded the Nobel Prize (*Breaking Bad*)

In a different shot, even Walter White's age is established through visual means, in the form of a plate of scrambled eggs and (veggie) bacon, which is arranged to read "50" (see Figure 4). His wife, Skyler, places the plate in front of Walter with the words "Happy Birthday". In combination, the spoken words and the visual presentation of the breakfast plate establish the information that we are witnessing the protagonists 50th birthday. Thus, even such highly specific information about characters can be provided in a direct and explicit way through images.

Fig. 4. Breakfast plate (*Breaking Bad*)

4. Case study: Introducing Sheldon

So far, I have discussed the range of resources and strategies for characterisation that are used in the opening passages of pilot episodes. In this section, I turn to a brief case study that provides evidence for the extent to which a protagonist is characterised within the opening passage. In other words, I will show how quickly a character can be presented to the audience. The case study focuses on Sheldon, one of the protagonists of *The Big Bang Theory*. The case study analyses the characterisation of Sheldon in the first two scenes of the pilot, which have a total duration of 5 minutes and 45 seconds. The analysis is carried out through repeated viewing of the opening passage to identify and analyse the characterisation of Sheldon.

Sheldon's characterisation in the opening passage is compared to the results of Bednarek (2012), who studies the characterisation of Sheldon in the entire first season of *The Big Bang Theory*. Based on transcripts of all 17 episodes and using corpus-based analysis, she studies how Sheldon is presented as a stylised representation of the "nerd" stereotype. By studying concordances, Bednarek identifies eight character traits that are often associated with nerdiness and that are attributed explicitly to Sheldon. Table 3 presents the eight traits identified by Bednarek (2012: 208–209), together with instances of direct characterisation in the opening passage that illustrate four of these traits.

Trait	Direct characterisation in opening passage
Believes in his own intellectual superiority	[at high IQ sperm bank:] We are committing genetic fraud. There is no guarantee that our sperm is going to generate high IQ offspring. Think about that. I have a sister with the same basic DNA mix who hostesses at Fuddruckers.
Was a child prodigy	I did a series of experiments when I was twelve [...] my work with lasers
Struggles with social skills	I'm no expert here but I believe in the context of a luncheon invitation, you might want to skip the reference to bowel movements. Chat? We don't chat, at least not offline
Is different	(indirect characterisation cues)
Is health obsessed / has food issues	(attributed to Leonard)
Has an affinity for and knowledge of computer-related activities	I do yearn for faster downloads I have 212 friends on myspace
Does not like change	(indirect characterisation cues)
Does not drive	–

Table 3. Direct characterisation of Sheldon as a "nerd" in opening passage of *The Big Bang Theory*. Traits based on Bednarek (2012: 208–209)

The first of these traits, "believes in his own intellectual superiorty", is established through a combination of the setting of the opening scene in a high IQ sperm bank ("is this the high IQ sperm bank?") and several utterances by Sheldon and Leonard that express their belief that they are eligible donors. An example for such an utterance is given in Table 3, where Sheldon talks about his sister as sharing much of his DNA, but not his intellectual abilities. As discussed in Section 3.1, Sheldon does not explicitly label himself as intelligent, but this information is clearly implied in his statement, thus resulting in direct characterisation. In addition, this character trait is further supported by indirect characterisation in the form of demonstrating knowledge about theoretical physics and use of scientific vocabulary. The second trait, "being a child prodigy", is established at the beginning of the second scene, when Sheldon refers to scientific experiments he carried out when he was a child. The trait "struggles with social skills" is expressed by Sheldon directly, for instance when he refers to himself as being "no expert" on how to invite someone for lunch. In addition, this trait is also reinforced extensively through indirect characterisation throughout the opening passage, for instance in awkward greeting sequences when meeting Penny for the first time. The final "nerd" trait established through direct characterisation in the opening passage is Sheldon's affinity for and knowledge of computer-related activities, for instance in his utterance "I do yearn for faster downloads", which provides the motivation for the friends' visit to the sperm bank.

While the four remaining traits are not clearly expressed through direct characterisation, there is still indirect evidence for some of them. The clearest of these is the trait "is different", which is implied by many pieces of information, such as the fact that Sheldon has never met any of his social media friends, that he does not chat offline, and that he would not love his own son if, as a toddler, he didn't "know if he should use an integral or a differential to solve the area under a curve". With respect to "does not like change", Sheldon's justifies his reluctance for inviting Penny for lunch by arguing that they never invited their old neighbour, thus demonstrating that he tends to follow the same routines. Interestingly, the trait "is health obsessed / has food issues" is not established for Sheldon, but only for Leonard. When Leonard invites Penny to join them for lunch, he adds that "curry is a natural laxative" and that "a clean colon is just one less thing to worry about". Thus, while this trait is not part of Sheldon's characterisation, it is still present in the opening passage. The only trait that is completely absent from the opening passage is "does not drive", which is not mentioned in the pilot episode.

In sum, of the eight character traits identified by Bednarek (2012) based on the entire first season of *The Big Bang Theory*, four are clearly established through direct characterisation in the first six minutes of the pilot, while two more are expressed through indirect characterisation and one is assigned to another character. Moreover, the opening passage adds additional aspects of Sheldon's characterisation, which

are not included in the nerd-related traits studied by Bednarek. This includes information on Sheldon's sexual orientation (heterosexual), his family (he has a sister), his education (he attended a boarding school) and his love for comics and science fiction (he is wearing a T-Shirt of superhero Flash and he wants to re-watch the second season of *Battlestar* Galactica with commentary). This shows that opening passages of pilots can be extremely rich in characterisation.

5. Conclusion

This study has addressed several aspects of characterisation that have received little attention by linguists so far. The first of these concerns the role of the opening passage of pilots for characterisation. The evaluation of the opening passages of 18 US TV series has shown that almost all of them include at least one form of direct verbal characterisation. In addition, the case study on the introduction of Sheldon in *The Big Bang Theory* has demonstrated that many of the most central traits of a protagonist can be introduced within the first few minutes of a pilot. This means that opening passages of pilots provide extremely rich material for studying the linguistic resources for characterisation. For instance, further studies of such opening passages could focus in more detail on the linguistic structure of utterances used for direct characterisation, on the various types of information provided about protagonists (e.g. profession, interests) and on the relation between the type of information and the form in which characterisation is presented.

The second aspect of interest in the present study concerns the interplay between verbal and visual information for characterisation. I have shown that visual information can contribute to characterisation in a large variety of ways, going far beyond the mere presentation of physical attributes of the character. Especially in combination with verbal information, visual elements can present very specific information in explicit ways. In the sample of pilots studied here, *Breaking Bad* clearly stood out with respect to the use of visual elements for characterisation, and it is likely that this is due to the specific style of the series. Still, a more systematic study of the interplay between visual, verbal, as well as paralinguistic information for the characterisation of TV series protagonists presents a promising avenue for future research.

Finally, while there has been an increase in linguistic research on characterisation in TV series over the last few years, much of this research has focused on the study of one specific series. For instance, researchers have demonstrated the stability of one specific character, or they have compiled an inventory of resources used for characterisation in one series. However, there has been little attention on comparing the resources for characterisation across different series. Such stylistic approaches to the study of characterisation in TV series deserve further attention. As my analysis of the presence and absence of different types of direct characterisation in opening passages has shown, there

is considerable variation in how characterisation is realised. At the same time, there appear to be certain strategies that are very common across different types of series, such as the use of introduction sequences, as well as flashbacks and flashforwards, which are often used to create character depth, and which could not be discussed in the context of this paper. Identifying such strategies and comparing them across different TV series – as well as to films, written novels and performed theatre – could reveal further patterns with respect to characterisation across different styles and genres of fiction.

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Chapter 8
The Intersectional Heroine of Digital TV Narratives: Intertextuality, Affect and Fandom in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*

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Abstract

This work looks at *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (Stevenson 2018-2020) as a case study to explore how remakes made for digital TV can offer an intersectional outlook on society that goes hand in hand with a preoccupation for empathy and affect. The changes made in the series, as it compares to the original TV show, represent a challenge to the patriarchal and heteronormative discourses. Hence, this study delves into the portrayal of women as heroes, queerness, race, and other minorities in the series showing how intersectionality is at the heart of the production.

By paying attention to human relationships the series explicitly deals with ethical motivations, intersubjectivity, and themes of isolation and prejudice in a discursive manner, portraying characters engaging in conversation to work through their problems. The chapter approaches the text from the lenses of fan theory, especially focusing on productive fandom and meaning-making processes linked to the formation of emotional connections. Ultimately, the representation of affect in the series calls for a similar engaged and caring response from the audience. This study aims to show how digital TV narratives provide creators with the right circumstances to focus on identity politics with an intersectional approach.

Keywords: Identity Politics, Intertextuality, Affect, Female Heroes, She-Ra and the Princesses of Power.

1. Introduction

She-Ra: Princess of Power (1985-1986) was a cartoon television show that originated as a spin-off of the then very popular series *He-Man*. Throughout its sixteen months of running time, it aired a total of ninety-three episodes. It was created by Larry DiTillio and J. Michael Straczynski, produced by Filmation, and distributed by Group W Production. She-Ra comes from a line of various commercial interests. Not only it is a spin-off of a popular cartoon series, but *He-Man* itself was developed based on a Mattel toy line securing the Masters of the Universe franchise. The

initial strategy behind creating She-Ra's character falls under the umbrella of the Smurfette Principle (Pollit 1991). This concept is used to describe the inclusion of one single female character in a production that is otherwise completely male (see Sarkeesian 2011). However, in the case of *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, the commercial interest in attracting a wider audience and having a greater variety of toys to sell resulted in the show having an ample collection of female characters. Many of these characters also appear in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* as more rounded and diverse individuals. The main difference is that their presence is also foregrounded in the title. While the original only spoke of a single "princess" (i.e., She-Ra), the recent show refers to multiple "princesses". Furthermore, the show also moves away from the Smurfette Principle origin of the character by completely removing He-Man from the series.

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power is a remake or reboot that ran from November 2018 to May 2020. It has a total of fifty-two episodes divided into five seasons, and it was created by Noelle Stevenson.[1] It is produced by DreamWorks Animation and is a Netflix original series. Before delving into the content, there is a second notable change that provides important context to the shows' reception. While DiTillio and Straczynski's original ran on syndication, Stevenson's was released by season —from six to thirteen episodes— on Netflix. Audience engagement and media consumption patterns vary greatly from syndicated show's to television audiences consuming one episode a week and are even more different from those audiences of digital television that, by having multiple episodes made accessible at once are encourage to binge-watch their shows.

Media effects and audience behavior have been objects of study for many decades and the evolution in the understanding of mass media throughout the years is very notable. The field has moved from a focus on television as a central element in family regular gatherings and communal experience, and Harold Lasswell's study of propaganda to an acknowledgment of audiences' heterogeneity and a much more nuanced understanding of media effects (see Bryant and Thompson 2002; McQuail 2010). The evidence of a perpetually increasing fragmentation of mass audiences, along with technological advances, has resulted in both new types of televisual texts and new business models, leading to the creation of media products with a greater focus on maximizing audience engagement. With this in mind, this chapter aims to explore how these changing audiences are reflected in the content of digital

[1] Female pronouns (she/her) are used throughout this article to refer to Noelle Stevenson to represent their public gender identification at the time of the creation and airing of the series. However, it is important to note that Stevenson currently identifies as a transmasculine/gender fluid person. As of June 2021, Stevenson identifies with he/she/they pronouns.

television and whether, counting on seemingly more active audiences, they can play a relevant socio-political role.

One final explanatory note that contributes to the contextualization of the show is to determine what type of production *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* is. Considering it is not a fully original story with original characters, both 'remake' and 'reboot' have been used here to refer to Stevenson's She-Ra. However, I would argue that 'reboot' is more appropriate in this particular case. While these two concepts often overlap, William Proctor, a transmedia scholar, proposes that while a remake is a self-contained narrative, a reboot does what the word itself tells us: it "re-starts" (2012: 4). This idea of restarting the world is interesting when we look at the implications that the changes have, since some of them affect the nature of the show in terms of the political space it occupies as a popular culture product. Moreover, if we regard the shift from syndication to streaming as a medium variation, it could be argued that Stevenson's *She-Ra* goes beyond reboot and operates as an adaptation. According to Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn we can understand an adaptation as a "transposition", a "creative and interpretative act of appropriation" (2013: 8-9). In this sense, Stevenson appropriates the source material taking some of its ideas and filters them through her own subjectivity and identity as an author. Besides, the series is adapted it to a medium with different consumption patterns, to the new socio-political context, and to a new target audience.

In order to explore how the show relies on active engagement and affect to offer an intersectional world-view, this chapter will first look at the portrayal of the heroine. Many contemporary popular digital narratives offer young female characters that are far from those traditionally constructed through the male gaze (Mulvey 1975). However, these new interpretations of the female hero pose their own new challenges, as they have to hold up to various, sometimes contradictory, standards (see Bernárdez Rodal 2018). This exploration continues with an intersectional approach that centers on the way in which the series raises awareness through the inclusion of diverse perspectives with LGBTQ+, POC, and neurodiverse characters. The main objective of this section is to have a better understanding of how identity politics is engraved in every aspect of the series and how it compares to the original show.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned interest in audience engagement, the study will follow by providing an analysis of the show from the lenses of fan theory (Jenkins 1992, 2006; Hills 2006). Digital TV implies higher rates of decision-making regarding time, place, and watching-device, along with facilitating constant access and binge-watching, helping the creation of strong and active fan communities. Hence, this chapter looks into how this fosters the proliferation of transformative fandom as opposed to curative fandom (Grady 2016). Finally, having noted that *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* has a much stronger focus

on human relationships, friendship, forgiveness, and empathy, this chapter examines the key role that affects plays in connection to the presence of intertexts and allusions —considering both the ubiquitous popular culture references and the original series as such.

2. Portrayal of women as heroes

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope published *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* in 1981. Their work highlighted the importance of having female heroes "in the literature and myth of the culture" as a requirement for societies to understand and accept that women can be heroic (1981: 7). This became an issue of inclusion and representation in fiction that, forty years later, although not so flagrant, is still present. Largely, the default idea of the hero in US popular culture continues to be male. "By virtue of their sex [sic] and the stereotypical qualities associated with it, female protagonists nearly always start out as unlikely heroes" (Campbell 2014: 10). This is because the inclusion of female heroes still plays with the expectations of the audience. As an answer to this trend, Pearson and Pope suggest that it is necessary to reconstruct the myths and collective imagination that cause the audience to expect heroes to be male. Nonetheless, oftentimes representation in the form of mere inclusion is not enough.

In recent years, numerous studies have explored how the representation of power and the conflict between good and evil are not always reshaped by the role of female heroes (see Campbell 2014; Wright 2016; Bernárdez Rodal 2018). It is notable how female protagonists as heroines have gained prominence in mainstream Hollywood productions throughout the years. But in many cases, this inclusion either conforms to traditional narratives that portray gender in a very essentialist and binary way, or that have a limited understanding of female empowerment as simply filling in the shoes of the otherwise male hero. In the first case, conforming to gender stereotypes, the female hero is subservient to the superior male hero that reveals himself towards the end of the narrative restoring the patriarchal order. As Lori Campbell points out, female heroes appear frequently subordinated to a male protagonist (2014: 10). The second type of limited inclusion is based upon a gender swap that does not affect the myth as a whole. The entire story appears as a reproduction of age-old narratives that do not subvert our understanding of the concept of the hero.

A recent example that encompasses both of these criticisms to the portrayal of the female hero is Rey in the latest Star Wars trilogy (2015, 2017, 2019). On the one hand, many fans have pointed out that this trilogy was nothing more than a retelling of Luke Skywalker's story but with a female protagonist, adding nothing new to the plot. On the other hand, the story that vertebrates the trilogy and gets resolved in the final installment is ultimately Kylo Ren/Ben Solo's redemption arc. In this sense, the heroine's journey

becomes subservient to that of her male counterpart who, not by chance, was presented from the beginning as a conflicted and mysterious man who needed a (female) love interest to save him (Álvarez Trigo 2018). The bottom line, as Bernárdez Rodal argues, is that "conventional gender models are still the dominant ones […] but nowadays that power is more hidden, camouflaged, less visible" (2018: 17).

Thomas argues that Stevenson's She-Ra, despite some apparent subversion, still adheres to many of the tropes that Campbell noted in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, such as "the hero as lover", "the hero as world redeemer", and "the hero as warrior", along with the general structure of the narrative (2020: 3). However, there are further details in the show that challenge the underlying perpetuation of gender hegemony so common in contemporary female-hero narratives. Firstly, She-Ra's design challenges assumptions about how a female-presenting body should look. And, secondly, her attitude and human relationships vindicate the necessity of a female protagonist with a lack of male gaze. If we compare it to the original, the protagonists' transformations into She-Ra bear some crucial differences. The transformation scene can be interpreted as an act of (literal) female empowerment (see Napier 2001; Sugawa-Shimada 2011), but in the case of the 80's She-Ra, it was also designed to increase toy sales (see Allison 2006; Hartzheim 2016). By shifting the focus from the sales to the narrative, we see a more holistic representation of She-Ra's body in the transformation, which, along with the design, implies a clear lack of male gaze. It no longer features revealing clothing with, most notably, the absence of cleavage and the inclusion of the biking shorts underneath her skirt.

Furthermore, a change is also notable in her attitude towards fighting enemies when transforming into the powerful She-Ra. Dealing with different approaches to facing hardship and negotiating with others is key to add depth to the role of the female hero narrative. Some scholars such as Murdock have defended the feminine perspective as a way of approaching the creation of both fiction and non-fiction. Murdock proposes a new model of the hero's journey to fit "the female experience". She argues that "today's heroine" needs to establish "a positive relationship with her inner Man with a Heart", "find the voice of her Woman of Wisdom", and ultimately "heal her estrangement from the sacred feminine" (1991: 193). This perspective poses certain problems, as it implies an innate difference between male and female worldviews and general patterns of behavior. It is far from this study's objective to suggest that there exists a female style of heroism that is intrinsically different from that of the male hero. Despite the strong focus on the presence of a heroine instead of a hero, the removal of He-Man, and the interest in affect, the argument does not imply that there is an implicit gender binary. As Downing puts it in the Foreword of the 2020 edition of Murdock's work, *The Heroine's Journey* "belongs very much to the zeitgeist of the particular period" during which it was written and published, corresponding to its contemporary "second wave of feminism" (Downing, 2020: xii). The analysis

offered in this chapter stays away from such conceptualizations of the "sacred feminine", arguing instead that there is no gendered essence that necessitates a specific narrative and motivates a specific arc or behavior. What is important to note is how all the changes undergone by She-Ra's character with the new adaptation imply a notable subversion of the hero's journey that goes beyond the inclusion of a woman as a protagonist, as well as beyond Murdock's idea of heroines having to reconcile the female and masculine in order to connect to their "sacred feminine" and achieve their journey as heroes.

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power is an iteration of the journey of the hero that is not built according to traditional conceptions of masculinity and the 'male way' of doing things. But rather, one of the ways in which She-Ra subverts the hero's narrative is by leaning more heavily on femininity (Thomas 2020: 10). The show's reliance on what would traditionally be considered feminine aesthetics and a caring attitude toward her loved ones is an affirmation that feminine traits are not anti-heroic or undesirable in a hero. This is not because she is a woman, but because the characters and narrative rely on traits stereotypically considered feminine to solve their problems and face their battles. The dichotomy in opposing feminine and masculine here relies upon traditional assumptions and stereotypes of gendered behavior. Through it, the show suggests that facing the hero's journey through a feminine lens can be adopted by anyone regardless of their gender. This approach can also be observed in other characters. For instance, Lord Hordak, who is the show's main antagonist at the beginning, turns out to be oppressed under the rule of Horde Prime. While Hordak progressively leans more and more into 'feminine' traits as he invests in his friendship with Entrapta, Horde Prime exacerbates the masculine idea of control and patriarchal order. It is precisely through Hordak's 'emasculation'—once again, in terms of traditional assumptions about the male/female traits dichotomy—that his character grows and finds his redemption. In quite a similar way, Catra finds peace and love by admitting her feelings for Adora (She-Ra) and gives up the though aggressive pose she has been trying to uphold.

3. Intersectionality and Representation

As argued before, when representation is equated with the inclusion of characters from a given minority without further nuance, it tends to fall short. From a committed socio-political point of view, fruitful representation lies in having a varied group of political identities that are understood not only in the character being reduced to one single trait of a minority (e.g., having dark skin) but their identity is manifold and permeates different aspects of the narrative, style, and production. This type of honest and mindful representation can be found in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* in three different aspects: the visual design of the characters, the characterization

(which is closely related to the feminine traits discussed above, and the inclusion of desirable alternative masculinities), and the people involved in the project. Moreover, all of these aspects are interconnected, providing an intersectional overall milieu.

Finally, it should be mentioned that *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* is not the first series that presents the characteristics here discussed. The road has been paved by other cartoon shows such as *Adventure Time* (2010-2018) and *Steven's Universe* (2013-2019) that also focus on various elements discussed in this chapter such as alternative masculinities, gender identity, and non-heteronormative sexuality. The interest in exploring *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* as a case study lies in how different political identities are heavily intertwined and, especially, in the possibility to compare it to the previous show from which it is adapted.

The redesign that the characters underwent signals how identity politics is engraved in every aspect of the series prior to the development of the story arc and script. The first noticeable change in character design—at least, the first that was revealed to audiences during the show's promotion—is that She-Ra is now quite brawny with marked biceps. Before the show premiered, when Stevenson shared the preview of the character design on her social media it immediately sparked angry responses online, "a certain sect of fans [declared] that She-Ra [was] no longer appealing, no longer sexy, and perhaps no longer an object of their sexual attention" (Abda-Santos, 2018). Many of these complaints on social media have since been deleted. Nonetheless, they illustrate the still hegemonic expectations that associate physically powerful appearance with male heroes and sexiness with female heroines.

When we look at the other characters in the series, it becomes clear that there is a desire from part of the creator to include different body types and to avoid the assumption that there is one single overarching beauty standard. In the 2018 show, Bow has dark skin and is far less muscular. It is important to also note that the inclusion of people of color is not simply done through a redesign. It corresponds to the actors who portray each character. Moreover, their racial identity is not reinforced by any exaggerated stereotypical accent as it has been done before in popular media, for instance, with Apu in *The Simpsons* (Hsu 2017). Some other examples of the variety of body types in the show worth pointing out are Glimmer, who is curvier and has smaller breasts (the latter being the case with all the women in the show); Mermista is also a woman of color (WOC) and wears less revealing clothing; Frosta is much younger, wears appropriate clothing, and is a WOC; and Scorpia is a tall woman with a very broad body frame and short hair.

In terms of characterization, we can also identify the representation of neurodivergent characters with Entrapta. Many fans noted from the beginning that she appeared to be somewhere on the autistic spectrum and Stevenson confirmed so on her Twitter account: "we wrote her that way. One of our crewmembers was on the spectrum and related to her specifically, and had a huge part in shaping her story and character!" (2020). Once again, the background research done for the character

evidences the creator's objective of having fair representation in her production. By having actors, creators, and consulting staff to develop characters' personalities and backgrounds the writers managed to avoid harmful stereotypes of neurodivergent characters, who are often used for the purpose of cheap laughs, for instance, Sheldon Cooper in *The Big Bang Theory* (Netzer 2017).

In terms of sexual identity, there are several openly queer couples in the series such as Bow's parents, Spinnerella and Netossa, and Adora (She-Ra) and Catra. The topic of diverse sexual orientations is treated throughout the show as a non-issue. All the characters accept that others might have either same-sex and opposite-sex relationships without further dilemma. We can also find variety in terms of gender representation in the show, with the character of Double Trouble, played by non-binary actor Jacob Tobia. The character, who is a woman in the original *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, has the magical ability to physically change into anyone, and "[this] act of transformation […] unveils the constructive nature of gender" (Vermeil 2020) and as Double Trouble themselves puts it "we all wear costumes" (Stevenson, 2019: S4E2, 13:50). The inclusion of a non-binary character showcased the lack of awareness that prevails regarding the use of inclusive and non-gendered language. Since English does not have so many gender-markers as other languages such as Spanish do, it is less often that the script needs to include non-binary pronouns and referents. Nonetheless, every time any character addresses Double Trouble—even those framed as evil (Brown 2019) —it is through "they" pronouns. In several translations all over the world, as López notes, from Spanish and Polish to Chinese, Double Trouble was vastly misgendered, sometimes with female pronouns and other times with male pronouns. The mistake was corrected in most cases after audience complaints (López 2020: 305).

Briefly pre-empting the discussion around the fan community, it is worth mentioning, in relation to gender representation, that these aspects of queer inclusion attracted many people to the fandom (fan community). Through online discussions centred on these issues of sexual and gender identity, some members of the fandom developed the theory that Bow was a trans male character. This conjecture was strongly motivated by a scene where the three main characters visit some hot springs and he is seen wearing what appears to be a binder. Stevenson has said about the idea of Bow being trans in an interview with *Digital Spy*: "It's a fan theory that I'm very, very fond of. I think that if anyone —especially trans people— can see themselves in Bow, it's incredible," but also: "It is something I'm a little hesitant to canonise, because, honestly, I would have cast a trans actor if that was something I wanted to [do]" (Alexander & Opi 2020). This, once again, speaks positively about the intention of making inclusion a very real thing behind the scenes. Stevenson adds too, that regardless of the trans issue, she is proud to present a character "who redefines masculinity in just a very positive, aspirational way" (Alexander & Opi 2020). All in

all, these elements reinforce the self-awareness behind diversity in the show. Moreover, in her comments about Bow Stevenson highlights the aforementioned value in portraying new types of masculinity that do not shy away from the stereotypical female traits and that are often dismissed in heroic narratives.

4. Fandom's Affect

The way audiences engage with a media product and evolve into fandom is a key element to understand how digital TV narratives are likely to be the ideal platform for intersectional narratives. Targeting a specific demographic with the purpose of increasing audience ratings has been used for years. There are many researchers in marketing, such as Kozinets (2001), who explore fan behavior and active consumer culture. In this context, one notable element that appeals to fandom is the inclusion of references. These intertextual elements appeal to in-group knowledge, as well as to their expected common tastes and interests. The existence of a common cultural history contributes to the emotional attachment that audiences have to the series.

In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, the design falls quite nicely under the umbrella of anime style. It is notable how it explicitly takes elements of the cute aspects and visual details employed in the genre, such as the shinning eyes, the little stars when someone is excited about something or trying to look *kawaii* (cute), and even the three red lines in the cheeks that signal blushing which appear even in She-Ra's enemies and seemingly tough individuals. We can also see the influence of anime in Adora's transformation into She-Ra, which exhibits great similarities in design and color palette to previous anime shows such as *Sailor Moon*. Another explicit reference to anime is made in an episode in which Glimmer is fantasizing about being a spy and we see a short sequence emulating the design and style of *Cowboy Bebop* (Stevenson 2019: S2E4, 5:00). This suggests, on the one hand, how the interests and tastes of the directors, designers, and writers are reflected in their creations; but also, on the other hand, it clearly defines the target audience of the media product and highlights the key role of nostalgia in contemporary popular culture.

Focusing on the importance of emotional involvement, Hills (2002) has criticized the first generation of fan researchers for focusing on the cognitive dimensions of meaning production rather than on the emotional dimension. Meaning, in fan culture, is never divorced from the emotional investment both in the texts and the cultural practices that surround it. Famous fan researcher Henry Jenkins argues: "Fans would reject such a clear separation between feelings and thoughts: their favored texts are both tools for thought and spaces for emotional exploration" (2006: 5).

Fandom practices have evolved quite a lot since they began being explored in the context of, among others, the *Star Trek* fandom. Nonetheless, some key points remain true; such as the importance that fandom has in the creation of identity (Jenkins 1992). The emotional potential lies in finding content that speaks to the audience member

through a sense of recognition that goes beyond the mere classification of a character as a woman or as lesbian and makes them search for others with similar concerns. Especially now in the Internet era, it is easier to find others with corresponding interests and have communities develop. The role that attachment and emotion play becomes more prevalent as the fandom object mediates relationships, friendships, and even artistic creation in the case of transformative fandom. This type of fandom, as opposed to curative fandom, refers to those practices that engage in the creation of new content rather than simply accumulating knowledge about their fandom object (Grady 2016). Hence, although the accumulation of knowledge is never completely overlooked, transformative fandom relies more heavily on circles of affect. In this context, the common tastes among fans that go beyond the initial object of fandom are reinforced and perpetuated. This is not to say that a transformative approach is always positive or that it always leads to a progressive result, but it is often the case.

Among their main activities, fans write fanfiction, draw fanart, cosplay, and develop theories such as the one mentioned above regarding Bow's possible trans identity. For instance, cosplaying can have a very strong impact on a persons' life helping them build their inner circle and procuring a "sense of family" (Riedel 2019). Additionally, the subversive power of creating fanart (Robinson 2018) can help fans explore their interest in a specific character, as well as their own gender and sexuality within the context of transformative fandom spaces which have been traditionally dominated by women (see Jenkins, 1992, 2006; Hills 2002).

Having a creator that is part of the various fandoms referenced in the text, *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* appeals to greater emotional involvement. But, most importantly, beyond the context of adjacent fandoms, the development of emotional attachment is called upon by the inclusion of affect within the narrative itself. The show explores the complicated aspects of friendship but, at the same time, it does not shy away from explicitly showing love amongst friends, taking the time to portray their experiences of love and care. Ultimately, by portraying actual nuanced conflict and having characters who are hurt by others' actions openly discuss their feelings, the show manages to engage audiences in akin emotion.

The elements that contribute to the creation of emotional attachment in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* can be divided into two major groups. The first one is the nuanced approach to the representation of minorities and how the show situates itself in the contemporary socio-political context. Audiences identify with the characters via their sexual and racial identity and through its feminist outlook that encompasses both the representation of women as well as a presentation of alternative masculinities, having men engage more openly in caring interpersonal relationships. And, most importantly, how all the inclusion is done taking into account who is behind the production and design. The second aspect relates both to content and character design. Through intertextual referents and allusions, the show appeals to the target/expected audience.

Affect is the common aspect that vertebrates all these elements. It can be recognized in how characters communicate their feelings, and in how audiences increase their affection for the show through recognition and nostalgia. It is also introduced through the way the script is enacted and how dialogue is constructed. Looking at how characters communicate their emotions and discuss their feelings with certain speech patterns and style helps contemporary audiences and minority groups connect with the media product.

For instance, at the beginning of the last season, Scorpia is trying to bond with Catra "outside office hours" as she feels underappreciated as a friend. Shortly after, she discusses her feelings of rejections sitting down with Adora and Sea Hawk.

> [Scorpia] "No matter what I do, I can't see to break down her walls. […] I wish she could see me as being worth her time too."
>
> [Sea Hawk, tearing up] "I—I know how you feel. I mean, just once I'd like to hang out with Mermista and her friends. […] Why don't they want me around?"
>
> [Scorpia] "I hear you. Catra's been so busy since she got promoted but she still always expects me to make time for her. Does she even understand how much I do for her?" […]
>
> [Adora] "You know, you guys are really great. You're just, like, the best. You're good friends and good people." (Stevenson 2020: T2E5, 16:00-19:00)

With this exchange, Scorpia has a bonding experience with Sea Hawk as they learn that they have had similar feelings of rejection and inadequacy. The situation is resolved through a slow-paced conversation in which they tell each other anecdotes about the moments when they have felt left behind and have had their feelings overlooked. The resolution comes when Adora tells them very openly that she likes and appreciates them. This helps both Scorpia and Sea Hawk come to the conclusion that they are in fact worthy of love. Hence, the scene concludes with them both stating good things about themselves. In relation to the speech, it is worth noting the use of signifiers of contemporary speech patterns and word use in expressions such as "I hear you" and the use of "like" as a filler word.

Several aspects that have to do with discourse, prosody, and the use of slang (all often lost in translation) can be found in the narrative. Some of the elements that relate to speech, modulation, and word-choice are key in character construction. One notable example is the way that Mermista, one of the princesses fighting alongside She-Ra, speaks. She has a very evident vocal fry, which, in connection to her character's personality constructed through her attitude, has clear connotations—there have been studies on how people respond negatively to fryers, especially when they are women (Gross 2015). The actor that portrays Mermista, Vella Lovell, does in fact have a vocal fry that is noticeable in interviews (see Build Series 2018). The positive inclusion of the vocal fry can be traced back to how the series avoids representing accents as a form of stereotyping. It doesn't take the vocal fry to construct a stereotypical character (despite the connotations) but because it is simply the way that the

character speaks. Instead of causing scorn, her vocal fry naturalizes the character. This contrasts with more traditional representations of both accents and voices that have been extensively used at their most innocent for comedic purposes, and at their worst for explicitly sexist and racist portrayals. Essentially, this constitutes an interesting line of inquiry to further explore in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*.

5. Conclusion: Why Digital TV

Contrary to the original series, the 2018 show has a much stronger focus on human relationships, friendship, forgiveness, and empathy. It explicitly deals with ethical motivations, intersubjectivity, and themes of isolation and prejudice, with the characters engaging in conversation about them. The show carefully constructs a world that relies on the common interests of its audience based on intertextuality, meta-references, and allusions; and at the same time is careful to be truly inclusive both in terms of sexuality and race. Most importantly, it engages in a discursive practice centered on emotion and affect that relates to the formation of identity in fandom.

One of the advantages of streaming is that people who dislike the content can comfortably avoid it. Unwilling audiences are not going to encounter it when changing channels on TV and, based on their interests, the Netflix algorithm is unlikely to show them the series, easily preventing backlash. This is evidenced in the immense decrease in criticism that Stevenson's She-Ra received from the first season onwards. News pieces from when the show premiered reported extremely low reviews online, which is no longer the case. Streaming services imply higher rates of decision-making regarding time, place, and watching-device, along with facilitating constant access and binge-watching, helping the creation of strong and active fan communities. This contributes to the creation of echo chambers. It benefits the industry from the point of view of both marketing and not being challenging to that section of the public that rejects this type of product upfront.

It is worth looking at how the new space that streaming grants us facilitates creations that promote diversity and affect. It has always been easier to start by opening up spaces in the margins. It seems that big production companies are more likely to open up a space for counterhegemonic content within streaming platforms since such a space can be at the same time in the margins and centered. In this way, they manage to avoid criticism and complaints while still being able to profit from those audiences interested in more intersectional content. In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power,* we see how increasing diversity in Digital TV is facilitated due to the more segmented public and the creation of echo chambers characteristic of the Internet. While it is not always positive that the Internet dynamics fully permeate TV watching practices—at the risk of becoming little isolated communities instead of practical and effective inclusion—it allows creators to access an easier path to mainstream culture that traditional business models for television would not allow.

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Chapter 9
The discursive representation of domestic violence in *Big Little Lies: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the Cycle of Violence*

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Abstract

Differently to previous patriarchal fiction created by mainstream screen culture (Mulvey 1989), Western media seem to be progressively showing an interest towards feminist concerns. Such political endeavour has materialised in a growing visibility of Violence Against Women (VAW) as a subplot (Shoos 2017) and the rise of new sub-genres such as domestic noir (Joyce 2018). Precisely inscribed in these two, television series *Big Little Lies* features the abusive marital relationship of the Wrights. It is this form of coercive control and its three-phased Cycle of Violence (CoV) (Walker 1979; 2009) that I engage with in this study. The research resorts to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as its general approach and aims to explore how Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities are discursively constructed through the CoV. An analytical framework consisting of the CoV and the behavioural tactics characteristic of coercive control shed light on the discourse strategies deployed during each phase. Results indicate a canonical use of the latter through Perry's abusive character and Celeste's de-victimisation, as she finally breaks the CoV. These findings highlight the series' ideological positioning towards condemning domestic violence and stress the pedagogic potential of domestic noir.

Keywords: VAW, Domestic Violence, Cycle of Violence, FCDA, Televisual Discourse.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) consists of a pattern of abusive behaviours whereby a cohabitant controls the conduct of another through fear, humiliation and emotional, sexual or physical injury (United Nations 2021). While men may also be subjected to it, DV continues to be commonplace for women on a universal scale (Myhill 2017: 33). Since its inception, domestic noir has been instrumental in addressing the relationship between DV and patriarchy (Joyce 2018: 2). This chapter offers an exploration of the discourse used to represent the DV experience in the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies* (Vallée 2017). By focusing on the abusive marital relationship of the Wrights, I analyse how Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities are discursively

constructed through the Cycle of Violence (CoV) (Walker 1979). Such theory accounts for the repetitive pattern that characterises the DV experience. To this end, the present study resorts to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar 2007).

Violence Against Women (VAW) has attracted scholarly attention from within the area of linguistics in recent years. As previous research has noted (O'Connor 1995: 310, as cited in Bou-Franch 2014: 177; Silva 2017: 1), language plays an instrumental role in perpetrating gendered ideologies of hate that ultimately lead to the exercise of VAW. Accordingly, this study is premised on the belief that, due to its ubiquity, *televisual discourse* (Piazza, Bednarek & Rossi 2011) constitutes a priority area of action from where all forms of VAW may be challenged. Although corpus-based analysis of televisual discourse is a flourishing area of research (Bednarek 2010; 2011; 2012; 2015; this volume, Gregori-Signes 2017; Reichelt 2020), there is a lack of investigations on the discursive construction of DV from a feminist perspective. This study aims to precisely bridge this gap in the literature.

The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 2 is divided into three subsections that offer a review of the relevant literature. Section 2.1 is concerned with the way in which domestic noir offers an alternative to the patriarchal *male gaze* (Mulvey 1975). Section 2.2 offers a brief overview of the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies* and provides an insight into international research on the series' portrayal of DV. Section 2.3 brings into focus the CoV and the behavioural dynamics characteristic of coercive control relationships. Section 3 offers methodological details on the design of this study (i.e., a description of the corpus, research framework and procedure for analysis). Section 4 contains a qualitative analysis of the CoV as constructed through Perry and Celeste's characters in *Big Little Lies*. By way of addressing its research question, the chapter finalises with some concluding remarks.

2. Background

2.1. Framing domestic violence: from male gaze to domestic noir

It is only recently that feminist thought and the Hollywood industry have converged (Mulvey 2011: 15). Rather, American filmmaking has been historically characterised by patriarchal narratives that represent the female body as the site of visual pleasure (Mulvey 1975). In the particular case of film noir, such fetishism has traditionally led to the creation of two feminine roles that are deeply interconnected with misogyny and violence. On the one hand, the role of the *victim* and, on the other hand, that of the sexualised *femme fatale* (Bornay 1990: 200; Bonovich 2015).

Although some scholars have conceptualised the latter as an indication of women empowerment (Grossman 2009: 2, as cited in Farrimond 2018: 5), it has also been argued that femmes fatales are not Hollywood's emissaries of feminism, but a projection of men's fears towards it (Doane 2008: 16). In the noir, femmes fatales are

independent, mysterious and intelligent women whose enticing allure is deployed over men with the sole objective of fulfilling their personal desires (Greven 2011: 68). They are presented as sexual objects worthy of the *male gaze* (Mulvey 1975: 62) attention and, though male protagonists might momentarily submit to their will, their ultimate death functions as a reminder of women's locus in patriarchy (Doane 2008: 16).

With the advent of third and fourth wave feminism, however, female representation has become a central concern in the neo-noir. After years of being depicted as disposable and decorative figures (Short 2019: 9), women are now finally allowed to be morally complex on screen (Hohenstein & Thalmann 2019). According to Redhead (2018: 117), the recent adoption of the *female gaze* in contemporary noir has marked a turning point in terms of representing women's anxieties within patriarchal society. In a world where media outlets (Santaemilia & Maruenda-Bataller 2014; Maruenda-Bataller 2021) and social networks (Palomino-Manjón 2020) frequently discuss gender-based violence, it is no longer reasonable for the Hollywood industry to turn a blind eye to VAW.

Precisely, domestic noir has recently emerged as a sub-genre within film noir that gives central stage to women's stories of DV (Shoos 2017). In particular, these stories offer complex takes on the gendered violence surrounding domesticity, motherhood, family, sexuality and marriage (Joyce 2018: vii). While the home can be seen by some as a safe space, domestic noir is premised on the feminist belief that it can also be any woman's cage for private torment (Ibid). Some Hollywood examples that bear witness to such ideological advances are *Gone Girl* (Fincher 2014), *The Girl on the Train* (Taylor 2016) and *The Invisible Man* (Whannell 2020).

Importantly for my purposes here, DV has also provided a steady stream of plots and sub-plots for video-on-demand television series over the past decade (Reinhard 2019: 1046): e.g., *Big Little Lies* (Vallée 2017), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Barker et al. 2017), *Sharp Objects* (Vallée 2018) and *The Undoing* (Bier 2020). According to Hadida et al. (2020), this direct connection between Hollywood's feminist ideological advance and that of online streaming services such as Netflix, HBO or Amazon (Prime) derives from Hollywood's current identity crisis and its urgency to shift into new production and distribution paradigms.

By way of introduction to the series under scrutiny, the next section provides an insight into the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies*, as well as an overview of international research evidence on the series' portrayal of DV.

2.2. *Big Little Lies*: an overview and extant research

Big Little Lies premiered in 2017 on HBO. As Joyce (2018: 6) contends, 2017 was the year of DV in fiction, film and television. In the wake of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, a myriad of global bestsellers echoed the time's social concerns on sexual abuse, VAW and reproductive rights. HBO series *Big Little Lies* was no exception. Produced by the Hollywood female-driven media company *Hello Sunshine*, *Big Little Lies* narrates the story of five upper middle class mothers whose lives are connected by VAW.

In this sense, the series is not so much a whodunnit as it is a polysemic work where five different accounts of VAW are woven together (Avanzas Álvarez: 2018 182): Jane is a survivor of date rape; Renata is financially abused by her husband; Bonnie was maltreated by her mother; Madeline is abandoned by her ex-husband; and Celeste suffers from conjugal terrorism. Although portrayed, at first, as somehow antagonistic, all five women finally find common ground after Celeste's husband, Perry, publicly assaults her. Enraged by the abuse, Bonnie shoves Perry off a stairway and all five women make a pact of silence in order to protect her (Ibid).

Tellingly, Short (2019: 56) observes that female vigilantism is a burgeoning theme in the small screen. Perhaps because abused women often find themselves abandoned by judicial systems in sexist societies (MacKinnon 1989: 237; Ehlich 2014), domestic noir presents the female outlaw as an opportunity to avenge patriarchy's heinous crimes. However, as Alsop (2019) observes, *Big Little Lies* does not solely rely on one individual female character to this end. Instead, the series resorts to a sororal rhetoric as all five women band together "for the purposes of solace and self-protection" (Ibid: 1030).

Although the study of this series has fallen, primarily, within the areas of cultural and media studies (Alsop 2019; Reinhard 2019; Cambra-Badii et al. 2019; Parra García et al. 2019), forensic analysts have also been concerned with its portrayal of VAW. For their part, Hicks and Friedman (2020: 141) contend that *Big Little Lies* offers an accurate example of DV, as it renders its characteristic CoV visible through the relationship of the Wrights. This thesis is also developed by Avanzas Álvarez (2018), who contributes a feminist account on Moriarty's original *Little Lies* (2014) novel. As of special interest for this study, I turn next to introduce the CoV and its relation with DV. This is accompanied by an insight into the behavioural dynamics of coercive control relationships.

2.3. The Cycle of Violence as coercive control

Owing to the trailblazing investigations of Walker (1979), it is currently noted that DV, as a form of coercive control, is articulated in three phases of escalating abuse: (1) the tension building phase; (2) the acute battering incident; and (3) the honeymoon phase (Walker 2009: 91) (see Fig. 1). These are described in detail in what follows.

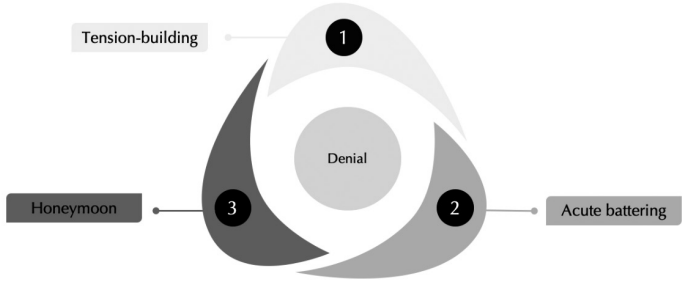

Fig. 1. Diagram illustrative of Walker's (1979) Cycle of Violence.

Importantly, Phase 1 or *tension-building* is characterised by verbal abuse (e.g., name-calling, insults and threats), intimidation and social isolation (Ibid; Jackson 2007: 167). Its trigger may be any small domestic inconvenience that disturbs the abuser's sense of control (Walker 2009: 91). While this phase may last variably, the level of violence increases as the phase expands over time. During this stage, the abused tends to use anger reduction techniques in order to placate further harm. These may include anticipating the abuser's needs, moods, or rather, avoiding their encounter (Wilson 2019: 1).

Phase 2 or *acute battering* is marked by "the uncontrollable discharge of the tensions that have built up during phase one" (Walker 2009: 94). Although it might be the shortest of all three phases, its verbal and physical impact is always the most injurious (Wilson 2019: 1). Injuries may range from bruises, cuts, broken bones, rape, disfigurement, miscarriage, to loss of life (Jackson 2007: 224).

The final stage or *honeymoon* begins when the abuser decides to stop battering the abused (Walker 2009: 94). This stage typically involves regret on the part of the abuser, who will shower the abused with promises, apologies, compliments, affectionate names, occasional indulgences and an absence of tension while covertly demonstrating omnipotence (Jackson 2007: 167). As Avanzas Álvarez (2018: 184) puts it, "this behaviour also acts as a positive reinforcement for the victim to stay in the relationship by giving her the false impression of power". Once he feels he has regained enough control, a new CoV will commence (Wilson 2019: 2). Only will the CoV be broken if the abused abandons her state of *denial* (see Fig. 1).

Against this backdrop, I pose the following research question and formulate the hypothesis below.

> RQ. How are Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities discursively constructed through the CoV?
>
> H. Considering the above-mentioned scholarly research into *Big Little Lies* as an example of domestic noir, I hypothesise that the discourse used to represent Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities will indeed be representative of the CoV. Different discourse strategies are, thus, expected to be deployed in each stage of the cycle.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus description

Two datasets comprising the two seasons of *Big Little Lies* were used in the present study: Transcripts - Big Little Lies (TS-BLL) (ca. 75.000 words) and Cycle of Violence - Big Little Lies (CoV-BLL) (ca. 8.000 words). On the one hand, TS-BLL consists of a processed version of fan transcripts from the series extracted from the website *Forever Dreaming*. It covers all 14 episodes and it is made up of word-to-word dialogue and names of speakers (e.g., Madeline, Perry, Bonnie). In this respect, TS-BLL is a specialised corpus representative of this television series. On the other hand, CoV-BLL is a subcorpus of TS-BLL that focuses on the abusive relationship of the Wrights. To such end, CoV-BLL comprises Perry and Celeste's dialogue interactions, names of speakers and stage directions related to the couple's communicative exchanges.

3.2. Framework and procedure

Given my aim to study how discourse is used to represent the DV experience in the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies*, this investigation approaches the series from a discursive perspective. More specifically, it draws on an inter-disciplinary research framework that brings together media, cultural studies and linguistics while addressing them from a critical feminist lens. In this regard, the present study adopts Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar 2007) as its general approach. The latter defines this study's political positioning by approaching televisual discourse (Piazza, Bednarek & Rossi 2011) as a social practice traditionally underpinned by a patriarchal gender ideology (Mulvey 2011: 15). As per its analytical framework, I adopt a qualitative approach to the series and deploy an analytical toolkit consisting of Walker's (1979) CoV and the behavioural strategies that make up the dynamics of coercive control relationships (see Section 2.3). As of special interest to the readership, *discourse strategies* are understood here as those verbal moves speakers deploy whenever they aim at understanding in a particular conversational context (Gumperz 1982).

The analytical procedure in my work involved several steps. Firstly, all fan transcripts were manually processed and checked against the actual episodes. This was instrumental in building the TS-BLL corpus. All significant non-verbal information (i.e., stage directions) related to Perry and Celeste's shared scenes was subsequently annotated in the CoV-BLL corpus. The careful, discourse-analytic reading of this latter dataset allowed me to identify the discourse strategies present in its dialogues. In order to scrutinise the data, the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo 12 was used. Note that only the BLL-CoV sub corpus was used after this analytical stage. Once imported the data, three higher-level categories or Parent nodes (i.e., *Phase 1–Tension Building*, *Phase 2–Acute Battering* and *Phase 3–Honeymoon*) were

manually generated via inductive coding. Sub-categories within these nodes or Child nodes were also generated and labelled after Jackson's (2007) behavioural strategies of coercive control. Figure 2 is illustrative in this respect.

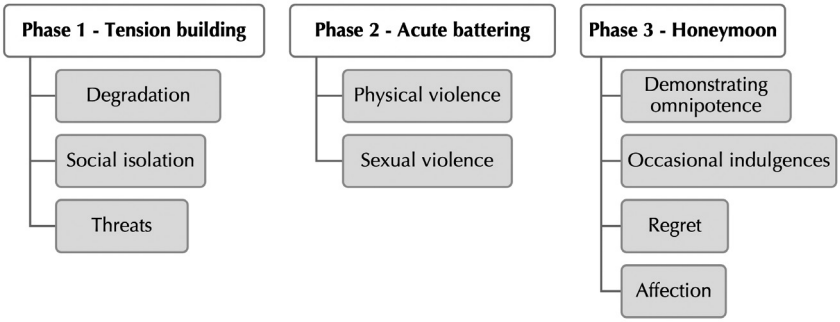

Fig. 2. Adopted coding taxonomy with Parent nodes and Child nodes.

This hierarchical taxonomy was complemented with further sub-categories that contained the discourse strategies identified in the corpus. This final step allowed me to map the discursive dynamics that characterise Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities with each of the CoV's phases.

In summary, my analysis involved a series of qualitative steps that were instrumental in identifying how the fictional identities of Celeste and Perry Wright are discursively constructed through the CoV in the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies*. Qualitative results are presented next in Section 4.

4. Results and discussion

This section offers an in-depth qualitative exploration of the discursive realisation of the DV experience in the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies*. As discussed in Section 2, domestic noir is a capacious sub-genre within the noir that encompasses realist writing about DV (Joyce 2018: 3). This makes it an ideal site for my analysis.

Regarding the BLL-CoV corpus, a total of six CoV were identified as to take place across the series. After subjecting the BLL-CoV corpus to qualitative scrutiny, it was possible to discern the discourse strategies that characterise each phase.

4.1. Phase 1 - Tension building

As set out in Figure 2 (Section 3.2), three Child nodes aided in identifying Perry and Celeste's discourse strategies within this first phase of the CoV (i.e., degradation, social isolation and threats). For ease of exposition, all linguistic examples are next grouped by the above-mentioned sub-categories and presented by chronological order of appearance.

Three discourse strategies are recurrently deployed by Perry to degrade Celeste: *Commands*, *self-victimisation* and *blaming*. The following examples are illustrative in this regard.

(1) Perry: *Well, so what happened with that girl?*
Celeste: *A boy tried to choke her.*
[…]
Perry: *Well, to be safe, we should tell Josh and Max to keep their distance from him.*
Celeste: *I don't think that's gonna be necessary.*
[…]
Perry: ***They are not to associate with him.***
Celeste: *You are being ridiculous*.
Perry: [grabs Celeste by the neck]. ***The boys will stay away from that kid.***
Celeste: *Take your hand off me*. [S1E01]

In Example (1), Perry asks Celeste about Renata's daughter being physically abused by a still-unknown classmate. Interestingly, this dialogue signals the onset of the first CoV in the first episode of the series. This is the first time the audience perceives a gradual escalation of tension between the couple. As marked in bold, Perry attempts twice to subordinate Celeste's will through a command. In the second attempt, however, and in view of her firm line, the level of violence increases as Perry co-deploys physical violence with another directive to establish the rule of his will. This concurs with Bancroft (2002: 384), who observes that major forms of domestic abuse are likely to follow if the abusee does not submit to minor forms of coercion. In contrast, self-victimisation and blaming precede the second acute battering incident in the second episode:

(2) Perry: ***I changed my flight so I could be here on their first day of school. And then I don't even get to go in the building.***
Celeste: *I understand, but I just—*
Perry: *And for you to just dismiss my being upset about it?*
Celeste: *I didn't dismiss anything. I just don't want to be blamed—*
Perry: ***Yeah, you know what I think? You didn't want me to be there for orientation.***
Celeste: *What?*
Perry: ***You decided to have that moment all to yourself. Mommy and her boys.***
Celeste: *You are such a child.*
Perry: [Slaps Celeste on the face]. [S1E02]

According to Evans (2010: 120), both blaming and self-victimisation are often deployed by batterers with a manipulative end. Precisely, in (2), Perry's abuse towards Celeste starts as psychological, as he diffuses his parenting responsibility and passes it on to her. In view of Celeste's defiant response (i.e., *You are such a child*), he unleashes a barrage of physical aggression, which, again, leads to Phase 2 in the cycle (See Example 2 in Section 4.2).

Two further discursive tactics are used by Perry for social isolation purposes: *interrogation* and *commands*. Example (3) corresponds to the fourth episode of the

series and constitutes the onset of its third CoV. In this case, Perry discovers that Celeste is trying to resume her career after prying into her closet. Undoubtedly, this new discovery upsets Perry's sense of control over Celeste's career. In order to restore it, he uses interrogation and tries to constrict the abusee's independent decision-making power by using the pronoun *we*:

(3) Perry: ***Are you practicing law again?***
Celeste: *Not practicing law, just going to a meeting.*
[…]
Perry: ***Okay. How come we didn't have a conversation about this?*** [S1E04]

The dialogue in (4) corresponds to a later scene in the same fourth episode. As may be gathered from the excerpt, Perry learns that his minor verbal coercion in (3) has been unsuccessful. This time, he takes a step further and uses a command followed by physical abuse (Bancroft 2002: 151), thus leading to a new acute battering incident:

(4) Perry: *So, a court appearance now, huh?*
Celeste: *Probably not, but what's the big deal?*
Perry: *Well, the big deal is that you lied to me. You said it'd be one meeting yesterday and then it'd be over with.*
Celeste: *I never said that.*
[…]
Perry: ***I don't want you doing this.***
Celeste: ***Well, it's not your fucking call.***
Perry: [Grabs Celeste by the neck]. [S1E04]

Particularly interesting is how Celeste's discourse strategies of resistance (See Examples 1 [i.e., *You are being ridiculous*], 2 [i.e., *You are such a child*] and 4 [i.e., *Well, it's not your fucking call*]) function as a trigger for Perry's violent explosions. This pattern may be explained by Berkowitz (1989) frustration-aggression hypothesis, which asserts that the higher the level of frustration in abusers, the higher their level of aggression (as cited in Okun 1986: 105).

In addition, verbal threats were also found to be characteristic of this phase in the corpus. According to Morewitz (2008: 6), threats are a common strategy among DV assailants. This is the case of Example (5), where Perry verbally threatens Celeste to death after she defends herself from being raped by him.

(5) Celeste: […] *I'm gonna get you some ice.*
Perry: ***You are lucky I didn't kill you.***
Celeste: *What did you say?*
Perry: *You could have done permanent damage.* [S1E06]

4.2. **Phase 2 - Acute battering**

Differently to the findings for the tension building phase (Section 4.1), dialogue during the acute battering stage is scant in the corpus, whereas stage directions abound. Indeed, Wilson (2019: 1) reports that lavish physical and sexual violence, as opposed to verbal abuse, are prone to occur during this phase of the cycle. This is best illustrated by the following six examples, each corresponding to a different acute battering incident in the series:

(6) Perry: [**Grabs** Celeste by the neck].
[…]
Celeste: *I asked you to remove your fucking hand!* [S1E01]

(7) Perry: [**Slaps** Celeste on the face].
Celeste: [Slaps Perry back].
Perry: [**Shoves** Celeste against the closet].
[…]
[Perry and Celeste have aggressive sex]. [S1E02]

(8) Perry: [**Grabs** Celeste by the neck].
Celeste: *I will leave you. You touch me like that again and I will fucking leave you!* [cries]. [S1E03]

(9) Perry: [**Throws** toys over Celeste].
[…]
[Tries to **suffocate** Celeste with a cushion].
[…]
[Perry and Celeste have aggressive sex]. [S1E05]

(10) Perry: [**Kicks** Celeste on the bathroom floor].
Celeste: [Gasps and curls her body to protect herself]. [S1E07]

(11) Perry: [**Batters** Celeste while Madeline, Renata and Jane try to protect her by hitting him].
Bonnie: [Comes running and shoves Perry off the stairway]. [S1E07]

Two Child nodes, one under the name of *Physical violence* and another for *Sexual violence*, helped to determine the coercive dynamics portrayed throughout Phase 2 of the cycle. For the former, all verbs marked in bold in Examples (6) to (11) indicate a rising escalation of life-threatening violence towards Celeste. What this suggests is that a progressive modification in the dynamics of the CoV operates along the series. While the first acute battering incident features Perry *grabbing* Celeste by the neck (i.e., Example 6), he tries to *suffocate* her with a cushion in (9) and *kicks* her until she finally falls down on the bathroom floor in (10). As Walker (2009: 380) points out, the magnitude of danger in Phase 2 tends to rise as the batterer perceives an increase in

independence on the part of the abused. This is certainly the case in the series, as will be expounded on in Section 4.3. However, it is worth noting that Celeste's resistance towards Perry's physical abuse decreases as his demeanour becomes more lethal along the series. Thus, while she deploys a discursive strategy of resistance in (6) (i.e., *I asked you to remove your fucking hand!*), fights back in (7) (i.e., *Slaps Perry back*) and uses a direct promise of abandonment in (8) (i.e., *I will leave you. You touch me like that again and I will fucking leave you!*), she submits to have aggressive sex in (9) and ultimately becomes a battered passive agent in (10). Symbolically from a feminist perspective, however, Madeline, Jane, Renata and Bonnie provide Celeste with the strength she could be lacking in order to survive the last battering incident in (11).

Further, Celeste and Perry Wright have been reported to present a dysfunctional sexual behaviour consisting in aggressive sex that does not always seem consensual (Hicks & Friedman 2020: 140). Lombard and McMillan (2013) offer an insightful account on how the arena of sexual intimacy is often used within coercive control relationships to assert power and control over the abused. Two instances of sexual violence were found to be present in the corpus. In both cases (i.e., Examples 7 and 9), Perry asserts his dominance using sexual violence after physically abusing Celeste. Once sexual intercourse is over, tension de-escalates and a new Phase 3 or honeymoon commences (Walker 2009: 94).

4.3. **Phase 3 – Honeymoon**

Four Child nodes were useful in spotting those discourse strategies that characterise Phase 3 in the corpus. These are reproduced here for greater clarity: (1) demonstrating omnipotence; (2) occasional indulgences; (3) regret; (4) affection.

Two are recurrently deployed by Perry to demonstrate omnipotence. In the first case, expressions of *authority* render him powerful as compared to Celeste. Indeed, authoritarianism has been found to be a common parenting style among domestic violence perpetrators (Bancroft, Silverman & Ritchie 2012: 34). Not only does such dictatorial style affect children's emotional and ideological development, but it also undermines the mother's authority towards them (Ibid: 72). Consider, by way of example, the following extract:

(12) [Kids play with toys on the dinner table].
Celeste: *Come on, eat up! You haven't eaten anything.* ***Perry. Perry.***
[Kids continue playing].
Perry: ***Hey! Toys down, food up. Hop to***.
[Kids resume dinner immediately]. [S1E05]

Giving the failure of Celeste's parenting instruction in (12) (i.e., *Perry, Perry*), she urges Perry to assert his power on their sons. The second discourse strategy consists of a *monster trope* that gets repeatedly enacted whenever Perry engages in playful

interaction with his children and wife. Salisbury, Donavin and Price (2002) claim that metaphors for domestic abusers have permeated the arts ever since Medieval times. Particularly, the monster trope is a recurrent theme among the domestic violence literature (Wood 2004), as it directly connects abusers with toxic masculinity. In *Big Little Lies*, such metaphorical manoeuvre functions as a constant reminder of Perry's inner beast and omnipotence throughout the honeymoon phase, as in (13):

(13) Josh: *Teenagers think you are bad?*
[…]
Perry: *Absolutely. Especially when I use my* [burps] *burping* ***superpower****, they do.*
[…]
Perry: *Or when I speak with my* [lowers tone of voice] *special voice. Because then they know that here comes* ***the monster!*** [growls and chases Celeste playfully]. [S1E05]

Gifting and *inviting* are also present throughout this phase as discursive manifestations of Perry's occasional indulgences towards Celeste. This is in accord with Bancroft (2002: 354), who observes that spurts of generosity during Phase 3 aim at restoring the abusee's trust on the abuser. Example (14) corresponds to the onset of Phase 3 after the second battering incident in episode 2.

(14) Perry: *Is that the* ***bathrobe*** *I bought you?*
Celeste: *Mm-hmm. It is. Thank you for the* ***flowers****. They're beautiful.* [S1E02]

Similarly, invites are present in the corpus, as in (15). Nevertheless, note how Celeste's response to Perry's coercion has shifted by episode 6:

(15) Perry: ***Come to Phoenix with me****.*
[…]
Celeste: ***No, I can't do that****.*
[…]
Perry: *How often do we get a chance to sneak away, just the two of us?*
Celeste: ***Look what you're doing. Look at it!*** *[…] You are the one who suddenly has to leave and I am the one who disappoints.* [S1E06]

In contrast to Celeste's words of gratitude (i.e., *Thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful*) and corresponding state of denial in (14), her refusal in (15) (i.e., *No, I can't do that*) suggests that she is starting to break the CoV. Kinstlinger-Bruhn (1997: 43) points out that the first step towards breaking the cycle of DV is telling someone you trust about the abuse. In the series, both Celeste's best friend Madeline and her therapist, Dr. Reisman, are key in this regard. In fact, such external help proves to be vital in Celeste's process of empowerment. At this point in the series, Celeste is able to identify Perry's invites as coercive control strategies (i.e., *Look what you're doing. Look at it!*).

Moreover, three discourse strategies are deployed by Perry whenever he aims at expressing regret. These include *apologies*, *confessions* and *promises*. First, apologies tend to be used right after the battering incident has taken place, as in (16):

(16) Perry: ***I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry***. *Don't. No.* ***I'm sorry***. ***I'm sorry. I'm sorry***, *honey. Fuck. Hey, hey, hey, hey hey.* ***Sorry***. *It's just—fuck.* [S1E02]

(17) Perry: **I'm gonna get better**.

[Perry and Celeste have loving sex in the shower]. [S1E03]

Second, sincere-sounding apologies are often followed by persuasive promises and reciprocated loving sex, as in (17). Bancroft (2002: 496) observes that apologies and promises during this phase may even be accompanied by concrete initiatives of improvement. In fact, Perry happily agrees to see a counsellor after his first violent explosion. Surprisingly, it is him who confesses to Dr. Reisman about the abuse (See Example 18 below). Nevertheless, as tension starts to build again, Perry drops counselling and ploughs his way back to the usual ruts (Ibid).

(18) Perry: [Stuttering] ***I grabbed her by the—, I grabbed her by the shoulders pretty hard. So, the idea that it's never gotten violent is, uh—. I grabbed her hard.***

[…]

Dr. Reisman: *Has this ever happened before?*

[…]

Perry: ***Yeah. Sometimes I lash out***. [S1E03]

Finally, *terms of endearment*, *appeals to emotion* and *compliments* are present in the corpus whenever Perry uses affection as a coercive strategy towards Celeste. As far as the former is concerned, both use nicknames during the honeymoon phase. What is particularly interesting is Perry's use of *Sparkles* at this stage (19), as it ironically contrasts with the state of depression abused women tend to develop over time (Walker 2009: 97).

(19) Celeste: *Hi,* ***baby***.

Perry: *Hey,* ***Sparkles***. [S1E02]

Appeals to emotion are also characteristic of both the discourse of the abuser and that of the abused. This is best exemplified by (20) and (21).

(20) Celeste: *You think you're so irresistible, don't you? Huh?* ***I love you so much***. [S1E04]

(21) Perry: *Let me look at* ***my gorgeous wife*** *for a second. Ten seconds.*

Celeste: *I'll give you five.*

Perry: *Wow. Make it a nice five.*

Celeste: [Flashes naked in front of the web camera]. *Okay, that's enough naughty boy (…).*

Perry: *Come closer.* ***I love you***. [S1E02]

Compliments are also recurrently deployed by Perry during Phase 3, as in Example (20). Survivors of DV have reported that, whenever they were complimented by their abuser, "their expectations rose; they forgot the past and held more hope for the future" (Evans, 2010: 95).

5. Conclusions

This paper set out to study the discursive representation of DV in the domestic noir television series *Big Little Lies*. The investigation was guided by a specific research question. The RQ investigated how Celeste and Perry Wright's fictional identities are discursively constructed in the series through the CoV. To address this research question, the BLL-CoV corpus was qualitatively analysed by mapping the behavioural tactics that are characteristic of coercive control relationships with the spotted discourse strategies deployed by Perry and Celeste Wright in each stage of the cycle. Commands, self-victimisation, blaming, interrogation and threats were identified to be commonly deployed through Perry's discourse throughout Phase 1 in the cycle. These strategies were observed to be responded with discourse strategies of resistance on the part of Celeste. As per Phase 2, a rising escalation of life-threatening physical violence towards the abused was mainly portrayed in the corpus through stage directions. Such brutality was coupled with Celeste's descending escalation of resistance and an in extremis sororal aid. Sexual violence was also observed to be present in the corpus. Further, expressions of authority and a monster trope function as reminders of Perry's omnipotence during Phase 3. Interestingly, however, Celeste was observed to engage in a process of empowerment and de-victimisation by ultimately refusing Perry's gifts and invites. These findings are interesting inasmuch as they portray Celeste breaking away from her initial state of denial. Apologies, confessions, promises, appeals to emotion, terms of endearment and compliments were also found to be characteristic of Perry's coercion during the honeymoon phase.

In all, the analysis confirmed that the discourse strategies used to represent DV in the series are representative of the CoV. In this respect, the study builds on previous research on the series (Alsop 2019; Reinhard 2019; Cambra-Badii et al. 2019; Parra García et al. 2019) and concurs with Avanzas Álvarez (2018) and Hicks and Friedman (2020) on its portrayal of the CoV from a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of research on televisual discourse and evidences the advent of well-informed Hollywood domestic noir productions whose female representation evidences an ideological concern towards DV as gender violence.

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