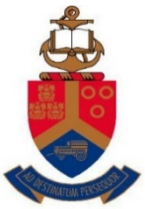

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FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN SELECTED WOMEN-CENTRIC TELEVISION DRAMA SERIALS

Laurika de Kock
u28014929

Supervisor: Prof CW Broodryk

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ABSTRACT

Since 2010, there has been a proliferation of women-centric television series and serials due to substantial socio-political and -economic changes as well a changing television landscape, often referred to as "Peak TV". Women-centric television series or serials are described as women's stories told from a female point of view (POV) (and employing a female gaze), dealing primarily with the female experience. This critical shift facilitated the construction of (compelling) female or difficult women characters (Pinedo 2021). These characters are described as heroic or anti-heroic, independent and empowered, or morally ambiguous.

This study provides an interpretive framework to analyse the construction of female subjectivity in both an international and a local popular long form television drama serial. Two women-centric television drama serials are the object of inquiry: HBO's *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) and Showmax and kykNET's *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). The interpretative framework is based on Smith's (1995) practices of **recognition**, **alignment** and **allegiance** combined with socio-political and -economic frameworks such as post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism.

The analysis finds that *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) constructed female subjectivity in a nuanced and complex manner: while it initially constructed female subjectivities as portraying 'traditional' gender stereotypes, the series deconstructed prevailing notions of 'the natural nurturer', 'mother' and 'housewife'.

Second, I analysed the female protagonists in the Afrikaans-language *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). Drawing on Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of post-feminist, neoliberal Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability), the study finds that female subjectivities in this series are autonomous and complex. However, it was found that the serial narrative did not employ a female gaze; it did not focus on woman- or sisterhood, or female empowerment; and it did not articulate or engage with contemporary popular

feminisms. Consequently, *Waterfront* does not promote a feminist sensibility. In *Waterfront,* white Afrikaans female subjectivities, specifically, still conform to an Afrikaner notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability).

KEY TERMS

difficult woman; drama serial; female gaze; female subject; female as subject; female subjectivity; feminist sensibility; neoliberalism; *ordentlikheid* (respectability).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The personal is political – Women's Movement Tenet, 1960s

Figure 1: Offred in 'Offred' (Miller 2017b).
(Vox 2016).

"A chair, a table, a lamp, there's a window with white curtains and the glass is shatterproof but it isn't running away they're afraid off. A handmaid wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself given a cutting edge. Or a twisted cheat…or a chandelier. I try not to think about those escapes, it's harder on ceremony days, but thinking can hurt your chances. My name is Offred…I had another name, but it is forbidden now. So many things are forbidden now…" (*The Handmaids Tale*, Miller 2017b).

The Handmaids Tale (Miller 2017a) was released on the American subscription-based streaming platform Hulu in 2017. This television drama serial[1] was based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Margaret Atwood which focuses on a futuristic dystopia (named, Gilead) that eliminates women's rights. Upon viewing the pilot episode of *The Handmaid's Tale* called 'Offred' (Miller 2017b), I, a South African white, middle-class, young woman, could relate to the fear, anxiousness, and desperation the character (Offred/June Osborne - Elizabeth Moss) experiences in Figure 1 as her rights in Gilead are eliminated.

[1] See page 4 of this study for a definition of 'serial' and 'series'.

Murray Smith (1995) suggests that recognisability is one of three practises used to construct character subjectivity. **Recognisability** is defined as the ability to individuate a character from another; through typifying characteristics such as visual presentation, classification, language, voice and idiolect (Smith 1995:117). The other two practises in Smith's (1995) lexicon of character subjectivity are alignment and allegiance. **Alignment** refers to subjective access to a character's interior state (emotions, thought processes and morality). **Allegiance** is described as the evaluation of or emotional and cognitive response to a character and their experiences. This study will demonstrate the synergy of recognition, alignment and allegiance in constructing female subjectivity through building an interpretive framework of analysis in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

Pamela Douglas (2011:19) states that television is a global information and entertainment medium that reflects the social, economic and political problems of contemporary society. This study arose out of two different occurrences that intersected at a precise moment in time. First, the inauguration of former USA President Donald Trump in early 2017, and the political protests and activism that ensued from his inauguration and his misogynist rhetoric. Second, the release of Hulu's *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a) in April 2017.

The day after the inauguration of President Trump, thousands of women in the USA united by protesting the newly-elected president and his administration due to his misogyny and objectification of women. Statistics gathered by the Crowd Counting Consortium found the 2017 Women's March was the largest single-day protest in USA history to date (Chenoweth & Pressman 2017). Women of all races and ethnicities came together to voice their concerns that 'Women's Rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are Women's Rights' (Women's March 2018).

In October 2017, women in the USA raised their voices again with the MeToo movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace (MeToo 2022). This was followed by the Time's Up movement (2022) in early January 2018 where women united in response to the MeToo movement and the Weinstein effect (Langone 2018; Weaver

2018). The Time's Up movement was created on behalf of women who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV), inequality and exploitation in the film, television and theatre industries. However, the movement has since recognised that the issues raised are widespread and that women across industries are being affected (Time's Up 2022). On 24 June 2022, thousands of women in the USA protested again when the Supreme Court of the United States overturned their 1973 landmark ruling of *Roe v Wade*, 410 US 113 (1973), reversing women's constitutional right to have an abortion (Donegan 2022; Karni 2022; Philbrick 2022; Zernike 2022). These recent historical and cultural changes within the USA gave rise to a new wave of feminist political activism also known as fourth-wave feminism, discussed in Chapter Two Section 2.4. If fourth-wave feminism is necessary, it means that the advancements by the women's liberation movement during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s towards women's rights and equality have been encumbered, arrested or reversed, thereby highlighting the well-known women's movement tenet that the personal is political (1960s).

Through the globalisation offered by visual culture, South Africans watch anxiously as the political rights and freedoms of women, internationally, are being restricted and removed by male-governed institutions. In post-apartheid South Africa (SA), white Afrikaans women can vote, they can have a career and own property. They have autonomy over their sexuality, marriage and reproduction rights. However, Christi Van der Westhuizen (2017:103) proclaims that post-apartheid "white Afrikaans womanhood still means to be a-self-for-others"; signifying a good wife and mother, an *ordentlike* (respectable) woman who remains subject to her husband's ultimate authority, in service to her family, community and country. Afrikaans *ordentlikheid* (respectability) is a historical Afrikaner identity configurator referring to embodying "presentability, good manners, decency, politeness and humility" (Van der Westhuizen 2017:23). The concern becomes whether these significant changes will affect women in SA, eventually.

Internationally, these changes have contributed to an increase and vibrancy in women-centric television drama series and serials on various television networks, cable and online

streaming platforms. In short, a television **series** is described as "a show whose characters and setting are recycled, but whose story concludes in each individual episode" (Allrath & Gymnich 2005:5). Meanwhile, a television **serial** is "a serial story which does not reach a conclusion during an episode, but whose threads are picked up again after a given hiatus" (Kozloff 1992:91).

Several international television creators, writers and producers have aligned themselves with the 'new' feminist zeitgeist or fourth-wave feminism. These drama serials include *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), *Girls* (Dunham 2012), *Orange is the New Black* (Kohan 2013) and *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a). These international popular drama serials focus on matters of increased female concern, pervasive gender inequality, misogyny, violence against women, threats against women's reproductive rights and the consequences of institutionalised sexism.

Isabel C. Pinedo (2021) suggests that the recent rise in women-centric television drama serials is to construct a counternarrative to the stereotypical[2] representation of women, constructing and centring a female gaze counter to Laura Mulvey's (1975) male gaze. Pinedo (2021:29) argues that women-centric counternarratives are essential to political change; therefore, the reason why we have seen an increase in women-centric and women-of-colour television programmes in recent years. Furthermore, Elizabeth Alsop (2019:1026) refers to 'counter-programming' to complicate prevailing narratives that centre on a male hero or anti-hero, or as alternative to 'male-driven serials' which have dominated quality television[3]. Mulvey (1975) formulated the phrase 'male gaze' and

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[2] Thornham (2007:23-25) describes traditional gender stereotypes as a fixed idea of womanhood, which represents women in limited roles (e.g., as 'natural nurturers', 'mothers', 'housewives' and 'sexual objects'). Traditional gender stereotypes and female representation in popular culture will be discussed in Section 1.3.1.

[3] Quality television places a great deal of emphasis on higher production or cinematic values in the form of authorial storytelling, overlapping plot lines, mixing genres, ensemble casting, skilful camera and editing work, which paved the way for constructing more distinct and memorable television characters. Quality television will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three Section 3.2.2.

described it as constructing woman as a (passive) sexual object of male desire, through three structures of looking:

1. The view of the camera (cinematographer, director – usually male);
2. The point of view (POV) of other characters in the production (male protagonist); and
3. The view of the spectator (male and female).

The antithetical female gaze which Pinedo (2021:11-12) refers to is defined as a "structure of looking that centres the narrative from a female perspective and is organised around female empowerment in the story space and viewing experience". This study demonstrates in Chapters Three and Four how the female gaze can be used as a principal practise in constructing female subjectivity in women-centric television drama serials.

Therefore, this study's aim is to establish how female subjectivity is constructed in long form television drama serials[4] (international compared to local) and the extent to which current feminist issues or feminist political activism is explored in these television drama serials. Jessica Ford (2017; 2018:17) uses the term **feminist sensibility** to refer to these types of serials, defined as "female driven series that negotiate, engage, and explore feminist politics, ideologies, ideas and issues".

I will analyse twenty-first century, post-feminist, neoliberal female subjectivities by critically analysing female subjectivities in the American television drama serial *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) compared to the local Afrikaans television drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). These two television drama serials function as the objects of my inquiry. I use terms such as 'female subject' which refers to 'woman' as herself (body and mind) – "a self-sufficient agent of unique thought, speech, actions

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4 Long form television drama is a term coined to describe the recent shift of interest towards television series of high quality that many consider having replaced the cinema as a locus of serious adult entertainment. Unfolding over multiple episodes, hours, and even years, these television shows are seen to provide content, often dark and difficult, and an innovative style that strain against the conventions of cinema as well as network television (Morrison 2014:3).

and experiences" (Schlee 1993:69). 'Female as subject' refers to a woman with agency (Pinedo 2021:30-31) as opposed to 'female as object', as spectacle of male fantasies (Mulvey 1975). Consequently, my focus is on the construction of **female subjectivity** which refers to the experience of a woman/women as individual(s), her/their selfhood/womanhood, identity, race, gender, class, age, sexual preference, inner character, thoughts, feelings, desires and consciousness (Braidotti 1994:98-99). Further, Schlee (1993:70) states that constructing female subjectivity "is ever a process".

1.1 *Big Little Lies* synopsis

Big Little Lies (Kelly 2017a) is a television adaptation of Liane Moriarty's 2014 novel. The plot is structured around a murder which has been committed at a school fundraiser. The story focuses on the lives and relationships of five privileged, educated and financially independent women who live on the beachfront in Monterey, California. The three main female characters are:

- Madeline Martha Mackenzie (Reese Witherspoon), a mother who works a few hours a week assisting at the community theatre.
- Jane Chapman (Shailene Woodley), a new resident to Monterey in search of a better life for her and her son.
- Celeste Wright (Nicole Kidman), a former attorney and current stay-at-home mother.

Each character has her own intricate plot line. Madeline struggles with motherhood and her children growing up, which mounts to the realisation that motherhood is all she has. Jane was sexually assaulted as a young girl which resulted in the birth of her son Ziggy. Years later, Jane still experiences emotional and psychological trauma which intensifies through the course of the season and steers her towards buying a gun. Celeste experiences domestic abuse, she loves her husband Perry (Alexander Skarsgård) but as the season progresses so does his violent temper. At first, these women are presented as stereotypical natural nurturers, mothers and housewives, rich and hyper-feminine (beautifully made-

up to present a persona of considerable visual appeal)[5]. At the end of the season, these characters are established as nuanced, complex and flawed women.

1.2 *Waterfront* synopsis

Waterfront (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) is a story about complex family relationships and sibling rivalry. The sudden passing of family patriarch Ben Myburgh (Dawid Minnaar), esteemed boat-builder and business owner, forces his three daughters, Julia Bruwer (Milan Murray), Anna Myburgh (Rolanda Marais) and Kate Myburgh (Trix Vivier) to reunite for the funeral in the Waterfront in Cape Town. At the reading of his last will, Anna, the middle child, inherits everything from her estranged father. This leads to anger, resentment and rivalry between the three sisters. Upon his death, Anna had not spoken to her father for four years. She shared his passion for boatbuilding but wanted to pursue her own dreams instead of building yachts the old, traditional, family way. This caused a rift between Anna and her father, which resulted in her moving to London, leaving her family and friends behind. Julia, the eldest, had to pick up the pieces and help raise Anna's son Stefan (Edwin van der Walt), whom Anna left behind. The complex and oppressive relationship Ben had with his daughters brings about Julia's struggle with anxiety and a severe form of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and Kate's need for love and affection. In contrast to *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a); Julia, Anna and Kate are not constructed as 'traditional' stereotypical natural nurturers, mothers and housewives. However, they do feature Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) (Van der Westhuizen 2017:23). The following section provides an overview of this study's background and rationale.

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[5] McLaren (1993:155) writes that "femininity is an artifice, an achievement, a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh". Bartky (1990:65) disseminate three categories which shape femininity: "firstly practices that aim to produce a body of a certain size and shape, secondly practices that elicit a specific repertoire of gestures, and thirdly practices which encourage the display of this body as an ornamented surface".

1.3 Background and rationale

1.3.1 Exploring female representation in popular visual culture

Reflecting on the importance of gender representation in popular media, Aisha Matthews (2018:638) states:

> In a world dominated by images of violence and objectification, policy aimed at restricting or eliminating women's rights (reproductive rights in particular), and recurrent rhetoric that devalues women's contributions, both professionally and domestically, we live in a moment where our perceptions of who we are and what we can be are crucially important. Yet many of the places where we look to see ourselves (television, film, music, magazines, books) often reproduce, rather than resist, the traditional gender stereotypes that perpetuate continued oppression.

To elaborate on Matthews' (2018) logic, viewers worldwide and in SA are bombarded with billboards, advertisements, magazine publications, social media platforms, television shows and films which display images of women, and in particular the objectification, devaluation and degradation of women.

Female representation in the above media refers to the 'visualisation of women', 'images of women' or the 'ideologies of femininity' portrayed by visual culture (e.g., women's magazines, photography, advertisements, social media, music, television and film) (Thornham 2007:6-7). I explore female representation as background to this study as it interconnects with constructing female subjectivity in popular television drama series. Female representation is linked to the construction of traditional gender stereotypes (Matthews 2018). Traditional gender stereotypes are defined as "cognitive structures that provide knowledge, beliefs and expectations about individuals based on their social group membership" (Kumar, Goh, Tan & Siew 2022:1). Kumar *et al* (2022:1) explain that stereotypes are cognitive in nature, which affects the social perceptions of individuals, their personality, behaviour, attitudes and appearance. One such gender stereotype is the notion of women being equal to nature and portrayed as natural nurturers, mothers and housewives (Kumar *et al* 2022:1-3).

Images of women as displayed by media and consumer culture have been criticised by feminists and feminist political activists since the 1960s. Betty Friedan (1963) was one of the first scholars to raise this concern by referring to the 'happy housewife heroine' – the ideal representation of Western femininity as displayed in women's magazines and advertisements within the USA. Germaine Greer (1971:60, 173) lambasted the stereotypical images of the 'eternal feminine', with her "glossy lips and matt complexion, her unfocused eyes and flawless figure, her extraordinary hair all floating and shining, curling and gleaming". Both Friedan (1963) and Greer (1971) emphasise the stereotyping of women within popular culture by presenting women as 'happy housewives' – exploiting domesticity and portraying women as a commodity object. This stereotype of the 'happy housewife' is reflected in my discussion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) in Chapter Four Section 4.2.

During the 1970s an increased focus was placed on the 'sex-role stereotyping' of women. In 1972, the journal *Women and Film* was founded to address and investigate the kinds of suffering women experienced in the American entertainment industry. In the journal's manifesto the co-editors Beh and Salyer (1972:5) wrote:

> The women in this magazine … are aware of the political, psychological, social and economic oppression of women. The struggle begins on all fronts, and we are taking up the struggle with women's image in film and women's roles in the film industry … Women in film suffer a threefold oppression: they are oppressed as workers within the film industry (they are receptionists, secretaries, odd job girls, prop girls and so on); they are oppressed by being packaged as images (sex objects, victims or vampires); and they are oppressed within a male centred and exclusionary film theory.

The threefold oppression of women within the film industry is noteworthy since I will suggest in the following section that behind-the-scenes female representation influences on-screen female representation (see Section 1.3.2).

Sharon Smith (1972) focuses on the representation of women in film and notes that women have been represented on-screen from the beginning. However, she claims that

women have not been represented in characterisations that any normal, self-respecting woman can identify with. Further, she states that women should be portrayed in a wider variety of roles; suggesting that "their characterisations must display heroism and human dignity – expressed in fields besides homemaking, loving a man, and bearing children ... Women must be shown as active, not passive. Strong women should not constantly face ridicule and unhappy endings" (Smith 1972:13). The continued oppression of women by patriarchal institutions has promoted the (mis)representation of women by constructing women in stereotypical gender roles that most 'normal' women cannot identify with or relate to, negatively affecting, devaluing and degrading women's positions within society. Further, men control the means of expression. They are the gatekeepers of the press, broadcasting, advertising, film, publishing and critique. Men occupy dominant positions within these institutions and use the power this gives them to convey the ideas and values of a patriarchal order (Coote & Campbell 1982:189).

Perkins and Schreiber (2019:919) assert that a critical shift has taken place within women's television, arguing that there has been a proliferation of women-centric television programmes over the course of the twenty-first century's second decade. They argue that this critical shift is due to an increased demand for television and film content in what is called the 'Peak TV' era. John Landgraf the CEO of FX Networks (a paid television channel in the USA) first coined the term 'Peak TV' in 2015 (Landgraf cited by Adalian 2015), referring to the vast amount of television programmes (scripted and unscripted) that was being produced by multiple distribution channels, television networks, cable and online streaming platforms. Also, Jessica Ford (2018:16) identifies an increase in "woman-authored, woman-directed, and woman-centred scripted television" programmes. Ford (2018:22) notes that woman-authored films and television series tend to highlight women's stories, lives and experiences. In addition, Pinedo (2021:13) focuses on women-centred scripted television and defines difficult women characters in serial narratives as female characters who "transgresses the norms of femininity unapologetically and systematically". These female characters are "abrasive, aggressive, ambitious, often defined by work more than motherhood, at times unlikable"

(Pinedo 2021:13). Later, I build my interpretive framework of analysis on the definition of difficult women characters and use the term '(compelling) female characters' to describe characters with female subjectivity.

Other socio-political and -cultural changes which facilitated the rise in women-centric content are women's initiatives such as #MeToo (MeToo 2022) and Time's Up (Time's Up 2022). These initiatives fight against gender discrimination within the workplace and try to remove the barriers that undermine and hold women back (actresses, production crews, studio executives, talent agents, filmmakers and assistants). These recent socio-political and -cultural as well as industry changes have given rise to more opportunities for female creators, producers, writers and directors to tell women's stories. Further, it has resulted in film and television productions with significant female control (Pinedo 2021:24-25). Martha Lauzen (cited by Goldsmith 2013) suggests that the more women are employed behind-the-scenes, the more women are employed on-screen (see Section 1.3.2 below). Lauzen is the founder and executive director of the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film in San Diego, which has been monitoring the representation of women in television and film in the USA since 1998 to present[6]. I outline her findings in Section 1.3.2.

1.3.2 Female representation behind-the-scenes and on-screen in American and SA film and television productions

International studies which track women's employment in independent film (narrative and documentary) draw the conclusion that most films and prime-time television shows are written, directed and produced by white male filmmakers (USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative 2020). Similarly, a study by Lauzen (2020a; 2020b; 2020c), researching the Top 100 and 250 grossing Hollywood films of 2020, and the representation of women, on-

[6] Lauzen's (2020c) study is the longest-running and most comprehensive of women's representation behind-the-scenes and on-screen, informing our understanding of female (under)representation and misrepresentation in television and film in the USA.

screen and behind-the-scenes, draws the same conclusion. Lauzen's (2020a; 2020b; 2020c) reports demonstrate that the number of women working behind-the-scenes in the USA film and television industry reached a historic high during 2019 and 2020. However, men still outnumbered women in key behind-the-scenes roles. Lauzen (2020:1) put forward that for the first time in history, there was a growing number of female directors employed for two consecutive years (2019 and 2020), breaking the historical pattern of male domination in the directorial role. Also, Lauzen (2020:6) states that films with at least one female director are likelier to hire women in key behind-the-scenes roles (i.e., writers, producers, editors, composers) than films with only male directors. Female representation on-screen has increased by 2% from 2019 (34%) to 2020 (36%). However, Lauzen (2020:1) finds that the number of films featuring a female protagonist have declined from 2019 (40%) to 2020 (29%). Note this 11% decrease in female protagonists as this study focuses on female protagonists in women-centric television drama serials.

Female representation in film and television both behind-the-scenes and on-screen is important because Lauzen (cited in an article by Goldsmith 2013) argues: "if (white) men are directing the vast majority of our films, most films will be about (white) males from a (white) male point of view". This suggests that if more women are employed behind the camera, instead of being employed as workers (receptionists, secretaries, prop girls and assistants), more stories about women, their history and experiences, will be told from a women's point of view. Lauzen's yearly study emphasises the continued oppression of women by patriarchal institutions within the film and television industry as well as the continued stereotypical portrayal of women. This study will however demonstrate that recent women-centric television series and serials also have men as creators, writers, producers and directors. For example, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Miller 2017a) originally written by Margaret Atwood was created for television by Bruce Miller, and *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) originally written by Liane Moriarty has been created for television by David E. Kelly (please note that both the original novels were written by a female author and has since been created for television by a male television producer).

In SA, Zama Mkosi (2016), the former CEO of the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), found that women in the SA film and television industry face the following challenges: "Lack of ownership, a serious lack of strong female representation within film and television roles, limited access to financial resources, limited knowledge of the business side of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI's) and a general lack of opportunities"[7]. Mkosi's (2016) emphasis on the lack of female representation within film and television in SA is meaningful to this study and my investigation into the construction of female subjectivity in Afrikaans television drama serials. Mkosi (2016) might be referring to both behind-the-scenes and on-screen representation, but I will focus primarily on female representation on-screen. Here, one should keep in mind Lauzen's (cited by Goldsmith 2013) statement on female representation – "the more women are employed behind-the-scenes, the more women are employed on-screen".

To support Mkosi's (2016) findings, a study on gender in the SA film industry by the NFVF and Sisters Working in Film and Television (SWIFT) conducted in 2018 found that the SA film industry remained male-dominated. The participation of women was limited due to various structural, institutional and cultural barriers preventing them from entering and succeeding within the film and television industry (NFVF SWIFT 2018). SWIFT found that 78% of women working in the film and television industry reported that they have experienced gender-based discrimination in this sector. Of the women who participated in the poll, 23.7% indicated that they have experienced sexual harassment, and 68.1% of the women are convinced that they need to work twice as hard as their male peers to succeed (Mambu 2017).

[7] Mkosi (2016) comments on the SA film and television industry in general, she does not place specific emphasis on the Afrikaans film and television industry or Afrikaans content. Since 2015, there has been an increase in women-centric Afrikaans films such as *Dis ek, Anna* (Blecher 2015), *Sink* (Innes 2016), *Tess* (Rickards 2016), *Vaselinetjie* (Van Rooyen 2017), *Krotoa* (Durrant 2017), *Stroomop* (Botha 2018), *Susters* (Van Rooyen 2018), *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (Joshua 2018) and *Toorbos* (Van Rooyen 2019). However, I argue that this female trend remains absent within the Afrikaans television industry; specifically, within Afrikaans television drama series and serials.

SA film festivals such as the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) and Encounters (the International Documentary Film Festival) were created to help emerging filmmakers showcase their work and be a platform for filmmakers to gain industry recognition. However, Rozanne Engel (2018) finds that there is a significant gender and race disparity and that female filmmakers are still marginalised. Engel (2018) investigates the festival programmes of both DIFF and Encounters over an eleven-year period, by individually exploring the content screened at both these festivals, and the directors at the helm of these fiction and non-fiction selected films (male versus female directors and white versus black female directors). Also, she conducts interviews with well-known female filmmakers, producers and key festival stakeholders:

- Katinka Heyns (white Afrikaans female filmmaker);
- Nadine Cloete (white Afrikaans female filmmaker and former Documentary Filmmakers Association chairperson);
- Xoliswa Sithole (SA producer and British Academy Film Awards winner); as well as
- Mandisa Zitha (former Encounters director).

Engel (2018:16-31) finds that female filmmakers' work continue to not be fully recognised by festival programmers and the respective audiences who view these screenings. Encounters seems to be making progress; however, Engel (2018) suggests that the film selection criteria at both these festivals needs to be modified to accommodate young female filmmakers – particularly young black female filmmakers. To assist emerging female writers and directors; recently, NFVF established the *Female Filmmaker Project* (2018), an initiative developed to nurture, support and promote female filmmaking through intensive training and strategic workshops. Selected female filmmakers are given the opportunity and funding to develop their stories and have their work made into short films in collaboration with industry experts and reputable production companies (NFVF SWIFT 2018).

1.4 Conceptual and theoretical framework

This section introduces this study's conceptual and theoretical framework. The first part of this dissertation consists of a theoretical study focusing on twenty-first century female subjects and how socio-political and -economic frameworks (e.g., post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism) influences these subjects. The aim is to establish a theoretical understanding of the study's context and the problem areas through the available body of knowledge. Post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism are introduced below, but discussed in-depth in Chapter Two. Thereafter, I use post-feminism, neoliberalism and feminist film theory as discourse and theoretical framework to critically analyse the construction of female subjectivity in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) and *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

1.4.1 Introduction to post-feminism and neoliberalism

The 1990s marked a shift within the historical feminist trajectory (Thornham 2007:15). A shift away from second-wave feminism's collective action and politics to 'popular' post-feminism, which offered women a new form of identification. Sue Thornham (2007:16) describes this new female subject position as characterised by independence, freedom, and choice which Catherine Rottenberg (2013) designates as a 'modern idea of womanhood'. Further, Karen Wilkes (2015) suggests that post-feminism is allied with neoliberalism. Wilkes (2015:18) proclaims that post-feminist female subjects are carriers of neoliberal values, such as individuation, self-interest and -investment. Wendy Brown (2015) defines neoliberalism as a governing rationality through which everything is 'economised'. Therefore, it casts the market as a model for the private and public sphere, whereby every individual, business and government are positioned as capitalist institutions (i.e., for profit and with the potential for exploitation). Thus, each of these entities become concerned with their respective market values. Both these ideologies (post-feminism and neoliberalism) instruct women to continually invest in themselves, their appearance and their bodies; displaying economic independence through wealth, privilege, normative Western beauty ideals and individualism. Consequently, post-feminist, neoliberal female subjects promote a status of "having it all" – sexual and

reproductive rights, access to professional occupations and financial independence[8] (Wilkes 2015:21). The resurgence of a new wave of feminism raises two important questions:

- Does fourth-wave feminism render post-feminism and neoliberalism redundant?
- Does fourth-wave feminism overlap and intersect with post-feminist and neoliberal discourse?

(These two questions will be discussed and answered in Chapter Two Section 2.4.)

1.4.2 Introduction to fourth-wave feminism

Since the mid-2000s, there has been a resurgence of feminist discourse through online and social media activism (Dean & Aune 2015:381), as well as a renewed feminist visibility and interest in media and popular culture – especially among international celebrities and movements (Cochrane 2013; Gill 2016; Rivers 2017). Dean and Aune (2015:375) proclaim fourth-wave feminism are emerging due to "a shifting socio-economic climate marked by, among other things, economic crisis, austerity, a resurgent far-right, shifting geopolitical relations and, to some extent, a backlash against feminist gains". These changes have caused an increase in feminist political activism in recent years, whereby various feminist movements and initiatives have come to the fore fighting for women's rights and equality.

These socio-political and -economic changes gave rise to following sub-questions which guide this study:

- What is the prevailing state of women's rights internationally?
- Are female subjectivities in international popular drama serials constructed in accordance with their current socio-political and -economic reality?
- What is the position of white Afrikaans women in the current SA political landscape?

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[8] *Sex and the City* (Star 1998) is an example of the post-feminist neoliberal female subject (Wilkes 2015:21).

- How do Afrikaans drama serials on MultiChoice's Showmax and M-Net's Afrikaans channel kykNET construct female subjectivity?

The sub-questions guide me in answering the main research question: *How do selected women-centric television drama serials construct female subjectivity?* As a white Afrikaans female subject in the SA film and television industry, I am concerned with the position of the white Afrikaans female voice and the construction of strong female subjectivities in our current SA television landscape.

1.5 Problem statement

Van der Westhuizen (2017) investigates the transformation of Afrikaner women from *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal to post-feminist, neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability). Also, Mkosi (2016), the former NFVF's CEO, states that there is a lack of strong female representation within SA film and television roles. Therefore, the study's aim is to research twenty-first century, post-feminist, neoliberal female subjectivities compared to white Afrikaans female subjectivities by critically investigating how female subjectivity is constructed in the international television drama serial *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) compared to the local women-centric television drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). My main objective is to establish whether white Afrikaans female subjectivities are constructed in accordance with their post-feminist, neoliberal western counterparts and if a **feminist sensibility** (Ford 2017) is portrayed in these television drama serials. Moreover, this study aims to build on and contribute towards existing research on female subjectivities in women-centric television drama serials; specifically, white Afrikaans female subjectivities in Afrikaans television drama serials.

1.6 Research approach

The following research approach is used to explore the construction of female subjectivity in long form television drama serials. Due to this study's theoretical, analytical and interpretive framework, a qualitative research approach is followed. Qualitative research is a method used by social scientists and other researchers in the humanities field. It is a

method of "research for, about and conducted by people" (Neuman 2014). Qualitative research is defined as collecting visual or textual data from books, articles, historical documents, public press, social media, television, film, observations, interviews, performances, images and photos (Flick, Von Kardorff, & Steinke 2004). Qualitative researchers investigate, examine and analyse the visual or textual data collected and interpret the meaning, behaviour and actions of human beings from a comparative, socio-historical, -cultural and -political POV (Flick *et al* 2004).

Focus is placed on female subjectivities in popular media; specifically, women-centric television drama serials. I analyse three female protagonists from *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) by focusing on how international television writers, creators, producers and directors use their current socio-political reality, television aesthetic strategies and the female gaze to construct identifiable female subjectivities. This exploration is used as a comparative reference point for the analyses of the construction of white, Afrikaans female subjectivities in the Afrikaans television drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

The study includes both content and textual analysis. Content analysis as methodology is defined as investigating or examining recorded communicative material displayed or used in popular media (e.g. film, television, radio, books, newspapers, magazine articles) (Flick *et al* 2004). First, I explore the construction of female subjectivity in both serial narratives, *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) and *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), by analysing the structure of both pilot episodes using television aesthetic strategies. The reason for only analysing the aesthetic strategies of the pilot episodes is because the pilot episode establish the structure (i.e., look and feel) of the serial narrative. Second, I interpret the dialogue used by the characters in the serial narrative. Textual analysis refers to the understanding of language, symbols and images used in the text to provide meaning to a person's lived experience (the self/identity) and their larger social structures (Hawkins 2018). The dialogue used by, and descriptions of characters inform my

interpretative framework which is based on Smith (1995)'s lexicon of **recognition**, **alignment** and **allegiance**.

Consequently, I critically analyse the construction of female subjectivities in Chapters Three and Four using post-feminism, neoliberalism and feminist film theory as discourse and theoretical frameworks. Further, Chapter Four draws on research by authors who have written extensively on white Afrikaans women from the South African War (1899) to the present (Brink 1986, 1990; Du Toit 2003; Kruger 1991; Van der Westhuizen 2017; Vincent 1999). In the following section, I outline the chapters and provide an overview of the key aspects as featured in each chapter.

1.7 Chapter outline

Chapter One introduces the study. The definitions of female subjectivity and -representation are explored within popular culture and television and film (behind-the scenes and on-screen). I discuss how behind-the-scenes representation influences on-screen representation and the importance of female representation as a constitutive force. Since 2010, there has been a proliferation of women-centric television programmes, which Perkins and Schreiber (2019) refer to as 'the Golden Age of Women's Television'. This rise in women-centric television content has facilitated the construction of more nuanced and complex female characters. This discussion on the construction of female subjectivity focuses this study's aim: *How do selected women-centric television drama serials construct female subjectivity?*

Chapter Two 'Constructing Female Subjectivity' focuses on this study's theoretical framework. The chapter explores post-feminism and neoliberalism as ideologies and the emergence of fourth-wave feminism. It questions the heightened visibility of this 'new' feminist zeitgeist and whether the term 'post-feminism' is becoming redundant? Also, the chapter examines female subjectivity and how the interchangeable terms 'subjectivity', 'identity' and 'agency' are defined. Particular focus is placed on white Afrikaans female subjects, their selfhood, individuality, inner character and consciousness. I argue that

white Afrikaans women in post-apartheid SA still experience subordination and subjugation from Afrikaner men through Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) as well as silence, service and white sex (reproduction).

Chapter Three 'Constructing Female Subjectivity in Popular American Television Serials' focuses on intersections between notions of female subjectivity, the female gaze and the construction of a (compelling) female character. This chapter concentrates on female subjectivities in woman-centric television drama serials. I explore female subjectivities in popular international drama serials, focusing on *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). Special focus is placed on the female protagonists Madeline, Jane and Celeste. Further, I focus on how their female subjectivity is constructed using an interpretive framework based on Smith's (1995) practises of recognition, alignment and allegiance. Also, I use my own television datasets to link the notions of female subjectivity and the idea of (compelling) character development. Then, I use this exploration as a comparative reference point to critically analyse the construction of female subjectivity in the Afrikaans television drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

Chapter Four 'Constructing Female Subjectivity in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a)' examines the history of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) and how Afrikaner female subjects have (re)constructed, (re)created or transformed themselves from 1994 until present. Then, I critically analyse the construction of female subjectivity in the contemporary drama serial, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) using an interpretive framework based on Smith's (1995) recognition, alignment and allegiance combined with Van der Westhuizen's (2017) post-feminist, neoliberal identity configurator *ordentlikheid* (respectability). Particular focus is placed on the white Afrikaans female protagonists Julia, Anna and Kate and the complex relationship they had with their patriarchal father. I use my own television datasets to determine whether aesthetic strategies like the female gaze have been used to construct Afrikaans female

subjectivities and how they compare with the construction of female subjectivities in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a).

Chapter Five concludes the study by summarising the key points of the argument. Then, I address the study's contribution to existing available research, comment on the study's limitations, and provide suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: CONSTRUCTING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

2.1 Introduction

One is not born; but rather becomes, woman.

(De Beauvoir 2011:14)

This chapter considers theories on female subjectivity, female selfhood and how post-feminism and neoliberalism as ideologies influence the construction of female subjectivity. I focus on the **female subject** which refers to 'woman' as herself – body and mind (Schlee 1993:69), and on **female subjectivity** (i.e., the experience of a woman/women as individual[s], her self-/womanhood, identity, race, gender, class, age, sexual preference, inner character, thoughts, feelings, desires and consciousness) (Braidotti 1994:98-99). I explore numerous definitions on female subjectivity which steer this study toward pivoting the construction of female subjectivity in long form television drama serials. Understanding the construction of female subjectivity in a broader sense assists me in critically interpreting and analysing the construction of female subjectivity in popular international and local women-centric television drama serials (my focus in Chapters Three and Four). Also, this chapter considers the recent emergence of fourth-wave feminism and how this new 'feminist zeitgeist' impacts, influences or critiques post-feminism and neoliberalism. Finally, I end the chapter by assessing white Afrikaans female subjectivities in post-apartheid SA. I introduce ideas of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal and post-feminist, neoliberal Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) and question whether this Afrikaner identity configurator still constructs white Afrikaans female subjectivity.

2.2 Female subjectivity

Rosi Braidotti (1991) shares three historical scenarios of women advocating and fighting for female subjectivity. In the 1920s, at Cambridge University, a young Virginia Woolf questions the poor educational opportunities for women. At the time, Woolf is not allowed to learn Greek, Latin, rhetoric or philosophy and had to teach herself many fields of study.

Woolf becomes a well-known writer and campaigns for the educational rights of women as well as women's right to vote. As a writer, Virginia Woolf feels compelled that all women should be entitled to become subjects of knowledge as well as political subjects (Braidotti 1991:155).

In the 1930s, in Paris, Simone de Beauvoir realises that she is not allowed to enrol in the "*Ecole Normale Superieure,* the most prestigious higher education institution for humanities in France, because it's reserved for men only" (Braidotti 1991:155). Her only option is to enrol at a state university – the Sorbonne. Nevertheless, strong-willed and determined she becomes a writer and a philosopher. De Beauvoir campaigns for women to become subjects of knowledge and devotes most of her academic writing to answering the question: "How can women, the oppressed, become subjects in their own right?" (Braidotti 1991:155).

In her last scenario, Rosi Braidotti (1991) refers to Utrecht in the early 1990s. She tells the audience that two young women (one of them, herself) are standing in front of a women's studies building at their university, discussing their career aspirations. Braidotti (1991) asks: "What will you do after graduation?", the other replies, "Oh, the usual things a girl can do – teacher, doctor, professor, diplomat, museum director, manager, head of personnel, director of a cabinet, journalist. I'll just see!" Braidotti (1991:155-156), who has studied general humanities and has read about the poor employment opportunities for graduates from the humanities, has a different line: "All things considered," says she, "I think I'll learn how to play the stock market so I can retire at the age of forty to write my best-sellers!".

Braidotti (1991) highlights the exclusion of women from higher education and the turn towards emancipation. These three short scenarios emphasise the construction of the female subject (producer of knowledge) by subverting the systematic dis-qualification and denigration of the female subject. Further, Braidotti (1991) states that the emancipation of women might not be enough. Allowing women into the labour market,

government institutions and 'systems of representation' will not cure a history of exclusion, discrimination and inequality. She argues that women should be able to redefine the rules for them to make a difference in women's lives – women's voices should no longer be silenced, their intelligence no longer denied, and their values no longer disregarded (Braidotti 1991:163-165).

What is subjectivity, and what is female subjectivity? How is female subjectivity constructed and how has the construction of female subjectivity changed through the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? These are all important questions to explore to answer this study's research question. Donald E. Hall (2004:3) defines 'subjectivity' as a complex social construct that is used interchangeably with the terms 'identity' and 'agency'. Discourses of subjectivity include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, consciousness and ideals. Thus, by exploring subjectivity, we are exploring the individual self. Hall (2004:5) explains that subjectivity explores:

- Who and what individuals are,
- How they became who and what they are,
- Why they remain that which they are, and
- To what extent they have the capacity and ability to become something different.

Stuart Hall (1987:44) notes that a person's identity, is an invention from the beginning of an individual's life, formed by various simultaneously occurring factors, such as history and culture. Therefore, suggesting that identity is constructed from birth and can be influenced throughout various points in time by an individual's history, culture, ethnicity, class and gender. In contrast to identity, subjectivity, refers to an individual's thoughts and self-consciousness (Hall 2004:3).

For Regenia Gagnier (1991b), subjectivity can take on various meanings. First, Gagnier (1991b:8) suggests that a subject is a human being with individual agency an 'I', who is responsible for creating and constructing itself, its own life choices, experiences and discoveries. Second, the subject is a subject to and of others, implying that as much as

one is responsible for oneself, this self is influenced by others and influences others which in turn influences the self. Third, the subject consists of an own mind and is both a producer as well as a receiver of knowledge, an intellectual being. Fourth, Gagnier (1991b:8) explains the subject is an environmentally-located body, a primary location where "biological, social and linguistic" (Braidotti 1991:160) cultural codes all intersect.

Following the above mapping of subjectivity, I suggest that subjectivity refers to an individual's state of being, their interiority, thoughts, feelings, desires and consciousness – all of which is shaped by their environment, history, culture, class, gender and context. Taking the specific dimension of gender into account, female subjectivity examines an individual woman, her identity and agency (Bock & James 1992). This individual woman has an own consciousness informed and shaped by her history and experiences. For this study, it is important to understand how subjectivity is constructed, to explore how female subjectivity is constructed in television drama serials. Specifically, Dimitra Rose Cupo (2010:5) defines female subjectivity as "an exploration of the possibility of a woman's legitimate claim to power as a culturally recognisable woman relative to discourse and the physical body." For Cupo (2010), female subjectivity is constructed when a woman is recognised as a human being, a self (producer of knowledge) whose claim to power is linked to her physical body and her socio-cultural environment.

2.2.1 Female subjectivity in film and television

Turning to the construction of female subjectivity in film and television, Lucy Bolton (2011:3) emphasises the term 'female consciousness' to refer to characters' inner lives, thoughts, desires, fears, emotions and the introspective contemplation of these. Subjectivity for Bolton (2011) focuses on a female character's individual, mental perspective rather than her physical appearance. She analyses three female-driven films *In the Cut* (Campion 2003), *Lost in Translation* (Coppola 2003) and *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay 2002). Bolton (2011:1-3) suggests that these films construct female subjectivity differently – they "create space for the female characters to explore themselves and others, using language, the body and consciousness". Bolton's (2011) emphasis on

character consciousness to construct female subjectivity links to Jan Alber's (2017) work on character interiority and how character interiority provides audiences subjective access to the inner lives of characters.

Alber (2017:265-266) refers to the inner lives and metal states of characters, he bases his argument of interiority on Alan Palmer's (2004:12) narratology work which suggests that "the construction of the minds of fictional characters by narrators are central to readers (audiences) understanding of the mental functioning of characters". Alber (2017) uses Palmer's (2011) internalist and externalist perspective to analyse the interiority of characters in film narratives. Palmer (2011:211) states: "An internalist perspective stresses those aspects that are inner, introspective, private, solitary, individual, psychological, mysterious and detached. An externalist perspective stresses those aspects that are outer, active, public, social, behavioural, evident, embodied and engaged". The difference between internalist and externalist perspectives is centred in differences between the private (individual) and the public (i.e., what is visible to, and observable by, a viewer).

For Alber (2017), the internalist perspective of film characters is constructed through subtitles, captions, mind screens or interior monologues at auditory level. The exterior perspective of characters is constructed through facial expressions, bodily position, voice quality and relationships with other characters. Alber's (2017) argument on the interior and exterior perspective can be likened to Murray Smith's (1995) lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance (discussed in detail in Chapter Three). **Recognition** aligns with Alber's (2017) exterior perspective, focusing on bodily images, classification, voice, idiolect and language used (Smith 1995:117). Whereas **alignment** and **allegiance** can be likened to Alber's (2017) interior perspective focusing on the interiority of character using camera aesthetics, placement, framing, the construction of a female gaze, as well as analepses (flashbacks) and interior monologues (Pinedo 2021:30-31; Smith 1995:143,187-227). These practices (embodiment and interiority) as outlined are key building blocks used to construct female subjectivity in film and long form television

drama serials. Another practice which facilitates the construction of female subjectivity is the female gaze.

Lisa French (2021) focuses on the female gaze as a means of constructing female subjectivity. French (2021:3) describes female subjectivity as the experience of being female, which may be variously connected to sex (biological and physiological characteristics) or gender (socially-constructed roles based on one's sex). She argues that "each woman has her own unique female gaze, which reveals how she is engendered as female through historic, psychological and cultural experiences that inflect her life, body and thinking" (French 2021:2).

I define female subjectivity as the amalgamation of the above, which includes body (living in a female body and identifying as female) and mind (inner life, mental state, thoughts, feelings, desires, fears and consciousness). This definition of female subjectivity is used in Chapters Three and Four to build an interpretative framework to analyse the construction of female subjectivity in television drama serials. Also, this definition links to the ideas of female selfhood, agency and choice (or the illusion of choice), which will steer this chapter towards post-feminism and neoliberalism as discourse.

2.2.2 Female selfhood and agency

Reflecting on the history of female subjectivity Simone De Beauvoir (2011:14) writes: "One is not born; but rather becomes, woman". Asserting that woman have individual agency and can determine their own destiny. Further, she states, "it is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account" (De Beauvoir 2011:69). Therefore, De Beauvoir (2011) argues that women, as human beings, are more than the word 'woman' demarcates, suggesting that women are autonomous beings capable of making their own life choices.

Sara Heinämaa (1997:20) claims that De Beauvoir's (2011) work on the meaning of woman, femaleness and femininity have often been (mis)understood and (mis)interpreted by Anglo-American scholars through the assumption that her study is based on the sex/gender 'dualism'. Heinämaa (1997:20) argues that De Beauvoir's (2011) work is a phenomenological[9] description of sexual difference based on the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. De Beauvoir (cited in Heinämaa 1999:122) goes on to say that "not every female human being is necessarily a woman; in order to be a woman, one must participate in the mysterious and threatened reality which is femininity". Thus, claiming that being female is necessary but not all that is required to be a woman. For De Beauvoir, woman "is not a fixed reality but a *becoming*" (De Beauvoir cited in Heinämaa 1999:123). Heinämaa (1999:124) suggests that De Beauvoir does not describe woman as "determined by performance" as Judith Butler (1999) argues, but as "living and evolving in the environment created by them". Also, Heinämaa (1999) proclaims that De Beauvoir suggests that femininity's specificity lies in its 'mode of changing' or **becoming** woman. Therefore, women play an active role in constructing themselves.

In 2022, feminists consider sex to be an outdated and biologically deterministic category; instead, gender has come to dominate thinking (Williams 2017:242). Judith Butler (1999) suggests that gender 'is always a doing', a '**performance**', whereby society socialises people into thinking and behaving in a particular way according to the sex they are assigned at birth. Butler (1999:6) writes:

> if one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. It becomes impossible to separate 'gender' from the

[9] Phenomenology is defined as "a study of phenomena, that is, the ways in which the world appears, or presents itself, to us in experience. It is about the ways in which people *relate* (emphasis original) to the world and its beings" (Heinämaa 1999:115).

> political and cultural intersections in which it is inevitably produced and maintained.

Subsequently, contemporary women construct their selfhood, femininity and identity as individuals through embodied, subjective and social experiences of being fundamentally gendered (Thornham 2007:55).

I suggest that the difference in argument for De Beauvoir (2011) and Butler (1999) is female agency. De Beauvoir (2011) writes about an autonomous female human being who becomes woman through 'living and evolving'; whereas Butler (1999), describes woman or femininity as made or influenced by society, constructed through gender **performance** – being acted upon. Both these arguments inform the construction of female subjectivity through embodiment; the living experience and evolution of the self-contrasted, to the influence(s) of society on the self. However, the question becomes how society enables or disables female agency and subjectivity through influence (thinking and behaving in a particular way). Butler's (1999) notion of gender **performativity** and the influence of society on constructing femininity brings us to female choice or the illusion of choice.

2.2.3 Choice or illusion of choice

The 1990s are described as a turbulent time for feminism, during which a conceptual shift took place within the feminist discourse. A move away from first- and second-wave feminism to popular post-feminism seeking to disrupt a white, heteronormative, heterosexual and middle-class view (Shugart, Egley Waggoner & O'Brien Hallstein 2001). Teresa De Lauretis (cited in Braidotti 1990:165) speculates that what emerged in feminist writings was:

> a multiple shifting and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but at odds with, language. An identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class and often indeed across languages and cultures. An identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations and that one insists on as a strategy.

De Lauretis (cited in Braidotti 1990:165) notes that 'women' are formed and re-formed through experience, relationships, society, culture, history and language, which produces our sense of self. Therefore, constituting an active construction. Contemporary Western women are led by consumer and visual culture to believe that they have the freedom, ability and choice to create and re-create themselves at will. Rosalind Gill (2007:153-158) refers to a post-feminist **sensibility**, focusing on individualism, choice and empowerment. Focus is placed on 'self-creation'[10] which entails self-monitoring, -surveillance and -management of the female body. Modelling and re-modelling the body at will, through consumer culture and the makeover paradigm (socially-constructed mass mediated beauty ideals – hairless body, slim waist, firm buttocks, and so forth).

However, Lawrence M. Friedman (1999) argues that this notion of **choice** is an illusion. Friedman (1999:240) states that "people are firm believers in free will. But they choose their politics, their dress, their manners, their very identity, from a menu they had no hand in writing. They are constrained by forces they do not understand and are not even conscious of. But even the *illusion* of *choice* (emphasis added) is of enormous social significance." Therefore, Friedman (1999), De Lauretis (cited in Braidotti 1990:165) and Butler (1999) suggest that human beings (men and women) construct their identity and subjectivity through the influence of countries, nations, cultures, history, politics, religion, race, gender, class and globalisation, various technological advances as well as media and popular culture. To understand the significance of **choice** or the **illusion of choice** in constructing and defining female subjectivity, we need to consider socio-political and -cultural changes in feminism, post-feminism and neoliberalism as well as the emerging fourth-wave feminism which has influenced and impacted women's lives from the 1960s onwards.

[10] This formulation of post-feminism hinges on Nietzsche-inspired images of 'self-creation' and is based on an aesthetic of individuality and freedom through notions of self-responsibility (Amin 2013:3).

2.3 Post-feminism and neoliberalism in popular media

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were a time of civil rights protests and women's protests around the world (De Beauvoir 2011; Butler 1997; 1999). The women's liberation movement which emerged in the early 1960s spearheaded these rallies, where women demanded (Sisterhood and after 2018):

- Equal pay, education and job opportunities;
- Birth control and abortion rights;
- Legal and financial independence;
- The right to homosexuality;
- An end to discrimination, male dominance and violence against women; as well as
- Freedom for women (to be agents, subjects of their own lives).

During the 1990s the term 'post-feminism' was coined. The decade is described as the decade of gender equality, social and legal reform, equal opportunity initiatives, social change and institutional advancement (Coppock, Haydon & Richter 1995:13). However, Gill (2007:147) asserts that "post-feminism is one of the most important but contested terms in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis". To clarify Gill's (2007) statement, the various descriptions of post-feminism must be explored and how it has developed and transformed from the feminist movement over the course of the last few decades. Ann Brooks (1997:4) describes post-feminism as a conceptual shift within feminism, whereby focus is placed on debates around 'difference' rather than debates around 'equality'. Moving away from a collective structure and activism and focusing more on the individual 'I', incorporating feminism into mainstream and popular culture. Brooks (1997) and Negra (2009:5) explain that this conceptual shift within feminism led to an emergence of a new generation of young women entering the feminist movement – (re)defining its goals by (re)claiming, (re)achieving, and (re)inventing themselves through a spectrum of female life choices and consumerism.

Nicola Rivers (2017:3-4) suggests that post-feminism can be interpreted in four different ways. First, she refers to a shift within feminism, termed an 'epistemological break' – whereby the prefix 'post-' suggests aligning with anti-foundationalist movements, such as post-modernism, -structuralism and -colonialism (Gill & Scharff 2011:3; Rivers 2017), which implies a transformation or change from the dominant rationality of feminism.

Second, she refers to post-feminism as an 'anti-feminist sentiment' or 'backlash against feminism'. These two post-feminist ideas are explained in-depth by Faludi (1991), Coppock *et al* (1995), and McRobbie (2009). In short, this asserts that feminist advances made by the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminists is being undermined. Susan Faludi (1991) exposed these post-feminist myths by revealing uncorroborated statistics about the 'infertility epidemic', 'man shortage', 'women's wages' and 'reproductive rights' – statistics which were publicised by 'popular' media at the time, without proper investigation or verification.

Faludi (1991) lambasted these media texts for attempting to undo feminism and undermine the ground that was gained by the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminists. Stéphanie Genz (2009:32) explains that during the 1990s "feminism became a *dirty* word (emphasis original) and terms like 'equality' and 'emancipation' lost their innovative appeal and was replaced by backlash narratives of 'having it all' and 'doing it all', becoming a superwoman". These backlash narratives were used by the mass media and consumer culture, who would have young, educated women believe that feminism and feminist political activism was no longer needed, as the aims of the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminists were achieved, simultaneously asserting that feminism had gone too far (Coppock *et al* 1995; Faludi 1991; Gill 2016; McRobbie 2009; Rivers 2017).

Third, Rivers (2017) refers to post-feminism being a 'time-after feminism' – whereby the dominant rationality becomes aged or redundant. An increase of women in the workplace, becoming economically independent, meant that feminism was no longer needed as the

goals and aims of the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminists had been achieved or surpassed (Genz 2009:1). Further, Amelia Jones (cited in Genz 2009:19) declares that the prefix 'post-' should be seen as a "signification of a kind of termination – a temporal designation of whatever its prefaces have ended, done with, become obsolete".

Fourth, Rivers (2017) refers to Rosalind Gill's (2007; 2017) idea of post-feminism as a distinctively new 'sensibility'; emphasising the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes, whereby feminism is 'taken-into-account' but also repudiated (McRobbie 2009). Post-feminism as 'sensibility' is identified through the following elements (Gill 2017:615):

- Femininity as a bodily property;
- Shift from objectification to subjectification;
- Emphasis on self-surveillance, -monitoring and -discipline;
- Focus on individualism, choice and empowerment;
- Dominance of makeover paradigm; and
- Resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference.

Assessing the various definitions and interpretations of post-feminism, it appears to be somewhat of a contradictory framework as Gill (2007:147) asserts. Genz (2009:31) and McRobbie (2004:255) explain that post-feminism should be explored as a "double entanglement or double movement" through simultaneous notions of 'empowerment' and 'subordination'. This post-feminist subject position is described as **subjectivation**, implying "both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection" (Butler 1997:83). To elaborate on Butler's (1997) description, Genz (2009:31) continues to describe this "double entanglement or double movement" as a contradictory site whereby the female subject inhabits this post-feminist femininity which works in 'constraining', 'liberating', 'productive' and 'oppressive ways'. In other words, female subjects striving for emancipation without fully relinquishing the patriarchal hold. Thus, this 'double

entanglement' or 'subjectivation' means that women in contemporary Western cultures are empowered by post-feminist neoliberal notions of independence, agency and choice, but still experience subordination and subjugation in public as well as private spheres through inequality, discrimination and violence against women. It is said that for every account of feminist activism and solidarity, there is another of misogyny and vicious trolling, for every feminist win there is an outpouring of hate, vitriol and animosity (Gill 2016:613).

Beschara Karam (2019:41) writes that post-feminism should be seen as "a pluralistic and contradictory discourse that has a particular fascination with, the erotic representation of, female bodies. This includes hyper-femininity, heterosexual love, and hypersexuality, as well as an emphasis on the maternal drive and domesticity". Karam (2019:42) defines the post-feminist aesthetic as "female characters who are white; young (ages: 18-30); with Caucasian features; thin; hyperfeminine; beautifully made-up ('lipstick-wearing' and glamourous); hypersexualised and athletic". She references this post-feminist aesthetic to popular American television drama serials: *Ally McBeal* (Kelly 1997) and *Sex and the City* (Star 1998); the first two television drama serials to showcase the post-feminist female subject. The female subjectivities represented in these two popular American television drama series exemplify hypersexuality, heterosexual love and commodified femininity. Hypersexuality refers to the display of female sexual desire, pleasure and freedom which is used to either promote or diminish female subjectivity (Pinedo 2021:63-64). Commodified femininity can therefore be described as exploiting women's femininity and domesticity through post-feminist neoliberal consumer culture.

Post-feminism as described above is believed to be enmeshed with neoliberalism. During the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberalism became the dominant political rationality within Western society (Brown 2015; Chomsky 1999; Harvey 2005; 2016). David Harvey (2006:145) refers to neoliberalism as a creative destruction; he writes:

> Neoliberalism has swept across the world like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment, entailing much destruction, not only of

> prior institutional frameworks and powers, but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought, and the like.

Wendy Brown (2015) defines neoliberalism as a governing rationality through which everything is 'economised'. Therefore, it casts the market as a model for the private and public sphere, whereby every individual, business and government are positioned as capitalistic institutions (i.e., for profit and with the potential for exploitation) in that each of these entities become concerned with their respective market values. Neoliberalism as governing rationality can spread through all domains and activities in life, monetising and marketizing all spheres, even non-economic spheres – reshaping human beings into human capital (Brown 2015:31). Democracies composed of human capital feature only winners and losers. Human beings become entrepreneurial competitors which leads to intensified inequality with inequality becoming the norm.

Brown (2015:37) explains that "neoliberalism as a modality of governance is not just limited to the economic sphere nor state policies but rather produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, a new organisation of the social". Thus, Brown (2015) states that the neoliberal subject's main concern is self-investment, enhancing their respective portfolio value through commodification and consumerism to attract potential investors through various forms of networking. Catherine Rottenberg (2013:420) affirms Brown's (2015) statement explaining that "neoliberalism moves to and from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors". Using this logic, every individual woman becomes an active entrepreneurial subject, responsible for her own well-being, continuously working on improving and enhancing her physical appearance and individual resources through 'incessant calculation', 'personal initiative' and 'innovation'. This emphasis on strategic initiative and innovation leads Braidotti (cited in McRobbie 2009:159) to agree that post-feminist, neoliberal discourse is pro-capitalist, where material success decides a woman's status.

Such market-measured individualisation designates a shift from second-wave 'objectification' to post-feminist, neoliberal 'subjectification', through monitoring and managing the female body, by exercising modes of self-awareness, -realisation and -improvement (Gill 2007:149; Van der Westhuizen 2017:196). Genz (2009:85) writes that post-femininity achieves "a depolarization of the 'feminine' women" (who makes herself into 'a thing') and 'the emancipated woman' (who "refuses the passivity man means to impose on her"). Thus, the post-feminist, neoliberal female subject demands authority – no longer as an object, but as a feminine subject – who takes responsibility for shaping her own identity and agency. Her notion of freedom is linked to 'self-creation' which is tied to neoliberal consumer culture and the ability to purchase – thus, female agency is enabled by consuming luxury goods (Genz 2009:85). Karam (2019) and Wilkes (2015:110) conceive of the post-feminist, neoliberal female subject as an educated, professional woman who promotes an aesthetic of wealth, who displays privileged whiteness, heterosexuality and hyper-femininity. She is a materially independent woman displaying her status through consuming luxury goods.

Angela McRobbie (2009) distinguishes between four different post-feminist, neoliberal subjectivities: (1) post-feminist masquerade, (2) working girl, (3) phallic girl and (4) global girl. The 'post-feminist masquerade' entails self-monitoring, -managing and -presenting through consumer culture (fashion and beauty industry) which becomes the dominant authority on 'respectability' and female self-awareness. The 'working girl', a well-educated, employed, independent young woman who acquires status through her qualifications, occupation and earnings. The 'phallic girl' enjoys casual and recreational sex and practices effective birth control, postponing marriage and childbearing into her early 30s. The 'global girl' sees herself as a member of a global femininity, which is expressed through an intersectionality of independence, earning capacity, feminine self-adornment and sexuality. Thus, the contemporary post-feminist, neoliberal female subject appears to 'do it all' and 'have it all' (Wilkes 2015:21).

This invidious collaboration between post-feminism and neoliberalism constitutes a 'modern idea of womanhood' where the female subject is encouraged to conform to the norms of the free market while assuming responsibility for her own well-being through the popular post-feminist notions of individual agency, empowerment and choice (Rottenberg 2013)[11]. McRobbie (2009:19) argues that contemporary young women are no longer compelled to conform to old structures. Instead, they are urged to invent new structures of being, internally and individualistically, no longer focusing on the collective 'we' but on the individualistic 'I'. In this context, the contemporary young woman accepts this neoliberal 'self-responsibility' for her own well-being, independence and career aspirations, no longer demanding anything from the state, government or men.

Although post-feminist and neoliberal tenets permeate and infiltrate contemporary Western women's ways of being and doing, these tenets all problematically ignore serious issues and concerns still faced by women daily such as:

- GBV and sexual harassment;
- Gender discrimination, exploitation and inequality; as well as
- Sexuality, reproduction and motherhood.

The question becomes does the post-feminist, neoliberal female subject disavow issues of social justice and inequality because she is more focused on her individual well-being, independence and agency?

During the last decade a growing number of women have started taking up the banner of feminism again, examples include: #Femen (2022), #HeForShe (2022) #MeToo (MeToo 2022) and #TimesUp (2022). These hashtags and movements I refer to as the emerging

[11] Lena Dunham's (2012) television drama serial *Girls* is an example of this. The television serial highlights four young adolescent girls' comfort and dissatisfaction. They come from privileged backgrounds and live privileged lives in Brooklyn, New York. However, they are dissatisfied with the measure of freedom, independence and choice available to them. Struggling with bodily anxieties and low self-esteem due to idealized images of femininity as constructed by consumer culture, relationships and sex. Emphasizing girls' frustrations with career aspirations, validation, success and anxieties around failure of success (Fuller & Driscoll 2015:253-262).

fourth-wave feminism, uses new information technologies and platforms such as social media to speak up and raise awareness about women's current concerns (see Section 2.4). This emergence of fourth-wave feminism intersects with the post-feminist and neoliberalism frameworks; therefore, a broader definition is necessary to define the contemporary female subject.

2.4 Fourth-wave feminism

Kira Cochrane (2013) announced the arrival of fourth-wave feminism highlighting the unfolding of various 'new' feminist movements and campaigns. However, Rivers (2017:22) proclaims that Jennifer Baumgardner already mentioned the arrival of fourth-wave feminism in 2011. This new 'feminist zeitgeist' or fourth-wave feminism has received heightened attention, especially within but not limited to, developed countries such as the USA and Europe, through women's protests (Reuters [Dubai Newsroom] 2022; Yee & Fassihi 2022; Pussy Riot (Zychowicz 2012), SlutWalk (Valenti 2011), Women's March 2018, Roe vs Wade Overturned 2022, IranProtests: #MahsaAmini 2022) and other women's movements and campaigns (#EverydaySexism 2012; #Femen 2022; #HeForShe 2022; Matich, Ashman & Parsons 2018 [#freethenipple]; #MeToo 2022; #TimesUp 2022). These initiatives and movements focus on issues of increased female concern: advancing women's rights and reproductive rights internationally; gender-inequality, discrimination and exploitation; sexism, sexual violence, harassment, abuse and rape – advocating women's rights as human rights.

Redfern and Aune (2013) highlight the vibrancy of contemporary feminism by exploring seven contemporary feminist themes which they proclaim new emergent feminists are fighting for:

1. Liberated bodies,
2. Sexual freedom and choice,
3. Violence against women,
4. Equality at work and home,
5. Transforming politics and religion,

6. Devaluing women through popular and visual culture, as well as
7. Reclaiming the feminist movement.

Fourth-wave feminism steers focus back to the collective 'we' through protests and activism, rather than focusing on the individualistic 'I' as foregrounded by post-feminism and neoliberalism. Dean and Aune (2015:375) suggest that the resurgence of feminist political activism in many first world countries is due to "a shifting socio-economic climate marked by, among other things, economic crisis, austerity, a resurgent far-right, shifting geopolitical relations and, to some extent, a backlash against feminist gains". Several decades after the formation of the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminism, societies all over the world have changed dramatically due to globalisation through the rise of capitalism, the increased influence of neoliberalism, financial crises, and economic recession as well as the rapid development of new information technologies. These political, societal, technological and structural changes have inspired the emergence of a new wave of feminism due to the current precariousness of women's rights (Redfern & Aune 2013:xii).

Fourth-wave feminism seems more diverse than the waves of feminism that came before due to intersectionality and the involvement of different social institutions, women, and men identifying as feminists. Also, Redfern and Aune (2013:16) write that there are differences in the style and substance of fourth-wave feminism where some feminists focus their attention on political activism (organising protests, marches and campaigns on the ground) while others dedicate their attention to online activism and subversion.

This specific cultural moment, known as fourth-wave feminism, has become increasingly visible through major technological advances and the pre-eminence of visual culture which has changed how twenty-first century feminist activists and individual women communicate and participate with one another. Online and social media platforms allow for increased activism, rapid mobilisation, social awareness and engagement. International audiences are reached, gaining wide support in 'real-time', allowing for

marches, protests, movements and events to be organised at the click of a button (Chamberlain 2016:461-463; Redfern & Aune 2013:15). For example, the #challengeaccepted campaign was created on the social media platform Instagram in 2020, to draw attention to the rising rates of femicide in Turkey (McKernan 2020). Unfortunately, online feminist activist campaigns can generate negative sentiment through "online trolling, hate, vitriol, animosity, threats and misogyny" because online campaigns are open to the broader public's sphere, encouraging feminist activism and public engagement (Gill 2016:616-617).

Whether the emerging fourth-wave feminism renders post-feminism redundant or overlaps and intersects with the post-feminist, neoliberal discourse and how it critiques, the first- and second-waves is of interest. As I noted, a lot has changed for contemporary women; women have more rights, freedoms and choices as has been demonstrated by the post-feminist, neoliberal discourse. However, it seems that many of the advancements made by women's suffrage, the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminism are being restricted or reversed as highlighted by the emergence of fourth-wave feminism, focusing more on political activism whether through protests, marches or online social media platforms.

The new 'feminist zeitgeist' and its increased visibility does not render post-feminism and neoliberalism redundant, but seems to intersect with it, challenging popular post-feminist, neoliberal beliefs such as gender equality, independence and choice. Once again collective female concerns such as discrimination, inequality, reproduction rights and violence against women are brought to the fore. Concerns which contemporary women seem to share with their twentieth century counterparts.

Considering this, it is evident that contemporary Western female subjectivities are influenced by post-feminism and neoliberalism through notions of independence, empowerment, agency and choice as well as female individualism and self-investment, whereby material success decides a woman's status. Moreover, post-feminist neoliberal

female subjects are increasingly faced with the precariousness of women's rights internationally and the collective impact of these inequalities and discrimination. These socio-cultural, -political and -economic tenets affect Western women in their everyday life, which facilitates the construction of the Self. Therefore, manifesting an 'active construction' by creating and re-creating the Self at will. This foregrounds female agency once again. De Lauretis (cited in Thornham 2007) posits that "we may be produced within and by structures of material, social and symbolic power, but the Self thus generated is also capable of agency". Agency, as Butler (1997:15) remarks, always exceeds the power by which it is enabled.

This brings me to contemporary white, Afrikaans female subjectivities in post-apartheid SA. Do Western notions of post-feminism and neoliberalism infiltrate, impact and influence the lives of post-apartheid white Afrikaans female subjects and how does the emerging fourth-wave feminism affect woman locally? The following section introduces white Afrikaans female subjectivities and how these women have been historically constructed. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, this is a brief exploration of white Afrikaans female subjectivities, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

2.5 White Afrikaans female subjectivities in post-apartheid SA

Christi Van der Westhuizen (2017) has written one of the most comprehensive texts to date about white, Afrikaans female subjectivities[12] post-1994. She contemplates whether "white Afrikaans women have embraced the possibilities of this moment to cultivate self-knowledge relating to racialised, sexual and gendered others, to problematise the normativity that governs 'the Afrikaner' and to transform themselves, drawing on the new potential for self-reflective non-conformism?" (Van der Westhuizen 2017:15). The

[12] Historically white, Afrikaans women were known or referred to as 'Afrikaner women'. Most scholars still refer to Afrikaner women in their work when writing about the history of white, Afrikaans women – I will do the same. However, I will use the term white, Afrikaans women or white, Afrikaans female subjects when referring to contemporary white, Afrikaans women.

question asks whether white Afrikaans women have taken this opportunity to reflect on the past (apartheid) through self-examination and -reflection, but also moved forward by embracing the liberating possibilities that democracy brings in the form of freedom, self-knowledge and transformation (reconstruction) or if they still conform to the normative ideals of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation)? The ideas of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* ideal and the modernised version of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) is discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.

In post-apartheid SA, women have post-feminist, neoliberal freedom, independence, empowerment and choice – more than was experienced pre-1994. However, SA is a diverse country with many different cultures and ethnicities; therefore, women in SA have different cultural and racial experiences and cannot be grouped into one single group called 'women', as in many western countries. I write as a young white Afrikaans woman from a middle-class background, and I will focus on this cultural group here and will not claim to speak for all SA women. Post-apartheid white Afrikaans women have the right to vote, they can have a career, own property, they have autonomy over their sexuality, marriage and reproductive rights. However, Ronit Frenkel (2008) argues that the advancement of women in SA is limited. She asserts that SA women today are simultaneously "empowered and victimised, seen and unseen, included and excluded" (Frenkel 2008:8). This aligns with the post-feminist, neoliberal notion of subjectivation (Butler 1997:83) or the 'double movement or double entanglement' (Genz 2009:31; McRobbie 2004:255) which contends that female subjectivities are striving for emancipation without fully relinquishing the patriarchal hold.

Van der Westhuizen (2017:102-148) affirms Frenkel's (2008) statement by noting that white Afrikaans women still experience subordination and subjugation from Afrikaner men (the 'patriarchal overseer'). Van der Westhuizen (2017:102-103) proclaims that post-feminist neoliberal "white Afrikaans womanhood still means to be a-self-for-others". A good wife and mother, an *ordentlike* (respectable) woman who remains subject to her husband's ultimate authority, in service to her family, community and country (Van

der Westhuizen 2017:102-109). The idea of 'silence', 'voice' or the silent/voiceless white Afrikaans woman, refers to a woman who knows her place, is obedient to her husband and father, who is seen and not heard. In SA, Van der Westhuizen (2017) finds, the silencing of women (to be silent or silenced) as a common occurrence demanded or enforced by Afrikaner men, the patriarchal head of the household. 'Service' means to be 'a-self-for-others', a compulsory wife and mother, passive, helpless, dependent and in service to her husband, often still domesticated, performing 'white sex' (heterosexual compliance without possible female pleasure). Van der Westhuizen (2017:148) notes: "These kinds of discourses depoliticise women and revitalises *ordentlikheid* (respectability) through the normalisation of a woman/wife as mother and the objection of its racialised and sexual and gender non-conforming others".

According to Van der Westhuizen (2017), the post-feminist neoliberal notion of choice, only applies when a white Afrikaans woman complies with her husband's ultimate authority. While the contemporary post-apartheid twenty-first century white Afrikaans woman has post-feminist neoliberal freedom, independence, empowerment and choice, she still succumbs to the patriarchal, stereotypical status quo. Heterosexuality, reproduction and motherhood are still central to a white Afrikaans woman's selfhood. Van der Westhuizen (2017:23-33) notes that *ordentlikheid* (respectability) constructs female white Afrikaner identity in terms of appearance, demeanour and moral character. Van der Westhuizen further (2017:4) states: "the project of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) is a normative one – it challenges Afrikaner women to "organise their bodies in accordance with certain prescriptions".

The question arises whether all white Afrikaans female subjectivities conform to this post-feminist neoliberal notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability), or whether they portray aspects of change (a refusal or rejection of this trope). I therefore examine if it is possible to imagine new modes of white Afrikaans female subjectivities, modes of female subjectivity that go against traditional gender stereotypes and against the rigid

conventions of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability), that embrace the ideas of fourth-wave feminism.

An example of embracing fourth-wave feminism in political activism, is the mass protests held in September 2019 when thousands of women (and men) from all races and classes took to the streets of Cape Town, protesting GBV and femicide saying #enoughisenough (Lyster 2019, Stickings 2019). SA women gathered in solidarity at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) following the violent rape and murder of University of Cape Town student, Uyinene Mrwetyana, in a SA post office. Her violent death sparked outrage among SA women, causing them to question whether they could be next (#AmINext) in a series of online posts (Lyster 2019, Stickings 2019). After two consecutive days of protests outside the CTICC where the World Economic Forum was being held, President Ramaphosa addressed the nation assuring them that measures would be put in place to stop GBV and femicide. On 13 September 2019, over 70 civil society organisations and hundreds of women (and men) gathered at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) in Sandton for the #SandtonShutdown protest to again protest GBV and femicide (Karim & Mthethwa 2019). This time, SA women took the protest to the private sector; a memorandum was handed over to former JSE CEO Nicky Newton-King demanding a 2% levy on all JSE-listed entities to help fight GBV and femicide in SA (Karim & Mthethwa 2019).

Should the white Afrikaans woman who takes part in these protests and political activism be considered *ordentlik* (repectable) or should she be seen as stubborn and defiant and described as a difficult woman? The following chapter investigates the idea of difficult women; specifically, and how a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character is constructed in 'popular' international television drama series and serials.

CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN POPULAR AMERICAN TELEVISION SERIALS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter critically discusses intersections between notions of female subjectivity, the female gaze and constructing (compelling) female characters. This chapter explores on-screen female representation in a selected American prime-time television serial and how female subjectivity on-screen has developed from the 1970s onwards. One part of the study draws on datasets about television aesthetics and how it is used to construct female subjectivity using the female gaze; another part requires the investigation of the characters themselves. Exploring what it is that constitutes a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character (Pinedo 2021), as well as variations in character engagement. Using the practices of **recognition**, **alignment** and **allegiance** as a contributing factor to create (compelling) female television characters.

3.2 (Compelling) female characters in select American television drama serials

To analyse the construction of female subjectivity in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), I first explore the construction of female subjectivity in the popular American television drama serial *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). These two contemporary television drama serials (local and international) were selected because both feature female protagonists who are informed by post-feminist, neoliberal values. To explore the construction of female subjectivity in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), I construct an interpretative framework using Smith's (1995) lexicon of engaging with fictional characters through the practices of recognition, alignment and allegiance as well as my own television datasets (see Section 3.4) to link notions of female subjectivity, the female gaze and the idea of a (compelling) female character. Therefore, I define and explain the complementary notions of a (compelling) female character and discuss how to construct female subjectivity.

3.2.1 Female subjectivity in prime-time American television drama serials

> "A medium that has often fetishized women's degradation, the decision to depict female characters surviving and even thriving may be one of contemporary serial television's more radical moves."
>
> (Alsop 2019:1034)

Female characters working outside the home were represented in a limited number of roles on television, prior to the 1970s. On the occasion that a career woman was portrayed, she struggled to balance her career with motherhood and marriage (Lotz 2006). During the second-wave feminist stronghold in the 1970s and 1980s, a change occurred in USA television series. Several television series incorporated working women into their narratives (e.g., *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* [Brooks & Burns 1970] and *Cagney and Lacey* [Avedon & Corday 1981]). In *Cagney and Lacey* (Avedon & Corday 1981), women were cast as detectives for the first-time (and in other shows, doctors[13]) rather than your conventional secretaries and nurses (Lotz 2006). The post-feminist neoliberal 1990s and early 2000s followed suit, with a boom in 'new' new-women television shows created to attract the spending power of working women (Pinedo 2021:12). These shows include:

- *Ally McBeal* (Kelly 1997)
- *Sex and the City* (Star 1998)
- *Judging Amy* (Brenneman 1999)

Amanda D. Lotz (2006:88) describes these 'new' new-women characters as career-driven young women in search of financial independence prior to getting married and settling down – the core theme of these shows being "sex, careers and Mr. Right", thus: pleasure, professional (job) satsifaction and idealised heteronormative romantic love. Lotz (2006) explains that these 'new' new-women characters exhibit flaws and 'imperfect' characteristics (e.g., being single, independent, career-driven women with complicated

[13] For example: *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (Sullivan 1993).

lives)[14] which she suggests brought about a new richness to female characterisations. These 'new' new-women characters became the counterpoint to how women were historically represented, but according to Lotz (2006:165), this women-centric dramatic trend only lasted a few years and reached its peak in the early 2000s, after which it slowly diminished. The television series that followed, placed little emphasis on their female characters outside of their professional roles; they hardly interacted with other female characters and there was nothing special or noteworthy about the characters[15] (Lotz 2006:165-166).

In a special issue of the journal *Feminist Media Studies* titled 'Independent women: from film to television', Perkins and Schreiber (2019:919) observe that there has indeed been a shift in how women are represented on television during the twenty-first century's second decade, which they refer to as the "golden age of women's television". This shift and rise in women-centric media is discussed in conjunction with various social and political changes: the 2016 presidential election in the US, the precarious state of women's rights internationally and the renewed interest in feminist political activism. Referred to elsewhere as fourth-wave feminism, where men and women are aligning themselves with women's movements and initiatives such as #MeToo and #TimesUp (Sezen, Çiçekoğlu, Tunç & Diken 2020:1-8).

Also, television as medium has changed since 2000. The post-network television era which took shape in the early 2000s opened new avenues for experimentation and innovation. The term 'post-network era' popularised by Lotz (2006) refers to the

[14] Female characters who could want "casual sex, a child without a husband, a husband without a child, an abortion" (Pinedo 2021:21).

[15] For example, Dr Jordan Cavanaugh (Jill Hennessy) a forensic pathologist in *Crossing Jordan* (Kring 2001) and Lilly Rush (Kathryn Morris) a homicide detective in *Cold Case* (Stiehm 2003). Both these police procedurals have female protagonists at the helm; however, it isolates them from other female characters in favour of male characters in a mostly male-dominated setting. Also, the stories did not explore women's stories or experiences and they did not engage and articulate feminist issues in a meaningful way. Consequently, both these police procedurals fail to construct female subjectivity.

deterioration of television networks; the erosion of linear television schedules and the creation of a variety of different channels (cable) and media forms (online streaming platforms) which has provided audiences with greater access to niche content, which can be consumed at any given time, on a variety of devices (Ford 2017). These media and technological developments foregrounded recognising women as television creators, producers and directors in the cable-, streaming- and Internet-distributed television landscape (Alsop 2019; Hohenstein & Thalmann 2019; Perkins & Schreiber 2019; Pinedo 2021). Perkins and Schreiber (2019:922) state that television has become an independent site for producing and developing television shows by women; offering women showrunners more opportunities, freedom and authorial control. Resulting in some television productions with significant female creative control[16] (Pinedo 2021:1). Television networks like HBO and online streaming platforms like HBO Max, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and Apple TV+ have increased women-centric content. In recent years, female-driven television serials like *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a), *The Crown* (Morgan 2016), *The Queen's Gambit* (Scott & Allan 2020) and *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel* (Sherman-Palladino 2017) have garnered numerous accolades at the Emmy's and the Golden Globes.

At present, the female characters who populate these prime-time American television series and serials have changed dramatically from the women audiences experienced in the 1990s and early 2000s. Elizabeth Alsop (2019:1034) describes it as: "a medium that has often fetishized women's degradation, the decision to depict female characters surviving and even thriving may be one of contemporary serial television's more radical moves". Mary McNamara (2013) describes these characters as "ladies from a whole different calibre". These series offer female characters who are compelling to watch, and who keep audiences engaged by making unexpected choices (because they now have these choices to make and the agency to execute these choices). McNamara (2013)

[16] Pinedo's (2021:23-25) work reflects on Lauzen's (1998-2022) comprehensive annual study of female representation behind-the-scenes and on-screen in film and television from 1998 onwards (Refer to Chapter One of this study).

suggests that for centuries female characters were allowed only one of two narrative endings: marriage or death. However, contemporary American television serials, portray female characters whom audiences have seldom seen before.

Female characters who go against traditional gender stereotypes;

- displaying a degree of complexity that has never been available to them before,
- who are unique and memorable but simultaneously imperfect and vulnerable,
- who sometimes fit the empowered post-feminist, neoliberal mould but also struggle with the demands of post-feminism and neoliberalism, pushing back against the belief that women need to be resilient primarily (McNamara 2013; Perkins & Schreiber 2019).

As I discuss later in this chapter, the characters in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) demonstrate this resilience in the tensions between the domestic and professional spheres, which are both informed by post-feminist and neoliberal concerns.

To illustrate the "golden age of women's television" (Perkins & Schreiber 2019); I refer to several international television creators (men and women) who have aligned themselves with this new women-centric phenomenon or feminist zeitgeist. Television creators who deploy drama serials with increasing amounts of female character arcs and feminist discourse. A female character arc is described as a female character's journey over the course of a story or, in this case, a television drama serial. In addition, it encapsulates the "gradual internal change in beliefs that a character goes through from the beginning of the story to the end" (Heckmann, 2021). Feminist discourse refers to television shows which increasingly focus on woman- or sisterhood and empowerment, articulating or engaging with contemporary popular feminisms, which has become more distinct from 2010 onwards. While not all women-centric television series and serials are feminist (e.g., *Homeland* [Gansa & Gordon 2011] and *How to Get Away with Murder* [Nowalk 2014]), there has been an increase in television shows with a feminist political agenda, referred to by Jessica Ford (2017; 2018:17) as series with a **feminist sensibility**. Ford (2017:34) states that the term 'sensibility' in feminist sensibility television refers to

"a keen consciousness of or appreciation for feminist television history, popular media feminisms, and popular feminist issues". Also, Hohenstein and Thalmann (2019) note an increase in serial narratives which convey a feminist political agenda. They explain that these serial narratives defy viewers' gendered expectations (old-fashioned, binary and normative tropes of womanhood), adopting (intersectional) feminist political agendas by employing diversified casts (women of different races and ethnicities, sexual identities, ages, economic backgrounds, religious views and body types), handling female character arcs and themes in a nuanced, complex and non-stereotypical manner. These serial narratives treat women's stories and experiences with candour (Hohenstein & Thalmann 2019:111).

Most of these women-centric television drama serials deliberately serve and target a female audience (Pinedo 2021:1). *Weeds* (Kohan 2005) follows Nancy Botwin (Mary Louise Parker), a suburban mother who starts selling marijuana to support her sons following the sudden passing of her husband. The espionage thriller *Homeland* (Gansa & Gordon 2011) follows Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes), a CIA operative who leads high stakes national security investigations. Carrie has bipolar disorder, which complicates her work and interpersonal relationships. In *The Good Wife* (King & King 2009), Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies) is a wife and mother forced to return to work after her husband, State Attorney Peter Florrick (Chris Noth), is incarcerated due to a public sex and political-corruption scandal. *Orphan Black* (Fawcett 2013) is a sci-fi thriller about the young 'street-smart' Sarah Manning (Tatiana Maslany) who is absorbed into a world of clones and conspiracy theories. The American political thriller *House of Cards* (Willimon 2013) features the amoral Claire Underwood (Robin Wright) as the wife of the equally amoral politician Frank (Kevin Spacey) as they rise to political power. The crime drama *How to Get Away with Murder* (Nowalk 2014) has the dynamic and intelligent Annalise Keating (Viola Davis), a criminal defence lawyer and law professor, who gets

entangled in a murder plot[17]. The murder mystery drama *Mare of Easttown* (Ingelsby 2021), follows middle-aged detective Mare Sheehan (Kate Winslet) whose own personal trauma comes to the fore during an investigation of a young woman's murder. These television drama serials all feature female protagonists at the helm and have constructed the serial narrative from the female protagonist's perspective. Consequently, telling the female protagonist's story, conveying her experiences, actions, thoughts and emotions. However, these serial narratives do not explicitly engage with or articulate a feminist political agenda; therefore, they do not directly demonstrate a feminist sensibility.

The zeitgeist-defining *Girls* (Dunham 2012) features Hannah Horvath (Lena Dunham) as the central character in a series about four contemporary privileged and entitled young women who live and work in Brooklyn, New York. This female-driven dramedy explores and engages post-feminist and fourth-wave feminist politics, such as contemporary young women's independence, employment insecurities, financial viability, freedom and choice as well as female friendship, idealised femininity, sex and abortion. Consequently, it can be described as a series with a feminist sensibility. However, *Girls* (Dunham 2012) is also criticised for displaying white privilege, self-entitlement, female immaturity and aimlessness (Daalmans 2013:359; Fuller & Driscoll 2015:257).

Set in a women's penitentiary, *Orange Is the New Black* (Kohan 2013) follows Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) as she enters Litchfield minimum-security prison on a drug trafficking charge. Once incarcerated she meets a diverse range of women, often from minority groups, whose intricate stories and experiences are fleshed out through the course of the serials' seven seasons. Also, this can be described as a series that promotes a feminist sensibility as it is set within an oppressive female prison system and features a wide range of different female bodies. The serial narrative deals with various feminist

[17] Viola Davis became the first black woman to win an Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for her role as Annalise.

issues such as medical care, education, hygiene, motherhood, equal representation and sexual relationships.

In the dystopian *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a), Offred/June Osborne (Elisabeth Moss) is a fertile woman trapped in the religious-fundamentalist regime of Gilead. She is forced to become a 'handmaid', a woman assigned to birth children for state commanders and their barren wives. With its emphasis on controlling women's reproductive capacity and bio-social oppression (especially against the backdrop of the 2022 controversy about *Roe v Wade*, 410 US 113 [1973]). *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a) is an explicitly feminist serial narrative, examining various feminist issues; therefore, it promotes a feminist sensibility.

Big Little Lies (Kelly 2017a) features the primary characters Madeline Mackenzie, Jane Chapman and Celeste Wright. These three female protagonists' female subjectivity will be interpreted and analysed in depth in Section 3.6.

Note that these women-centric television drama series and serials, are all unique in their tone (feeling, mood, aesthetics). *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017a) differs from *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), which again differs from *Orange is the New Black* (Kohan 2013). These drama serials all feature lead female characters who can be described as complex or complicated women (individualistic, autonomous, multi-dimensional). This complexity is based on various factors such as:

- Personal/past trauma (e.g., the domestic abuse Celeste endures in *Big Little Lies* [Kelly 2017a]).
- Restrictive political and domestic environment that shapes a character's thoughts and actions (e.g., Offred/June's defiance in *The Handmaids Tale* [Miller 2017a]).
- An imperative for survival that over time reshapes into material profit (e.g., Nancy selling marijuana in *Weeds* [Kohan 2005]).
- Ambition and a hunger for power (e.g., Claire's ruthless rise to power in *House of Cards* [Willimon 2013]).

While Hohenstein and Thalmann (2019), Pinedo (2021) as well as Tally (2016), refer to them as 'difficult women characters', I prefer the term 'compelling female characters'.

3.2.2 Difficult Woman Character

Television critics and scholars have ascribed various definitions to try and define a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character. Hohenstein and Thalmann (2019:113) define difficult women as "female characters who defy an easy categorisation, female characters who exhibit contradicting traits, who are often elaborated". Jason Mittell (2015:136) describes character elaboration as a "shift in audiences [*sic*] understanding of a character, whereby a serial narrative gradually reveals aspects of a character over time so that these facets of a character feel new to the audience"; for example, flashback scenes which reveal aspects of a character's backstory which cast their actions in a new light. Pinedo (2021:1) defines difficult women as complex, multi-dimensional female characters who have the female gaze. She explains that these female characters "transgress[es] the norms of femininity unapologetically and systematically" and can be "abrasive, aggressive, ambitious, often defined by work more than motherhood, at times unlikable" (Pinedo 2021:13). Events within the drama serial unfold from their perspective and their actions drive the narrative (Pinedo 2021:13). However, Margaret Tally (2016) refers to difficult women characters as the anti-heroine which she defines as "complex, multi-layered and morally flawed female characters".

These definitions can be linked to Brett Martin (2013). During the late 1990s and early 2000s television gave us morally ambiguous male characters such as Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos* [Chase 1999a]), Walter White (*Breaking Bad* [Gilligan 2008]), and Donald Draper (*Mad Men* [Weiner 2007]) – the first male characters to set the anti-hero television trend. Martin (2013) argues that this television trend sent the creation of high-end quality television programmes in a new direction and was the start of a creative revolution, redefining television by challenging the norms of what the medium could do. The onset of quality television during the 1990s and 2000s placed a great deal of emphasis on higher production or cinematic values in the form of authorial storytelling, overlapping plot

lines, mixing genres, ensemble casting, skilful camera and editing work, which paved the way for constructing more distinct and memorable television characters. Mittell (2015) calls this phenomenon 'complex television' and uses the phrase **narrative complexity** (a distinct narration mode) to describe television serials that redefine the conventional episodic form, in which every episode needs plot closure. These narratively complex television serials focus more on ongoing long form storytelling across a range of genres, featuring compelling character arcs, often experimenting with non-linear and -chronological narration, prolepsis (flashforwards) and analepsis (flashbacks) (Mittell 2006:17-18; 2015:18-31). Mittell (2015:22) suggests that complex or quality television's "most defining characteristic might be its unconventionality" and its refusal to conform to conventional norms. He (Mittell 2015:22) states that complex serial narratives are composed of four constitutive elements: (1) story world, (2) character, (3) events (4) temporality. For this study's purposes, I focus on character. As suggested earlier, this change in the television landscape facilitated the construction of more distinct and memorable television characters – the rise of the anti-hero trend and, in recent years, constructing (compelling) female or difficult woman characters and the female anti-heroine (Mittell 2006; Tally 2016:8).

Television's anti-hero can be defined as a male character who is not morally good or bad, but who commits illegal or immoral acts due to their history, experiences, circumstances or other factors, situations or ambitions which might drive a person to commit heinous acts or crimes. This allows audiences the opportunity to experience these situations through the character's eyes, imagining how far they will be willing to go if the roles were reversed (Tally 2016:101). Quality television and complex narratives such as *The Sopranos* (Chase 1999a), *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan 2008), *The Wire* (Simon 2002) and *Mad Men* (Weiner 2007), with their charismatic and morally ambiguous male anti-heroes fostered the rise of the female anti-heroine. Tally (2016:8) defines this anti-heroine as "a deeply flawed, yet simultaneously, sympathetic character. She is neither uniformly good nor evil but has qualities that mark her as capable of doing bad things for good reasons. She is usually 'edgy' in the sense that her actions and her personality do not obey the

conventions of traditional femininity (nurturing, selfless, maternal, confined to a domestic life) though she may or may not behave at times in conventionally masculine ways"; for example, Carrie (*Homeland* [Gansa & Gordon 2011]).

Also, female characters like Hannah (*Girls* [Dunham 2012]), Annalise (*How to Get Away with Murder* [Nowalk 2014]) and Claire (*House of Cards* [Willimon 2013]) are categorised as anti-heroines because they are not necessarily likable or conventionally morally laudable characters, unlike many female characters that came before them, such as the emotionally astute Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart) from *Ally McBeal* (Kelly 1997) and the pop-culture savvy Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham) from *Gilmore Girls* (Sherman-Palladino 2000). Television critics and scholars describe Claire and Annalise as unlikable, unpleasant and devious. However, television series creators and writers have constructed them as multi-dimensional, capable, smart women who exhibit qualities that make them interesting and compelling to watch (Omar 2018; Payne 2020; Rodgers 2019; Tally 2016:1).

Pinedo (2021:12-14) theorises that the distinguishing factor between the male anti-hero and female anti-heroine is that female characters' "level of transgressions does not typically rise to the level of transgressions committed by men". In television series, male characters may exhibit more indiscriminately violent behaviour. For instance, in the 'College' episode from *The Sopranos* (Chase 1999b), Tony strangles a man in witness protection with his bare hands to increase the power of the mob, whereas in 'The Wilderness' episode of *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017d) June Osborne arranges and assists in the killing of Commander Fred Waterford (Joseph Fiennes), a man who imprisoned, beat and raped her. The difference in their transgressions is that Tony murders a man to reinforce his patriarchal power, whereas June assists in murdering Fred, to remove a pillar in the patriarchal system. June, like Claire (*House of Cards* [Willimon 2013]) and Annalise (*How to Get Away with Murder* [Nowalk 2014]) is a complex, transgressive character who demonstrates agency in her life.

To build on Tally's (2016) definition of the female anti-heroine, Pinedo (2021:21-29) suggests the following three types of female anti-heroines: (1) the anti-hero's wife, (2) the pathologized female-antihero and (3) the difficult woman character. First, Pinedo (2021:21-23) identifies "the anti-hero's wife – pathologized if against him, normalized if with him". For example, Skyler White (Anna Gunn), Walter's wife in *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan 2008). The character of Skyler was so heavily and consistently criticised, even verbally attacked, by viewers for consistently opposing Walter, that the contempt for the character impacted on Gunn's personal life and safety to such an extent that she wrote an op-ed letter to the *New York Times* titled "*I Have a Character Issue*" (Gunn 2013). On the other side of the spectrum is Gemma Teller Morrow (Katey Sagal), the matriarch in *Sons of Anarchy* (Sutter 2008). Throughout the serial narrative, Gemma works with the male anti-hero(s) in the Sons of Anarchy motorcycle club and goes to great lengths to protect herself, her husband Clay Morrow (Ron Perlman) and son Jax Teller (Charlie Hunnam).

Second, Pinedo (2021:25-26) refers to "the pathologised female-antihero" - female characters with emotional problems or mental instability. For example, Carrie (*Homeland* [Gansa & Gordon 2011]) is a pathologised female anti-heroine. Carrie is a multi-layered, complex female character; an intuitive, no-nonsense CIA operative, entitled, arrogant, and deceitful, with a drinking problem and bipolar disorder (positioned in the series as a character flaw). Carrie experiences manic episodes from time to time but retains her extraordinary ability to draw patterns/connections in solving high-stakes investigations for the CIA. Another problem associated with this anti-heroine is the fact that she cannot be good at both her career and personal life. Carrie has been constructed to be brilliant in her professional capacity as CIA operative, but fails miserably in her personal life[18].

[18] Another example is Jackie Peyton (Edie Falco) from *Nurse Jackie* (Brixious, Dunsky & Wallem 2009), an inner-city hospital nurse who struggles with substance abuse (Pinedo 2021:25).

Third, Pinedo (2021:28-29) identifies the "difficult woman character". This character trope refers to female characters whose stories are not side-lined, pathologised or diminished. These difficult women characters are constructed as multi-layered, complex or complicated, even morally ambiguous women. Female characters who exhibit flaws; who sometimes transgress, commit, or attempt to commit murder; however, retain our sympathy throughout the narrative arc as their perspective guides our experience of events and locates their gaze (the female gaze) at the core of the story. The serial narrative conveys their desires and viewpoints, giving audiences access to their subjectivity and agency - for example, Celeste (*Big Little Lies* [Kelly 2017a])[19].

What distinguishes the female anti-heroine from the difficult woman character is that the anti-heroine is capable of intentionally harming others through "commission or omission" (Pinedo 2021:13). However, if she "deliberately kills, then it is to protect herself or others, though not under conditions that the law would recognise as killing in self-defence" (Pinedo 2021:14). In contrast, the difficult woman character deconstructs the stereotypical norms of femininity. She is unconventional and goes beyond the portrayal of the stereotypical natural nurturer, mother, wife or girlfriend, she is not necessarily likeable and conveys characteristics of being "abrasive, aggressive and ambitious, often defined by work more than motherhood" (Pinedo 2021:14). Most of these female character arcs have been constructed in such a way that audiences can understand the plausibility of their actions, relate, identify, recognise and sympathize with them because of their deeply human characteristics.

Table 1, as set out below, encompasses the characteristic attributes of a difficult woman character described above.

[19] Another example is Claire Beauchamp Randall (Caitriona Balfe) from *Outlander* (Moore 2014) who Pinedo (2021:63) describes as "outspoken, pushy and brash". Also, she is more defined by work (being a nurse and later a surgeon) than motherhood.

Behaviour	• Femininity/might behave in conventional masculine way • Abrasive/aggressive • Morally flawed/unlikable at times/not uniformly good or bad
Post-feminist neoliberal worldview and practice	• Strong/capable/independent • Hypersexuality/varied sexual identities/varied sexual partners • Varied/non-specific religious views • Non-specific gender and race • Highly ambitious • Defined by work/career-driven • Does not obey conventions of traditional femininity

Table 1: Characteristics of a difficult woman character or (compelling) female character.

Mittell (2015:144) believes that audiences find anti-heroes and anti-heroines appealing and enjoy watching them come to life due to their charismatic qualities, which helps audiences overlook their deviousness and immoral actions. To explore female subjectivity or the interiority of female characters in more detail and what it is that constitutes a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character, I use Smith's (1995) framework of engaging with fictional characters through his structure of sympathy using the practices of recognition, alignment and allegiance.

3.3 Engaging with fictional characters through recognition, alignment and allegiance

To construct an interpretive framework to analyse female subjectivity in women-centric television drama serials, I explore Smith's (1995) lexicon of engaging with fictional characters through the practices of recognition, alignment and allegiance – the structure of sympathy. Eder *et al* (2010) proclaim that the structure of sympathy is a more naturalistic framework for understanding and evaluating a character, fiction and narrative representation.

First, Smith (1995) explains that it is fundamental for television characters to be constructed in such a way that they are recognisable to audiences to distinguish or

differentiate between human beings and other objects or agents. Audiences should be able to identify with or relate to a character. Further, they should be able to experience characters as 'real' multi-layered human beings with subjectivity and agency, feelings and emotions, background and history which help audiences understand a particular character's actions or lack thereof. Smith (1995:117) explains that the principal material for the **recognition** of character is:

> bodily images (face, body, clothing, deportment, actions performed by the character), classification (sex, gender, nationality, ethnicity, class, values, age) voice, idiolect and language (names, 'titular' names or social roles like 'priest' or 'father', pronouns, descriptions of characters) which are conveyed through dialogue, voice over narration and visual imagery.

Smith (1995) explains that recognising the character requires the **mimetic hypothesis,** which is described as embodied knowledge of emotional states or interiority. In other words, audiences engage with narrative text and the construction of characters through aspects of real-world experiences. He states that characters are constructed by writers as cleverly designed artifices or beings who represent a collection of textually described emotions, feelings, beliefs and analogical traits that audiences relate to/identify with due to their own experience with real-world persons.

Second, Smith (1995) refers to **alignment,** which is broken up into two key ideas: (1) **spatio-temporal attachment** and (2) **subjective access**. Spatio-temporal attachment enables viewers to follow a particular character(s) experience(s) or path(s) through the narrative of a television serial, which sometimes spans years, seeing a character grow, develop and sometimes transform into someone completely different. In other words, spatio-temporal attachment is "the function that renders characters as agents or entities that act and behave" (Smith 1995:143). In addition, subjective access allows audiences into the interior state of a character, providing viewers access to the character's subjectivity, disposition or state through their emotions, thought processes and morality which is done by using prolepsis (flashforwards) or analepsis (flashbacks). Therefore,

subjective access is "the function that represents characters as entities that desire, believe, feel, think, and so forth" (Smith 1995:143).

Television aesthetic strategies such as shot sizes, angles, framing, etc. are used to allow audiences subjective access to a character's internal state and therefore construct and maintain female subjectivity, for instance: empathy-inducing shots. *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) makes use of empathy-inducing shots when Jane is sexually assaulted, by focusing the camera on her face using closeups and extreme closeups to convey her distress and pain, instead of focusing on the perpetrator or act (Kelly 2017d). Further, Smith (1995) posits that POV shots are often used to control alignment with characters as it provides audiences with greater access to a character(s) subjectivity, inner state and emotions; alternately, it can hide/conceal things from the viewer. For instance, in the pilot episode ('Somebody's Dead') of *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017b), Celeste is standing in the kitchen watching her husband Perry reading to their twin sons (Max and Josh) in their living room. POV shots are used to alternate between closeups of Celeste's face (revealing contradicting emotions of both happiness and sadness) and wide shots of her POV, watching Perry and the boys reading and making jokes (Kelly 2017b). These lingering closeups provide audiences subjective access to Celeste's interiority, but also conceal emotions (brief moments of sadness), suggesting that there is more going on than audiences are allowed access to.

Pinedo's (2021:30-31) concept of female gaze is a another principal factor used to construct female subjectivity. Pinedo (2021) formulated the female gaze to counter Mulvey's (1975) male gaze. Pinedo (2021:11) describes the female gaze as a "structure of looking that centres the narrative from a female perspective and is organized around female empowerment in the story space and viewing experience". By constructing a female gaze, Pinedo (2021) acknowledges that female sexuality is an essential component of female subjectivity, centring and validating female desire and pleasure, by constructing equality in sexual scenes. Consequently, the female gaze de-fetishise and de-eroticise sex, nudity, sexual violence and rape by presenting these scenes from the female gaze

(subordinate party), deconstructing masculinist pleasure and the male gaze. Which constitutes audience alignment and sympathy with the female characters experiences. Section 3.4 elaborates on aesthetic strategies to construct female subjectivity.

Third, Smith (1995) talks about **allegiance**. This entails how a television narrative represents a particular character(s) in moral and ideological terms, with reference to class, nation, age, ethnicity and gender. Allegiance is split into two segments: (1) **system of values** or **moral structure** and (2) **moral orientation** (Smith 1995:187-227), which refers to the character's moral principles and the moral evaluation of a character's actions (behaviour towards other characters – minor, physically- or socially-weaker characters such as children, the old, sick or suppressed, as well as animals or domestic pets). Smith (1995) explains that allegiance to a character is brought about by not only understanding a character, but through evaluating and emotionally responding to that character's journey, actions or situation in the narrative's context, which is often cued by how other characters regard, interact with and talk about the character. In other words, allegiance refers to the spectator's emotional and cognitive response to a character. Audiences can only evaluate the character appropriately if the context of the narrative, action or situation is understood. The practise of allegiance towards a character is important for audiences to be sympathetic or antipathetic towards the character's actions, beliefs, desires, ethics, values, etc. to respond emotionally towards a character. Therefore, audiences become and remain emotionally invested in the character's story, narrative or the drama serial (Mittell 2015; Smith 1995). An example of how allegiance is created in *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017c) is in the episode 'Late' when Ofglen/Emily's (Alexis Bledel) clitoris is surgically removed to negate her desire for sex. Although the surgery is never shown, it is indicated when Emily lifts her surgical gown and Aunt Lydia (Ann Dowd) tells her: "You won't want what you cannot have" (Miller 2017c). This is followed by an earnest emotional reaction from Ofglen/Emily shown through extreme closeups of her face for a duration of time. In the episode 'Faithful' (Miller 2017d) Ofglen/Emily's emotional and psychological trauma escalates to an emotional breakdown. At the end of the episode, she tells June her real name and then steals a commander's wife's car. She drives around in

circles at the market (smiling), driving over a guard at one point, until she is forcefully removed from the car and taken away for her defiant behaviour (Miller 2017d). The female genital mutilation that Ofglen/Emily underwent in the 'Late' episode of *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller 2017c) fosters allegiance, as audiences are allowed to emotionally and cognitively respond to the character's experience, to comprehend and be sympathetic towards her future actions.

Using Smith's (1995) lexicon in combination with the theoretical frameworks post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism (discussed in Chapter Two) and Ford's (2017) feminist sensibility, I constructed the model in Figure 2 to use as an interpretive framework combined with my television datasets (see Section 3.4 on aesthetic strategies) to analyse the construction of female subjectivity in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a).

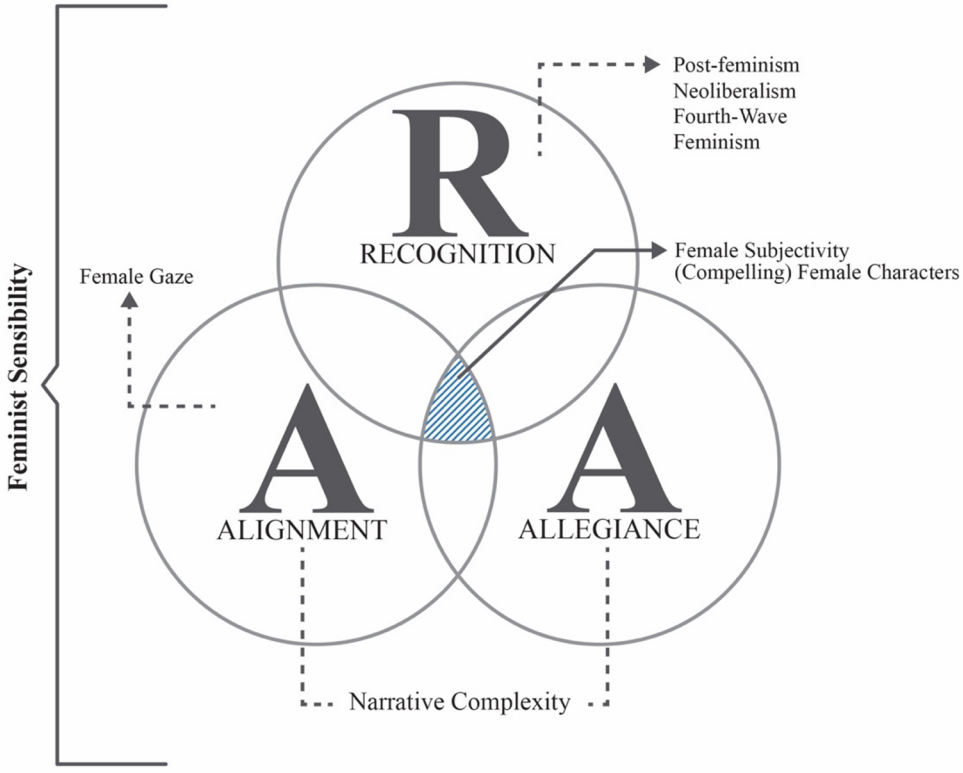

Figure 2: Interpretive framework for the analysis of female subjectivity in women-centric television drama serials.

Based on the above interpretative framework, I argue that the preconditions for constructing (compelling) female characters in long form television drama serials, who have female subjectivity, are recognition, alignment and allegiance. Post-feminism, neoliberalism or fourth-wave feminist values or concerns (as highlighted in Chapter Two) should inform recognition of contemporary female characters. Further, character alignment should be structured by allowing audiences subjective access to the female characters' interiority (feelings, emotions, desires, etc.). Alignment promotes a female gaze by centring the serial narrative from a female perspective, validating the female character's story and experiences which establishes allegiance between the character, the serial narrative and the viewer. Allegiance is therefore only possible through the evaluation of/and emotional or cognitive response to a character's moral orientation which allows audiences to be sympathetic or antipathetic towards the character, as well as the serial narrative. Where these three notions intersect (recognition, alignment and allegiance), female subjectivity is constructed and consequently (compelling) female characters are formed. This type of female character (complex, multi-dimensional, potentially alienating) can only exist if the television series or serial they inhabit are narratively complex (Mittell 2015). Therefore, for this study, it is important for the narratively complex television drama serial to encompass post-feminism, neoliberalism or fourth-wave feminism and promote a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017).

I now turn to cinematography and the use of camera – shot sizes, angles, framing and editing – and how cinematography is used to construct female subjectivity and agency through visual presentation. Television aesthetic strategies such as camera placement can provide or restrict audience's access to a character's thoughts, feelings and emotions (interiority), aligning audiences with their perspective, desires and interest. Thus, creating emotional investment or allegiance in a female character arc and the serial narrative.

3.4 *Big Little Lies*: Shot size and shot angle analysis

Having discussed the creation of engaging television characters using Smith's (1995) lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance (Section 3.3), my focus shifts to

television as medium. Specifically, I explore how television aesthetic strategies (camera placement, angles, framing and editing) are used to construct the three levels of character engagement, construct the female gaze and suggest agency, in turn implying the presence of female subjectivity, for and in certain female characters.

The camera has been described as the eye of the storyteller or the window from which a spectator experiences narratives, characters, situations and events (Boggs & Petrie 2008:124). One of the elements used by cinematographers to give audiences greater access to a character's subjectivity and agency (creating character/spectator alignment) through space and time is POV shots (Smith 1995:156-165). Boggs and Petrie (2008:126) describe the following four definitive points of view shots which are employed in both film and television:

1. Objective (camera as side-line/impersonal observer who does not take part in the action),
2. Subjective (camera as a participant in the action),
3. Indirect-subjective (closeups or extreme closeups of characters or actions – drawing the spectator closer to the action/emotion/feelings to create an emotional response),
4. Director's interpretive (how the director wants spectators to interpret the action or event).

The audience's level of identification or engagement with a character can be aligned and manipulated using various POV shots. In other words, the closer the camera is placed to the sightline of the character, the greater the degree of access to/identification with the character. Thus, the closer we are to a character's face, the more impact their feelings, emotions and interior state (subjectivity) will have on us as spectators, fostering sympathy and promoting moral allegiance and vice versa. The POV shot is used to control viewer alignment (Smith 1995).

Another important television aesthetic used to create character allegiance is camera placement or angle as it communicates character status, dramatic information and

emotional attitudes. When a camera is placed at eye level, it portrays the most common height. Therefore, it places the character in a neutral perspective - not superior nor inferior. This angle portrays how we would see people in real life, at eye level (Boggs & Petrie 2008:152). However, a low-angle shot is framed from just below eye level and is usually used to exaggerate a subject or to emphasize a subject's power dynamic, presenting them as superior. A high-angle shot is framed from above eye level and is used to diminish a subject, presenting them as inferior, small and insignificant. How a character is represented using camera placement or angles gives spectators a greater understanding of the character, their actions or situation. Therefore, spectators can evaluate and respond to the character and their actions accordingly.

Also, basic shot sizes play an important role when it comes to character depiction. Cinematographers use closeups, extreme closeups, medium closeups, medium shots and wide shots to present a character, their importance and actions within their surrounding environment – establishing objectivity or subjectivity to various degrees (see Figure 3 for examples of basic shot sizes).

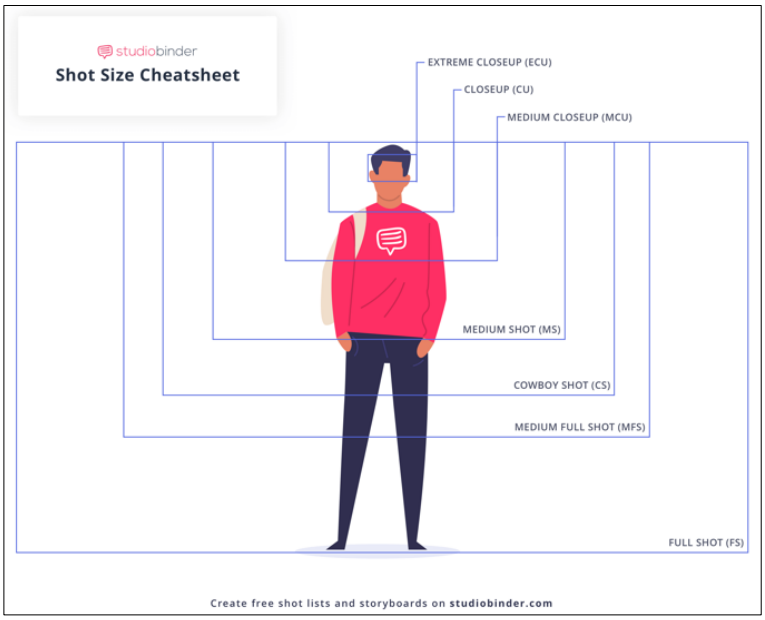

Figure 3: Basic shot sizes.
(Lannom 2020).

Using these basic elements of cinematography; I explore the aesthetic strategies used in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017b) by critically analysing the first season's pilot episode ('Somebody's Dead'), focusing specifically on the basic shot sizes, POV shots and camera placement and angles used. This analysis is necessary to see how the late Jean-Marc Vallée (director) used aesthetic strategies to construct (compelling) female characters and the female gaze, female subjectivity and female agency. Then, the analyses of *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) are used as a comparative reference point to analyse the female gaze, female subjectivity and female agency in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) in Chapter Four Section 4.5. Comparing these two television serials will help answer the research question on how female subjectivity is constructed in selected women-centric television drama serials.

Tables 2 to 4's content were gathered from watching the pilot episode ('Somebody's Dead') of *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017b), a 49-minute-long episode, which includes the series intro as well as the opening and end credits. I analysed every shot used within the episode. Setting up a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the headings time, shot size, POV shot, shot angle, and shot information (see Attachment A[20]). I counted the different shot sizes, the various POV shots and the camera angles. Percentages were added to the amounts used.

Shot Sizes	*Big Little Lies*	Percentages
Extreme closeup shot	6	1%
Close shot	78	19%
Medium closeup shot	98	23%
Medium shot	89	21%
Cowboy shot	11	3%
Medium full shot	0	0%
Medium wide shot	26	6%

[20] Attachment A - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1V5f6t0KQv0Jigd_IHCvYq2AP5qs80SSA/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107349457800719427648&rtpof=true&sd=true

Full shot	1	0%
Wide shot	111	26%
Establishing shot	0	0%
TOTAL	**420**	**100%**

Table 2: *Big Little Lies* basic shot sizes.
(Kelly 2017b).

Point of View	***Big Little Lies***	**Percentages**
Objective POV	115	27%
Subjective POV	222	53%
Indirect-subjective POV	83	20%
Director's interpretive	0	0%
TOTAL	**420**	**100%**

Table 3: *Big Little Lies* point of view shots.
(Kelly 2017b).

Camera Angle	***Big Little Lies***	**Percentages**
Eye level	362	86%
Low angle	16	4%
High angle	42	10%
TOTALS:	**420**	**100%**

Table 4: *Big Little Lies* camera angles.
(Kelly 2017b)

From the information gathered in Tables 2 to 4, I found that the international drama serial *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017b) used 420 shots in the pilot episode. The closeup, medium closeup and medium shot are used a lot in the pilot episode, which is a standard film and television feature to emphasise individual subjects, their emotions and reactions in greater detail. *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017b) uses the wide shot 26% of the time in the pilot episode, balancing the subjects in their surrounding environment, giving greater context in establishing the character in their surrounding environment. Jean-Marc Vallée the director of *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), often frames his subjects from the front, providing the spectators with more character dimension and depth. Considering Table 3 above, Vallée uses the subjective POV 53% and the indirect-subjective POV 20% of the time across characters, and 52% across the female lead characters (Madeline, Celeste,

Jane, Renata Klein [Laura Dern] and Bonnie Carlson [Zoë Kravitz]). Vallée's sustained use of the Subjective POV focuses the audience's attention on the lead female protagonist's subjectivity – what and how they are experiencing things, constructing the narrative from their perspective (female gaze), and aligning viewer identification. Further, this allows spectators greater access to these women's subjectivity and agency. As discussed in Section 3.3, Smith (1995) states that POV shots are used to control viewers' alignment with characters, allowing audiences subjective access to the characters.

3.4.1 Operational definition and explanation of a (compelling) female character

For this study, the operational definition of a (compelling) female character is based on the definitions mentioned (Section 3.2), describing the female anti-heroine and the difficult woman character in combination with Smith (1995)'s lexicon of creating engaging fictional characters through the practises of recognition, alignment and allegiance (Section 3.3). I propose that a (compelling) female character is a character who has been constructed as an identifiable (recognisable) human being with subjectivity (interiority, feelings, emotions and desires) and agency, aligning viewers with her character. She can be heroic or anti-heroic, complex or complicated, independent and empowered or morally ambiguous and ruthless. Her story is treated candidly and her perspective or viewpoint drives the narrative (female gaze), fostering sympathy or antipathy with her character, creating allegiance with her, and emotional investment in her character arc and the serial narrative.

3.5 Female protagonists in *Big Little Lies*

In this section I demonstrate how the female lead characters in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) have been constructed as post-feminist, neoliberal twenty-first-century women who engage with current social and political issues (e.g., violence against women). The core themes of the serial narrative are female friendship or kinship, female empowerment, domestic violence (intimate violence), bullying and rape (focal issues re-emphasised in emerging fourth-wave feminism, see Chapter Two). Based on the salience of its feminist

themes, *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) is, from the outset, considered a serial narrative promoting a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017).

Margaret McVeigh (2019) describes the genre of *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) as domestic noir, with crime as a sub-genre. The genre domestic noir was coined by Julia Crouch (2013), which McVeigh (2019:2) describes as: "domestic noir takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants". I agree with McVeigh's (2019) description: this television drama serial is set in the domestic sphere and is based upon the lives and relationships of five complex (individualistic, autonomous and multi-dimensional) women who live on the beachfront in Monterey, California. Each character has her own intricate plotline, and although they are at first represented as stereotypical 'natural nurturers, mothers and housewives', wealthy and mostly hyper-feminine (Kelly 2017b), they are revealed to be complex and flawed female characters (Kelly 2017h). The series is critical of gender stereotypes and focuses the viewer's attention on issues such as domestic or intimate violence, bullying and rape.

To explore the construction of female subjectivity in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), I analyse three of the five female protagonists in the serial, using my interpretive framework (Figure 2) based on Smith's (1995) lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance combined with my television datasets as set out in Section 3.4. I incorporate current socio-political and -economic frameworks such as post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism to explore Madeline, Celeste and Jane in greater depth. Karen Wilkes (2015:110) describes the post-feminist, neoliberal female subject as "an educated, professional woman who promotes an aesthetic of wealth; displaying privileged whiteness, heterosexuality and hyper-femininity; an economically independent woman displaying her status through the consumption of luxury goods" (Chapter Two Section 2.3). The post-feminist, neoliberal markers and signs described by Wilkes (2015)

are all characteristic attributes that the lead female characters display in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a).

3.6 *Big Little Lies'* construction of female subjectivity

3.6.1 Madeline Martha Mackenzie

Madeline (Reese Witherspoon) is one of the main female protagonists in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), whose experiences help drive the narrative. As the show opens, Madeline hurts her ankle after scolding her daughter Abigail and her friends. Jane, a new resident to Monterey, tries to assist Madeline beside the road. Madeline introduces herself to Jane (and the viewers): "I'm Madeline Martha Mackenzie, I always say Martha, but nobody calls me that. Everyone just calls me Madeline" (Kelly 2017b).

She is a middle-upper class (privileged, economically independent and wealthy) white woman who lives on the beachfront in Monterey, California. Madeline can be described as a **recognisable** female character as she fits the post-feminist, neoliberal mould (see Chapter Two Section 2.3). As outlined by Wilkes (2015:110), this mould describes these female subjects as thin, hyper-feminine, heterosexual, maternal and domestic, displaying their status through commodified femininity (i.e., the consumption of luxury goods). Madeline is a mother and a housewife who occasionally helps at the community theatre. Her husband Ed (Adam Scott), is a computer engineer and their family's primary source of income. Madeline displays her neoliberal status (wealth and privilege) through commodified femininity. She lives on the beachfront in a big, beautiful house with her family, drives a large SUV and wears expensive designer clothing. The visual presentation of her character is well-groomed (always beautifully made-up).

One morning while having coffee with friends after dropping their children at school, she asks the waiter (Kelly 2017b): "Three coffees please, and will you throw in something chocolate that won't make my ass look fat?" This order can be interpreted as playful and self-deprecating; however, it suggests that the well-groomed Madeline is concerned with her weight and appearance (self-management and -monitoring). Also, she regularly does

yoga and goes running with her friends, improving and enhancing her physical appearance (controlling her body), focusing on her individual well-being and thereby displaying post-feminist, neoliberal values of self-investment (see Chapter Two Section 2.3).

Madeline is the link character across the characters and storylines. She is outspoken and not afraid to speak her mind or confront characters if she deems it necessary. Her daughter Chloe describes her as "an active talker" (Kelly 2017b). The first time Madeline, Celeste and Jane have coffee together the following exchange takes place (Kelly 2017b):

Madeline:	"Do you have a husband? … I shouldn't assume, boyfriend … girlfriend? I am open to all possibilities."
Jane:	"No, no husband or partner."
Madeline:	"What about Ziggy's dad?"
Celeste:	"Easy girl …"

Madeline tends to be direct, sometimes maliciously so. For instance, when Harper (Kelen Coleman) tries to play peacemaker between Madeline and Renata, after Jane's son is accused of bullying Renata's daughter, she responds (Kelly 2017b): "Thank you, Harper, that is very sweet of you to offer, and I will make sure to let everybody know that Renata is your best friend."

Madeline likes to interfere in other characters' affairs, for example:

- On orientation day, with Renata and Jane's child bullying situation (Kelly 2017b);
- At Amabella's (Ivy George) birthday party (Kelly 2017d); and
- During Jane's search for the man who sexually assaulted her (Kelly 2017e).

The Otter Bay school principal explains it (Kelly 2017b): "What Madeline had was a nose for everybody else's business … believe me I know." However, it is evident that Madeline intervenes on other character's behalf; rarely for her own gain, except when it involves her theatre production and children.

Through the course of the season, Madeline struggles with anger and it becomes clear that she is fond of keeping grudges, which inhibits her ability to process and resolve past issues, stating to her friends at one point (Kelly 2017c): "Oh I love my grudges; I tend to them like little pets." These grudges are revealed in her relationship with Nathan (her ex-husband), Bonnie (Nathan's wife) and Renata. Madeline is consumed with anger, bitterness, resentment, jealousy or envy, which she internalises. However, these visceral emotions come through visually and vocally on various occasions. I would like to reference these visceral emotions back to Lucy Bolton's (2011:3) description of female consciousness; the inner lives or mental perspective of female characters (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.1).

We learn a lot about Madeline's character through her outspokenness and through other characters opinions of her, allowing the audience subjective access to her character's subjectivity and interiority. Throughout the season, she is in a constant on-off feud with Renata, Joseph, Nathan and Bonnie. She dislikes, resents, is jealous of, or envies Renata because she is a successful businesswoman and mother. Joseph (Santiago Cabrera) is the community theatre director with whom Madeline had an affair, for which she feels guilty. Her ex-husband Nathan (James Tupper) left Madeline at a young age as a new mom, leaving her to raise Abigail by herself. Therefore, she resents Nathan's relationship with his current wife, Bonnie (Zoë Kravitz), whom she constantly runs into at Chloe's school and her yoga class. Often and unintentionally, Madeline gives viewers the idea that she is dissatisfied and unhappy with her 'perfect, ideal life'.

Motherhood is a central theme in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) and a significant theme in Madeline's character arc. She tells her husband Ed, after fighting with her daughter Abigail (Kelly 2017b): "I just feel that they gonna grow up and they're gonna be gone and it'll be just you and I … and we're going to be onto another chapter of our life, and you have another chapter, you have a business. And, and I don't. I'm a mom. This is my universe." Later, that same day, she tells Abigail (Kelly 2017b):

> What people don't tell you is that you lose your children. As beautiful and wonderful as you are now, that little girl whose curly hair I used to tangle, the one who had bad dreams and would crawl into my bed. She's gone. And I guess that is why I am feeling a little bit … and compounded by the fact that your little sister is going to first grade. I'm losing my babies.

Madeline is struggling with motherhood and the fact that her children are growing up. She feels anxious about losing them and what her life will be like once they leave home because she does not have a career or anything else to occupy her time with, like her husband. She is primarily a mom, as she stated. When Abigail decides that she no longer wants to live with Madeline, Madeline's world crumbles, making her feel as if she has failed as a parent (Kelly 2017d). The dejection she experiences when Abigail leaves home is an emotionally vulnerable moment for her character. This moment of vulnerability creates viewer **alignment,** facilitating emotional investment in the character as the serial narrative has already established that being a mother is at the core of Madeline's world.

Her female subjectivity is validated through her sexuality and sexual desire for Joseph. Initially she is the 'perfect' wife, mother and friend; however, she is concealing an affair with the community theatre director, guilt and regret. Madeline is content with her marriage to Ed but does not seem to be in love with or physically attracted to him. She does not sexually desire Ed, which is essential to her subjectivity. When Joseph kisses Madeline, after winning their 'controversial' musical dispute, she does not resist and kisses him back (revealing female sexual desire) (Kelly 2017e). Only later does she slap him and say she is married. Then, the audience learns that Madeline and Joseph had an affair a year before, which she ended. However, Madeline still has feelings for Joseph and might still be in love with him or desire him. Madeline is guilt-ridden about the affair and afraid that her relationship with Joseph might be revealed, which would mean she will lose her husband and her children (Kelly 2017e; 2017f).

One evening, while trying to connect with her daughter, she confesses about the affair, telling Abigail (Kelly 2017g):

> I am not fucking perfect. You think you know me so well. I fuck up too. I make mistakes. I've made mistakes bigger than this … Last year I cheated on Ed. I ended it very quickly … The two things I value the most are my kids and my marriage, and I risked destroying both, just because I was selfish, so tell me I'm perfect, okay? I know about fucking up.

Marriage and motherhood are very traditional values that Madeline displays. I suggest that contemporary post-feminist, neoliberal women have individual agency, freedom and choice (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.2, 2.2.3 & 2.3). Therefore, they can decide to be married, have children or a career or balance all of them on their own terms. Thus, though Madeline displays some traditional values (being maternal and domestic), she also displays various post-feminist, neoliberal values as emphasised when it comes to female independence, education and empowerment. Revealing her affair to Abigail is a vulnerable moment for Madeline. Laying her imperfections bare allows viewers to sympathise with her character's actions and the 'myth' of her perfection, creating **allegiance** with her character.

Though Madeline's character exhibits flaws such as infidelity, she is also virtuous, stating that education, especially female education, is important. Madeline was a young mother who never had the opportunity to go to college, which she regrets as she indicates in her conversations with Ed and Abigail and her resentfulness towards Renata, a mother and a businesswoman. She tells Jane (Kelly 2017b): "Everybody moves here for the education, basically it's private school at a public-school price, anyway, you're gonna love it." In another conversation with Abigail with regard to her going to college, she says (Kelly 2017b): "Let me be clear, you're going to college … this is about you Abigail and your future. When it all comes down to it, you must be independent and you must be self-sufficient … cause even the best-laid plans of your life, goes poof in your face … and in that case, you need to be strong, independent, and educated." Here, Madeline stresses post-feminist notions of female individual agency, independence and empowerment through higher education as the ideal career and life choice. To be self-sufficient and economically independent, emphasising individualism, self-reliance and self-investment

(enhancing her own well-being) are all markers of neoliberalism. I refer this entanglement back to the invidious collaboration between post-feminism and neoliberalism, which Rottenberg (2013) suggests as a "modern idea of womanhood" (See Chapter Two Section 2.3). These post-feminist neoliberal notions promote the serial narrative's feminist sensibility.

Madeline's perspective can be considered one of the main female perspectives in the serial narrative, which guides the viewer's experience of her character and the other female characters, situations and events, consequently, constructing a female gaze. Also, the use of television aesthetic strategies, such as framing Madeline's character from the front, using closeups, medium closeups and the subjective POV shot, allows viewers greater access to Madeline's subjectivity, interior state, emotions and thought processes (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Framing of Madeline's character on *Big Little Lies*. (Kelly 2017a).

Female friendship or kinship is one of the central themes in this female-driven serial narrative and Madeline is the thread that keeps the fabric together. She befriends Jane in the first episode, and they instantly become friends. On hearing about the bullying situation on orientation day, Ed and Madeline have the following exchange (Kelly 2017b):

Ed: "You are drawn to damaged people … Celeste, there's something wounded about her."

Madeline: "I am not drawn to damaged people. Do I like to help people in need, yes, last time I checked that's not a character flaw?"

Madeline's reply to Ed's description of her character or 'character flaw' gives viewers access to her moral orientation (values, principles and belief system), which fosters character allegiance. Also, it allows the character and the audience a moment of self-reflection as she/viewers evaluate(s) her moral character and her friends, especially Jane. Throughout the season, Madeline is protective of Jane – making her feel at home in Monterey, helping her with Ziggy's school projects, defending Jane and Ziggy when attacked by the parents at Otter Bay, and even assisting in her search for the man who sexually assaulted her. This protectiveness Madeline displays towards Jane could be because Jane is a young, single mother who reminds Madeline of herself as a struggling young mom. She tells Abigail (Kelly 2017b): "I was a very young mother when I had you, all that it takes a village crap is only good to a certain extent". Madeline's behaviour (protectiveness and kindness) towards Jane (who can be described as a younger, financially weaker character when compared to the other Monterey women) provides the audience access to Madeline's character in moral and ideological terms.

Considering the above descriptions of Madeline and how she is portrayed through visual presentation and dialogue, audiences are drawn into her intricate plotline, where they experience actions, situations and events through her perspective. Exterior markers of her character (how family, friends and other characters see and experience Madeline and how they talk about her and describe her) are used to connect viewers with her character, creating emotional investment in her character as well as the serial narrative, creating allegiance with the character.

Therefore, Madeline's female subjectivity is constructed by allowing her to be complex (individualistic, autonomous and multi-dimensional) in her own right. She is not a beneficiary to a male lead; she is not objectified and does not portray a marginal role. She features deeply human characteristics. She has female agency and displays anger,

bitterness, resentment, guilt and jealousy as well as kindness, endearment, protectiveness, friendship and love. The serial narrative conveys her viewpoint, perspective, actions and desires – allowing audiences access to her subjectivity and interiority, locating her gaze at the core of the story. Also, her sexuality (female desire and pleasure) is portrayed as an essential element of her subjectivity. Based on the above, I argue that Madeline is a compelling female character. Her character might be flawed and experienced as unlikable or malicious at times, but she is an identifiable, relatable post-feminist, neoliberal female character who deconstructs the stereotypical portrayal of the mother, wife and natural nurturer.

3.6.2 Jane Chapman

In this section, I explore Jane's (Shailene Woodley) female subjectivity and demonstrate how empathy-inducing shots contribute to constructing a female gaze and female subjectivity. Jane is a young, middle-class, white woman, a single mother, unemployed, searching for bookkeeping work (Kelly 2017b). She recently moved to Monterey, where she stays in a small, one-bedroom house in the suburban areas of Monterey, not on the beachfront like most other female characters. Also, Jane's choice of car (a Toyota Prius) indicates her middle-class status. She is not particularly glamourous (hyperfeminine or beautifully made-up) compared to the other female characters in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), often dressing simply in jeans, a blazer and sneakers that do not foreground her body. Jane tells Madeline and Celeste that she feels out of place (Kelly 2017b): "… it's like I am on the outside looking in … or like … I see this life, and it's so wonderful … but it doesn't quite belong to me … and then like, I look at you, and you're so beautiful … you are … and so are you …"; "you guys are just right … you're exactly right … and for some reason that makes me feel wrong I guess."

Jane is not as wealthy or economically independent as the other female characters and is lower in class and status. Some of the other higher class, wealthier parents at Otter Bay disapprove of Jane; therefore, they do not want to allow her into their midst. Harper tells the police investigator (Kelly 2017b): "Jane just didn't fit here, kinda like a dirty old Prius

parked outside of Barney's". However, Jane has social aspirations for a better life for herself and her son Ziggy and that is why she moved to Monterey. Ziggy tells Tom (the café owner) when he asks Jane why they moved to Monterey (Kelly 2017c): "Schools are great. To build a better life for her son. That's all you'll get." Ziggy is echoing Madeline's previous emphasis on the importance of education. Education is an important post-feminist, neoliberal tenet as it foregrounds female self-investment, independence, and empowerment (see Chapter Two Section 2.3).

Jane introduces herself to Madeline and the audience at the start of the pilot episode ('Somebody's Dead') (Kelly 2017b):

Jane:	"I'm Jane. Jane, no middle name, Chapman."
Madeline:	(*Observing Jane*) "Jane, no middle name, Chapman. I like you already. You're an intrinsically nice person. I have a nose for these sorts of things."

Repeating Jane's name emphasises her character as an important character or main character in the serial narrative, focusing the viewer's attention. Also, Madeline's brief description or first impression of Jane provides the audience with character information (that Jane is kind and caring) which is an important factor for character identification.

After dropping their children at school for orientation day, Madeline, Jane and Celeste go for coffee on the pier. Jane explains to Madeline and Celeste about Ziggy's father (Kelly 2017b): "He is not in the picture; he actually never was …" Only later during the season do audiences learn that Jane was sexually assaulted, and that Ziggy was the result. Throughout the serial narrative, Jane is portrayed as a devoted and loving mother, establishing her character as a caretaker and nurturer for whom her son is her primary priority. This tells audiences a lot about her character. Despite experiencing anxiety (post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]) and severe emotional and psychological trauma from the sexual assault, she can look past her trauma to raise her son with love and kindness. Jane features attributes of a strong, self-sufficient, capable, kind and caring young woman. Therefore, I argue that she is a **recognisable** female character. The female

attributes of strength, independence and self-sufficiency, which Jane displays, emphasises Madeline's earlier statement to her daughter Abigail, the 'modern idea of womanhood'. These attributes are all markers of post-feminism and neoliberalism (see Chapter Two Section 2.3) and therefore promote a feminist sensibility.

On Ziggy's first day of school, he is accused by Amabella (Renata's daughter) of choking her, in front of all the other children and their parents. Amabella is shown with bruises on the side of her neck. However, Ziggy denies hurting Amabella and Jane believes him saying (Kelly 2017b): "Ziggy doesn't lie". This incident places Jane and her son in the spotlight and starts the conflict between Jane and the other parents at Otter Bay.

Throughout the season, the bullying of Amabella continues (Kelly 2017c; 2017e). In the episode 'Push Comes to Shove' (Kelly 2017e) Ziggy's teacher suggests that Jane take Ziggy to see a child psychologist for evaluation, as she suspects that Amabella is still being bullied by him. Jane agrees because she is concerned that Ziggy might have his father's violent nature. However, the psychologist believes that Ziggy is not a bully and tells Jane (Kelly 2017e): "Frankly, he doesn't show any of the classic signs of a bullying personality, he's not narcissistic and he certainly demonstrates empathy and sensitivity." This is a big relief for Jane. However, when bite marks are found on Amabella (Kelly 2017f), one of the parents from Otter Bay starts circulating a petition calling for Ziggy's suspension. Jane is upset about the petition because there is no evidence that Ziggy is the bully. She confronts Renata, accidentally poking her in the eye (Kelly 2017g). Later that afternoon, Jane visits Renata to apologise, saying (Kelly 2017g):

> The truth is that I finally realised that I have been feeling exactly what you must be feeling. There's nothing worse than your child being victimised right? So, I understand and completely empathise with what you are going through. I am as sure as any parent can be that Ziggy is innocent. I took him to a child psychologist, and she examined him, tested him, and said that he is a gentle young boy, who is completely incapable of doing what he is being accused off … Renata, I am at my wits end. I don't know what to do anymore.

This is an emotionally vulnerable moment for both Jane and Renata, allowing viewers subjective access to their interiority (sincere feelings and emotions). As I noted in my discussion of Madeline (above), vulnerability creates viewer alignment, facilitating emotional investment in both Jane and Renata's characters. Audiences are aligned with Jane's character whose son, Ziggy, is being victimised as a bully, and Renata's character whose daughter Amabella is getting hurt, and the powerlessness both parents feel at the opposite side of the spectrum. In the season finale Ziggy confesses to Jane that Max (Celeste's son) has been hurting Amabella all along (Kelly 2017h).

Bullying, domestic violence and rape are major themes in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), which connect to current fourth-wave feminist concerns (see Chapter Two Section 2.4). Also, these themes and concerns are markers of the show's feminist sensibility. From the pilot episode ('Somebody's Dead') (Kelly 2017b), audiences are made aware of Jane's sexual assault through various analepsis. She experiences intense psychological trauma and anxiety (PTSD). Viewers gets access to flashbacks and nightmares of the sexual assault and the physical and emotional trauma she sustained, **aligning** audiences with her character. In the episode 'Living the Dream' (Kelly 2017d), Jane opens up to Madeline about the sexual assault saying: "he became extremely aggressive, it was like he was operating some piece of machinery or something, it was so rote. I tried to resist, but he was way bigger than I was. I eventually just stopped resisting because I was afraid that he would kill me … He finished, got up and said goodbye, and that was it". Madeline asks Jane if she has seen a professional to work through what happened. Jane tells her that she is the first person she has ever told, suggesting that she has never dealt with what happened to her; thus, never working through the trauma she endured.

Jane continuously feels anxious and afraid. These visceral feelings and fears are connected to feminism, and contemporary fourth-wave feminism, as it is a form of psychological trauma Jane experiences due to patriarchal power or dominance (being sexually assaulted). She tries to 'empower' herself by getting a gun and going to the shooting range, telling Madeline (Kelly 2017f): "It's actually helped me a lot, owning

one. They say just holding one in your hand has psychological benefits for emotional trauma. Because it inhibits mentalisation, so it helps you block yourself off from emotions … I feel stronger with one, more empowered".

However, owning a gun and fantasising about shooting the assailant does not negate the emotional trauma that Jane is experiencing. It might prevent Jane from seeking professional help and dealing with her feelings and anxieties. Also, Jane's gun ownership highlights her fear and the failure of existing institutions (police, law enforcement, the justice system, etc.) whose job is to protect society's citizens and, in this instance, women. When Madeline finds a man who resembles the perpetrator (Saxon Banks), Jane does not think twice about going to confront him, taking the gun with her (Kelly 2017f). Fortunately, it is not the right man. Only at the end of the season finale does Jane see Perry (Celeste's husband) when Perry confronts Celeste in front of all her friends at the school trivia night (Kelly 2017h). It takes a moment for Jane to recognise Perry, as he is dressed up in costume. However, staring into his face and eyes, and hearing his voice, Jane realises that Perry is the man who sexually assaulted her that night (Kelly 2017h). In the end, Perry's subjectivity (his embodiment and voice) gives him away as the perpetrator.

Through the extensive use of analepsis (Section 3.4), audiences are allowed subjective access to Jane's trauma, reliving what she experienced through memories (flashbacks). Viewers experience the assault through her eyes using empathy-inducing shots, displaying her (the subordinate's party's) pain and distress in her face and body and experiencing the sexual assault through her perspective – centring her character's gaze (the female gaze) as a primary gaze in the serial narrative. Audiences are allowed access to her subjectivity, interiority, feelings and emotions, which aligns audiences with her character and her character's story. Viewers witness her trauma and its emotional and psychological consequences and the enduring impact (being scared, suffering from PTSD, buying a gun, going to the shooting range and fantasising about shooting the assailant), which creates emotional investment in Jane's character arc.

Also, other television aesthetics, such as framing her character from the front, using closeups, medium closeups and the subjective POV, allow audiences greater access to Jane's interior state (see Figure 5 below). Exterior markers (how family and friends/or people see, describe or experience Jane) are used to connect viewers more with her character. Jane can be described as lower in hierarchy compared to the other female characters in the serial narrative (she is young, lower in class, financially stable but not wealthy, single mother, 'bullied' by the other mothers, 'victim'); however, this does not make her a weaker character. It invites audiences to root for and rally behind her character, creating **allegiance** with her character.

Figure 5: Framing of Jane's character on *Big Little Lies*. (Kelly 2017a).

Considering Jane's moral structure or her structure of values (principles, beliefs) as set out above; Jane is a kind and caring person ('intrinsically nice' as described by Madeline) (Kelly 2017b). Even though Jane has experienced great psychological and emotional trauma and is being 'bullied' or victimised by other characters (Renata and Harper), because she is lower in class and status, Jane remains deferential and apologises when she accidently pokes Renata in the eye.

Also, she earnestly tells Celeste that it has been Max (Celeste's son) who has been bullying Amabella all along (Kelly 2017h): "Ziggy … Ziggy told me this morning, it was Max who choked Amabella at orientation and apparently it's been him who has been bullying her all along … Amabella told Ziggy but made him promise not to tell, because Max threatened to hurt her more if it got out. So, he's just been keeping it a secret." Celeste asks Jane if she is sure about these allegations, whereby Jane replies:

> I definitely considered that he could be lying, just to protect himself … and I'd have to face the fact that violence could be in his DNA, given who he's dad is … I think he's telling the truth; he said also that Max pushed Sky down the stairs, um, and that he's been a little aggressive towards her as well … I'm so sorry Celeste, to tell you this … They're kids though, you know, they bully, it's human nature. They grow out of it.

Whereby Celeste replies: "Sometimes they don't." This indicates that some bullies, for example her husband Perry, never grow out of their violent behaviour. Jane approaches Celeste empathically with these serious allegations about Max, never extending anger, bitterness or resentment towards her for being unfairly blamed and victimised by these allegations. Jane treats the matter with kindness and compassion, allowing audiences to evaluate and emotionally respond to her character's moral orientation.

Jane's character represents female individual agency, independence and empowerment – which are all post-feminist and neoliberal tenets. She presents human characteristics such as fear, anxiety, anger, desire, hatred, but she is also kind, caring and compassionate (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.1). She displays acts of heroism and human dignity which makes her an identifiable (recognisable) female character. The serial narrative allows viewers subjective access to Jane's character through analepsis, dialogue and how her character is aesthetically framed which permits audiences to sympathise with Jane's character and her character's actions as her experience or perspective of sexual assault as well as the accusations/blame towards Ziggy is treated candidly. Therefore, the serial narrative conveys Jane's viewpoint, perspective, actions and desires – locating her gaze, as one of the main gazes at the story's core. Her sexuality, in this case her past sexual trauma and the consequences thereof, is portrayed as an essential element of her subjectivity.

Considering the above character construction and interpretation, using recognition, alignment, and allegiance, I suggest that Jane is a compelling female character with female subjectivity and agency. Both Madeline and Jane have been constructed as compelling female characters with female subjectivity. I now explore Celeste to

determine whether her subjectivity has been constructed in a meaningful and contributing way.

3.6.3 Celeste Wright

Celeste (Nicole Kidman) is a reserved female character (especially in public), intelligent and elegant (beautifully made-up) with an idyllic life. She exhibits post-feminist neoliberal traits of being thin, hyper-feminine, heterosexual, maternal and domestic, displaying her status through commodified femininity (consumer culture) (see Chapter Two Section 2.3). Celeste and her husband Perry are a wealthy couple who live in a big, expensive house on a cliff overlooking the ocean in Monterey with their twin sons. The first image audiences see of Celeste is with Perry and her boys at breakfast. The audience experiences Celeste and Perry as playful, romantic and in love. Later that morning at the school orientation, Madeline introduces Celeste to Jane (Kelly 2017b): "Come meet my best friend. Celeste! ... How did you get more beautiful?" Naming Celeste and stating how beautiful she is, adds identification to her character (character **recognition**) — emphasising post-feminist, neoliberal self-investment through beautification (consumer culture).

Celeste used to be a respected lawyer but gave up her career to have children and be a hands-on mother. Motherhood as a theme plays an important role in Celeste's character arc. In the episode 'Push Comes to Shove' (Kelly 2017e), Celeste tells her therapist that she gave up her career and her friends for Perry, moving to Monterey to start a new life with him. The audience views Celeste as a happy, loving mother devoted to her twin boys, but when Madeline asks Celeste to represent her and Joseph in a case against the Monterey town council, it is revealed that motherhood is not enough for Celeste (Kelly 2017e). Celeste misses having her fulfilling career as a lawyer. She tells Madeline in the car after the hearing (Kelly 2017e): "I feel so ashamed for saying this, but being a mother is not enough for me, it's just not, not even close." What is notable here is Celeste's self-criticism; she feels 'ashamed' for wanting to be a mother and to have a career. Both roles should be accessible to the post-feminist, neoliberal twenty-first-century woman and

feelings of shame for wanting both to feel fulfilled should be something of the past. There remains a stigma around being both a mother and having a career in Monterey.

This line of enquiry is also explored with Renata's character, who feels she is disliked because she is a mother and a successful businesswoman (Kelly 2017b). Renata is the only female character in the serial narrative who is established as career-driven and successful CEO of her own company. Furthermore, her husband, Gordon Klein (Jeffrey Nordling), supports her career. She tells him (Kelly 2017b): "It's one thing to be demonised for having the temerity of a career … Look at this. Look at our life. What kinda person chooses to work? Certainly not a mother, by any acceptable standards. You should have seen the way they looked at me today. Oh my God. And on the one morning that I chose not to go to the office and join my daughter for orientation." Gordon feels that the other mothers resent Renata because she is "beautiful, hugely successful and financially independent." These are all neoliberal tenets of self-sufficiency, -reliance and -investment (see Chapter Two Section 2.3). I suggest that it could be resentment in the case of Madeline as suggested earlier, but rather subjugation in the form of patriarchal oppression or domination when it comes to Celeste's character.

Perry encouraged Celeste to give up her career to be a mother and prefers that she does not work. I argue that this is a form of post-feminist neoliberal subjectivation (Butler 1997:83) – whereby Celeste simultaneously experiences empowerment (by being able to practice law again, assisting Madeline and Joseph in their case against the Monterey Town Council) and subordination (Perry's utter refusal of her having a career). This dual experience is an example of the double entanglement whereby contemporary women simultaneously experience post-feminist neoliberal empowerment and subordination (see Chapter Two Section 2.3). Later during the season, Celeste takes counsel from her therapist on how to approach Perry about returning to work. Seeking advice from a therapist on conducting a seemingly uncontroversial conversation with her husband suggests that Celeste fears Perry and how he will react. Her fear of his reaction is

symptomatic of a domestic existence under patriarchal oppression. This fear inhibits Celeste's female subjectivity and impedes her individual agency.

Celeste and Perry's sexual relationship borders on domestic abuse, escalating through the serial narrative to brute violence (Kelly 2017b; 2017c; 2017f)[21]. What makes this display of domestic abuse so compelling is the ambivalence of the act, especially at the start of the season. Is Celeste complicit in the act and aroused by Perry's forceful 'crazy, angry sex', or is she role-playing in a relationship where she is the subordinate party, trying to protect herself? Both Celeste and Perry acknowledge that it is a big problem in their relationship, especially when Perry starts to hurt Celeste, so much so that they have to seek counsel from a therapist (Kelly 2017d). Seeking counsel is a vulnerable moment for both Celeste and Perry as they lay their volatile intimate relationship bare, displaying deeply human characteristics like anger, shame and regret and how this affects them and their relationship. Presenting the inner lives and mental perspective of these characters (Bolton 2011:3). Through these vulnerable moments audiences' are allowed subjective access to both Celeste and Perry's interior state, feelings and morality.

This vulnerability, as previously mentioned, creates viewer alignment, facilitating emotional investment in these character's story arcs, which **aligns** audiences with Celeste's character (the subordinate party). Celeste expresses her feelings of shame about their volatile relationship, explaining to the therapist (Kelly 2017d): "I think I feel ashamed. We get angry and we fight, we then have this crazy, angry sex and then we make up and it's all better, but we have this dirty secret …" However, Celeste believes that she is not a victim and that she herself becomes violent at times (she fights back when Perry hurts her); therefore, she shares in the blame. She minimises the extent of Perry's violence and falsely treats her reaction to the abuse (physically defending herself) as equivalent. Celeste experiences self-denial and -blame, and fears the social stigma and

[21] Gilbert (2017) writes that "Kidman contributes to one of the most complex and thoughtful portrayals of domestic violence in recent memory."

shame that sometimes accompany domestic abuse. This fear is made salient when she covers her bruised body with makeup before meeting her friends. This is another example of post-feminist, neoliberal subjectivation (Butler 1997:83), whereby Celeste is portrayed as a beautiful, independent, empowered, educated woman who experiences domination (in the form of domestic abuse) from her husband. Throughout the season, viewers bear witness to Celeste's inner struggle – the profound love she feels towards Perry contrary to the physical abuse she sustains (Kelly 2017f). She seeks help by confiding in her therapist about the continued abuse, who becomes alarmed by what she hears, telling Celeste (Kelly 2017g): "When are you going to leave him Celeste? When he hurts you badly enough?" These intimate moments between Celeste and her therapist connect viewers with Celeste's character and her character's journey, allowing audiences to evaluate Celeste's relationship with Perry and the abuse she is suffering, creating emotional investment (**allegiance**) in Celeste's character.

Shot types such as closeups, medium closeups and the subjective POV (Section 3.4) allow audiences access to Celeste's subjectivity or interiority (see Figure 6 below). The duration of these shots, sometimes lingering for long periods on Celeste's face, focusing viewer attention on Celeste's interior state, emotions and thought processes, aligns viewers with her character and her character's actions. Celeste and Perry's forceful intercourse and Perry's abusive behaviour is always framed from Celeste's perspective (as the subordinate party), focusing the viewer's attention on how she is experiencing these acts of aggression – centring the female gaze. The camera never lingers on Celeste's naked body (de-fetishising and de-eroticising female nudity). Instead, it focuses the viewer's attention on her face and the physical and psychological pain she is experiencing – empathy-inducing shots – displaying her bruises. Empathy-inducing shots allow viewers to foster sympathy for Celeste's character rather than fetishising and eroticising her body, deconstructing the male gaze with its emphasis on objectification.

Figure 6: Framing of Celeste's character on *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a).

Another factor that comes into play regarding domestic abuse is the impact on Celeste's twin boys. At first, audiences are made to believe that the abuse has no impact on the children, and that they are not aware of anything. Celeste tells the therapist (Kelly 2017f): "It doesn't impact on my sons. I'm telling you. None of this affects them, we never fight in front of them. They never see anything. They're fine. They live in a happy household. They have no idea." Only by the season finale does Celeste find out that Perry's abusive behaviour impacts their children and that Max is emulating it, when Jane tells Celeste that Max has been bullying Amabella all along (Kelly 2017h).

Celeste's character construction complicates prevailing notions and ideas about the stereotypical natural nurturer, wife and mother. She is a beautiful, elegant, composed and well-spoken woman. However, when she is at home with Perry, her demeanour changes. She becomes sexually active, forceful and aggressive (she talks back) and when Perry physically hurts her, she fights back – hitting him and throwing things at him. Thus, although victimised by her husband, Celeste is for the most part 'complicit and aroused' by his often-violent behaviour, "turning each other on by rage" (Kelly 2017f). As mentioned, this could be a form of role-play to protect herself. She does not feel she is a victim, but she does experience intense shame for her behaviour. In the episode *'Burning Love'* (Kelly 2017g) Celeste tells her therapist that she thinks her 'self-worth is made up of how other people see her', which is why she has not confided in her friends about the domestic violence she experiences.

On the outside Celeste is displayed as beautiful, composed and happy with the perfect marriage, while on the inside she is insecure with a low self-esteem (she experiences a lot of self-judgement and shame), afraid of what her friends might think. In the season finale (Kelly 2017h), when Perry tries to kill Celeste, female friendship, solidarity or 'ally-ship' (Alsop 2019) saves Celeste's life when Bonnie shoves Perry down the stairs. This empowering moment of female friendship and kinship is also a marker of the serial narrative's feminist sensibility and can be referenced back to the fourth-wave feminist idea of the collective "we" (see Chapter Two Section 2.4).

Evaluating Celeste's moral orientation (values, beliefs and principles) regarding the heteronormative institution of marriage and family, it is clear that she loves her husband dearly even though he is abusing her. Her therapist tells her (Kelly 2017h): "You know your husband is ill Celeste, but so are you." Celeste is reluctant to leave Perry, which is of great concern to her therapist because he uses brute force to hurt her and will eventually try to kill her. Celeste experiences self-denial, which places herself and her children in grave danger. Only in the season finale, when Perry badly injures Celeste does she decide to leave him (Kelly 2017h).

Celeste is portrayed as a recognisable female character who features human characteristics such as anger, aggression, shame and regret but also assertiveness, desire, independence, empowerment and heroism. The intimate sessions between Celeste and her therapist – confiding in her about personal experiences – allow audiences subjective access to Celeste's interiority, feelings and emotions, which aligns viewers more with her character. Her sexuality is constructed as an essential part of her subjectivity and the physical abuse she is sustaining is conveyed through her viewpoint, her perspective – locating her gaze at the story's core. Her physical abuse is never fetishised or erotised but presented so that audiences are made to sympathise with her experiences as a woman. This sustains emotional investment in her character, creating allegiance with her character. Considering the above, I argue that Celeste is a compelling female character.

To summarise, the three female protagonists analysed and interpreted in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) have each been constructed with their own unique female subjectivity. Madeline is a post-feminist, neoliberal white, privileged, middle to upper-class, beautiful, bold, outspoken woman and mother of two. Her unique character arc is structured around the complexities of 'traditional' motherhood and marriage and how she navigates these heteronormative institutions in a post-feminist, neoliberal setting. Jane is a white, young, single mother who moved to Monterey with aspirations of a better life for her and her son. However, she is plagued with continued emotional and psychological trauma from being sexually assaulted. She experiences anger, fear and anxiety, escalating to her acting out, buying a gun and fantasising about killing her assailant. Celeste is a post-feminist, neoliberal white, privileged, upper-class, elegant, reserved woman and mother of twin boys. She is a stay-at-home mother, profoundly yearning for a career as an attorney. Though Celeste is an educated and empowered woman, she experiences subordination and subjugation in the form of domestic abuse from her husband, which brings about self-denial and shame, gravely impacting her self-worth. The three character's female subjectivities, as located in the overall female sensibility of the television drama serial, foregrounds the construction of compelling female characters.

3.7 Conclusion

Big Little Lies (Kelly 2017a) considers post-feminist, neoliberal womanhood in all its complexities, representing complex or complicated, white, privileged, educated, economically independent and empowered women. The female characters are presented as 'perfect' on the surface, but layered with flaws, displaying deeply human characteristics like desire, anger, shame, resentment and regret, and also kindness, love, solidarity and kinship. Allowing audiences subjective access into the inner lives and mental perspective of these female characters - female consciousness (Bolton 2011:3). Laying bare the dynamics of intimate or domestic relationships and abuse. The three female protagonists have been constructed with female subjectivity and agency, feelings and emotions, a history which makes them 'real', multi-layered human beings – or recognisable characters (Smith 1995).

Director Jean-Marc Vallée has contributed to constructing female characters with subjectivity by using various aesthetic strategies, such as: framing the female protagonists from the front and providing the audience with more character dimension and depth. Vallée uses closeups, medium closeups, and medium shots. Some shots used linger for long durations on the character's face, focusing the viewer's attention on their interior state, feelings and emotions. The closer viewers are to the character's face, the more impact their feelings, emotions and interior state will have on viewers, emphasising the female character's subjectivity. Also, Vallée uses the subjective POV, aligning viewers with the female characters, allowing them access to the female characters subjectivity, what and how they are experiencing things, subsequently centring viewer identification.

Their body/sexuality, and the sexual trauma they have endured or are still enduring is portrayed as an essential part of their subjectivity. The camera never lingers on the female character's body or nudity for too long (deconstructing the well-known male gaze by de-fetishising and de-eroticising these shots). The female body is not objectified. Rather, focus is placed on the female character (the subordinate party) and the distress she is experiencing, emphasizing her physical and psychological pain and the bruises she sustains during the forceful intercourse/abusive behaviour - what Pinedo (2021) refers to as empathy-inducing shots which promote a female gaze. This allows audiences to foster sympathy and moral allegiance with the character(s), their emotions and actions or reactions to the violence. Also, allegiance is created through analepsis (flashbacks) and other exterior markers (what viewers see and hear about these characters), providing audiences the opportunity to evaluate and emotionally respond to the character(s) and their actions in the context of the narrative; therefore, allowing viewers to become emotionally invested in the character's story arc, narrative and the television drama serial.

To answer the research question: *How do selected women-centric television drama serials construct female subjectivity?,* I suggest that *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) has constructed female subjectivities in a nuanced, complex and non-stereotypical manner. This serial narrative features a female ensemble cast and portrays women's stories and experiences

with candour. Considering the above exploration of the construction of female subjectivity, I suggest that the three female protagonists have been constructed as compelling female characters.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN *WATERFRONT*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter shifts the focus from a 'popular' international television drama serial to female subjectivity in the Afrikaans television drama serial, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). This chapter explores the historical notion of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal and the transition from *volksmoeder* to the more modern post-feminist, neoliberal Afrikaner notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability). *Ordentlikheid* is a gendered mode of performance for traditional Afrikaans women, which Van der Westhuizen (2017) suggests, has been infiltrated by discourses of post-feminism and neoliberalism. I incorporate this Afrikaner identity configurator known as *ordentlikheid* into my interpretive framework (Figure 7) to determine whether this stereotypical post-feminist neoliberal Afrikaner trope is used to construct female subjectivity in Afrikaans television drama serials or if these characters are constructed as (compelling) female characters, deconstructing the 'traditional' gender stereotype of the v*olksmoeder* ideal and Afrikaner *ordentlikheid.*

My interpretive analysis of Showmax and kykNET's *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) draws on television datasets and how aesthetic strategies such as the female gaze (Pinedo 2021:30-31), analepsis and prolepsis, and various types of shot sizes and angles are used to construct female subjectivity. In this analysis, I highlight selected white, Afrikaans female protagonists (Julia Bruwer, Anna Myburgh and Kate Myburgh) using my interpretive framework (Figure 7) based on Smith's (1995) practices of recognition, alignment and allegiance (Chapter Three Section 3.3), combined with post-feminism and neoliberalism and the Afrikaner identity configurator *ordentlikheid* (respectability).

Before we shift to television in SA and the construction of female characters in the selected Afrikaans drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), first, I explore white Afrikaans female subjectivities and how their identity has been forged through

notions of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal and the more modern *ordentlikheid* (respectability). Thereafter, I explore whether it is possible to imagine new modes of white Afrikaans female subjectivities that go against the 'traditional' gender stereotypes.

4.2 *Volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal and post-feminist, neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability)

> "The image of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) is a 'highly stylised symbolic identity of ideal womanhood to which the ordinary women of the nation are meant to conform or at least aspire to."
>
> (Vincent 1999:65)

After the South African War (1899–1902)[22] Afrikaner women were once again consigned to the private sphere of the home fulfilling 'traditional' female roles such as being wives, mothers and homemakers[23]. Women's work in the private sphere of the home especially on farms in the more rural areas (*platteland* [countryside]) included: bearing, nurturing and caring for children – teaching and training them, feeding the household by making bread and butter, drying fruits, seeing to vegetable gardens, slaughtering small animals, boiling soap, making candles, sowing and making clothes for their husbands and children as well as general housekeeping (Kruger 1991:106). According to Cachet (cited in Kruger 1991:106-107), at the time, Afrikaner women typically had between six and twelve children; therefore, household production was no simple task.

Within the more urban areas in the country, Afrikaner women sometimes worked outside the home as teachers and nurses but also as welfare workers – establishing and supporting

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[22] The South African War (1899–1902) or 'the Anglo Boer War' was a war fought between imperial Great Britain and the Boer republics in the then Transvaal and Orange Free State.

[23] During the South African War Afrikaner women's role can be described as "courageous and important" (Kruger 1991: 134). Afrikaner women were pushed to the foreground and largely responsible for protecting and running their farms, doing "men's work" when their husbands were called up to fight (Kruger 1991: 131).

welfare organisations such as the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV), the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* (SAVF) and the *Helpmekaar*-beweging (Blignaut 2013:10-11; Du Toit 2003:155-176; Kruger 1991:146; Van der Westhuizen 2017:108). Afrikaner women established these welfare organisations to try and uplift the Afrikaner *volk* (nation), especially the growing number of *armblankes* (poorer white communities), and primarily focused on the social terrain, arranging "picnics, concerts, competitions, bazaars, lectures on health issues, street collections, sport days, soup kitchens, baby exhibitions, supplying bread for poor school children, social gatherings and garden parties". However, Lou-Mari Kruger (1991) suggests that welfare work is seldom apolitical and that these welfare organisations (ACVV, SAVF and the *Helpmekaar*-beweging), unofficially, worked towards an Afrikaner nationalist agenda.

Other more politically-driven Afrikaner women started the Nationalists Women's Political Parties. The *Women's South African Party* (WSAP) was established in 1910 and the *Women's National Party* (WNP) in 1915. Ironically, these women's political parties were established more than a decade before women in SA had the right to vote (Kruger 1991:162; Vincent 1999). In 1915, 4 000 Afrikaner women came together and ventured into the public realm with a nationalist political agenda. These Afrikaner women (mothers and daughters) marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to request that amnesty be given to political prisoners (*Boer* leaders), including General Christiaan de Wet (Kruger 1991:157-161, Van der Westhuizen 2017:109).

During 1918–1939 several Afrikaners (men, women and children) migrated from the more rural areas towards the cities, entering the industrial labour market and the flourishing mining sector. Insufficient familial income and the need to help support their households, forced some Afrikaner women to enter the industrial labour market[24] (Brink

[24] These Afrikaner women entered the clothing, leather, chemical, food and drink industries. Of these working-class women more than 50% were employed as garment workers in the clothing industry in Witwatersrand and the Cape Peninsula (Brink 1986:17).

1986). At the time, it was still undesirable for Afrikaner women to work outside of the home (Brink 1986:4-5).

Afrikaner nationalism is commonly believed to have been hostile towards women's labour and political involvement. However, as proven by various SA scholars, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, Afrikaner women were no passive followers but actively constructed a gendered Afrikaner identity (Vincent 1999:52-54). During the 1924 general election, the women's political parties (WSAP and the WNP) helped secure the win for the National Party (NP). Although women and women's parties could not participate in the election – in the form of selecting a female candidate from their ranks or placing a cross next to a female candidate of their choosing, they were involved in every other possible way – "electioneering, educational, self-improvement, information-gathering and advisory roles" (Vincent 1999:56,62).

However, Afrikaner women's political agency was short lived. The *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal, a trope formally conceptualised by Willem Postma in 1918 in his book *Die Boervrouw – Moeder van haar Volk*, emerged during the 1920s, slowly sanctioning the political disempowerment of Afrikaner women (Brink 1986:12; Vincent 1999:52). "The image of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) is a 'highly stylised symbolic identity of ideal womanhood to which the ordinary women of the nation are meant to conform or at least aspire to" (Vincent 1999:65). The *volksmoeder* ideal is described as an ideal of Afrikaner womanhood – a white, Afrikaans women who features ideal Afrikaner characteristics such as purity, piety, bravery, self-reliance and -sacrifice in service to their family and *volk* (nation), housewifeliness, nurturance, submissiveness, *ordentlikheid* (respectability), decency and virtue (Blignaut 2013; Brink 1986; 1990; Mans & Lauwrens 2013; Van der Westhuizen 2017). Thus, identifying as a *volksmoeder* meant not only being a mother to your own child/children but extending said motherhood to your country/nation – nurturing the *volk* (Brink 1986).

Therefore, the working-class Afrikaner women of the early twentieth century did not fit the mould of an ideal *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation); as the rightful place of the *volksmoeder* was in the home (Brink 1986:11). Prior to and during the economic crisis in 1929, brought on by the Great Depression, Afrikaner men realised that they not only had to compete with their fellow men in the labour market, but also had to compete with Afrikaner women. Male nationalists sought to reassert their dominance; consequently, they called on Afrikaner women to disband women's political parties and the women's labour force, relegating Afrikaner women back into the invisible domestic domain (Kruger 1991:239). Many women, especially women in the women's political parties, resisted at first but eventually succumbed to male nationalist authority. As in the West, after the Second World War (1939–1945), Afrikaner men sought to reinstate patriarchal authority – forcing women out of the workplace and back into the home where they had to reproduce the nation, physically and morally (Van der Westhuizen 2017:106).

In 1930, premier JBM Hertzog granted white women the franchise and in 1933 Afrikaner women went to the polls for the first time (Van der Westhuizen 2017:107; Vincent 1999:64). In 1948, the NP won the election and enforced the apartheid legislation (system of racial segregation). Afrikaner women virtually disappeared from the public realm into the Afrikaner home. Van der Westhuizen (2017:105) suggests that "nationalism yokes 'woman' into a chain of equivalence with motherhood, nurturance and caregiving, displacing the actual variance amongst women". The Afrikaner home became a crucial space for Afrikaner women, for the enculturation of children into Afrikanerhood by initiating Afrikaner nationalist gender, sex and race normativities (Van der Westhuizen 2017:200). Thus, Afrikaner women became the foundation of the Afrikaner household (Brink 1990:2) – the 'spiritual soldier' or 'guardian' of the 'inner-room' (Van der Westhuizen 2017). Small power (mastery over children and servants) within the Afrikaner household was all that remained for the Afrikaner woman or *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation). Afrikaner women's domestic banishment only ended in the 1990s during the transition to democracy.

> "The Afrikaner woman, as described by poet Antjie Krog: In my view, is a privileged species, unique on Earth. We enjoy the limitless freedom [of] time granted us by cheap, intelligent black domestic help. So, we can select the titbits and specialize in entertaining, or designing clothes, or studying, or gardening, becoming a connoisseur in silver, and making our own pots or poetry for Christmas […] I blame the men for it. They like it that way. The more idle their wives, the more successful they obviously must be. Most have remained totally unliberated, living the way their ancestors did – complaining about the government, hunting up north, or telling racist jokes in clouds of *braaivleis* [barbeque] smoke."
>
> (cited in Cloete 1992:53)

Do all white Afrikaans women conform to the rigid definition of Afrikaner women as set forth by Krog (cited in Cloete 1992): "privileged, unliberated, idle" or have contemporary white Afrikaans women evolved and is it possible to imagine new modes of white Afrikaans womanhood? I will demonstrate that new modes of white Afrikaans womanhood are possible to imagine, with reference to *Waterfront*.

In contemporary post-apartheid SA, Van der Westhuizen (2017) agrees with Krog. She reports that the redundancy of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) trope is premature. She ascertains that the post-apartheid white Afrikaans women as *volksmoeder* received a facelift through post-feminist, neoliberal tropes of self-improvement and -responsibility as women-as-wife/mother (Van der Westhuizen 2017:102). Van der Westhuizen (2017:195) states that consumerism has been made the gateway to accomplishing a modernised version of the *volksmoeder* ideal, hetero-femininity and hyper-femininity tailor-made to be *ordentlik* (respectable) again. *Ordentlikheid* is forged by manufacturing a unique self by embracing post-feminist neoliberal idealisations of marriage, motherhood and beauty (through consumerism). Van der Westhuizen (2017:68) suggests that neoliberalism "prescribes consumerism as a mode of self-actualisation". This identity configuration referred to as *ordentlikheid* (respectability) (Van der Westhuizen 2017:23)

is difficult to translate but its "meanings are embodied and include presentability, good manners, decency, politeness and humility with a Calvinist tenor."[25]

This modernised post-feminist, neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability) is accomplished through:

1. A devotion to 'pretty things'. White Afrikaans female subject's meeting Western standards of hyper-feminine beauty, being decidedly white, middle class, maternal and hetero-monogamous (Van der Westhuizen 2017:195). This description can be likened to Wilkes' (2015:110) definition of the post-feminist, neoliberal female subject: "an educated, professional woman who promotes an aesthetic of wealth; displaying privileged whiteness, heterosexuality and hyper-femininity (beautifully made up)". An economically independent woman displaying her status through commodified femininity and the consumption of luxury goods (see Chapter Two Section 2.3).
2. Undertaking a shift from objectification (devaluing and dehumanising women and reducing women to body parts) to post-feminist, neoliberal subjectification (women achieving 'Self' through consumer culture), by becoming more focused on post-feminist, neoliberal hyper-individualisation which involves notions of 'self-awareness, -realisation and -improvement' (Van der Westhuizen 2017:196). McRobbie (2009) refers to this post-feminist neoliberal female subject as the 'post-feminist masquerade' which entails self-management and -presentation through consumer culture (the fashion and beauty industries) who become the dominant authority on female respectability or *ordentlikheid*. For instance, Van der Westhuizen (2017) refers to Afrikaans-language *Sarie* magazine as being an interlocutor between white Afrikaans female subjects and consumer culture;

[25] Calvinism is a denomination of Protestantism that adheres to the theological traditions and teachings of John Calvin. It is the understanding of the Bible as authoritative and the belief in the sovereignty of God and predestination (Palmer 1972:9-10).

whereas, international fashion houses like Gucci, Dior, Chanel and *Vogue* magazine take on this role.

3. Afrikaner women embracing 'individual agency'; however, still needing to "perform normalised subordination within an Afrikaner gender relationality" to be considered *ordentlik* (respectable) (Van der Westhuizen 2017:196). In other words, a woman still having to assume responsibility for the care of others, by being a 'self-for-others'. Being a good wife and mother, taking care of their husbands and children, the elderly and the sick. This is a form of subjectivation (Butler 1997:83) and or a post-feminist 'double entanglement/double movement' (Genz 2009:31; McRobbie 2004:255) whereby twenty-first century female subjects can embrace individual agency, independence and choice; however, still succumb to subordination of having to be a 'self-for-others' in the Afrikaner household.
4. Heterosexuality becomes a compulsory feature of *ordentlikheid.* Reproduction as an accomplishment of an Afrikaner woman's hetero femininity is projected as 'wholeness'. Male verification is central to this womanhood, whose neoliberal self-responsibility involves being a good wife and mother. Van der Westhuizen (2017) suggests that popular culture such as *Sarie* magazine avoids referring to female hypersexuality or homosexuality, as opposed to international magazines like *Cosmopolitan*. Paradoxically representing the ideal Afrikaner woman as simultaneously childlike and maternal in her sexuality (Van der Westhuizen 2017:198).
5. Afrikaner women, throughout history, have been brought up to not offend, to not challenge, to not oppose their fathers or husbands. "Silent children at the knees of godlike father-husbands" (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 198) which means to be seen and not heard, to know your place. In addition, Marijke du Toit (2003) refers to the silence of women's voices in the public domain, specifically the ACVV. Du Toit (2003:166) explains that Afrikaner men's reaction to women speaking in public was: "for women, worshipping God entailed obedience to men" – therefore, silence in public. Further, Van der Westhuizen (2017:198) proffers that male violence is his masculine right, which he is allowed to exercise as he deems necessary.

6. Reclaiming post-feminist neoliberal *ordentlikheid* by embracing the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal. Being fully devoted to "white heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality, disciplining the body through self-monitoring and self-management, refusing black people except 'good blacks' into her white world" (Van der Westhuizen 2017:198-199).

Therefore, Van der Westhuizen (2017:103) suggests that in post-apartheid SA, true Afrikaner womanhood still means to be in service of others – 'a-self-for-others' through *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) iteratives of "silence, service, and sex (white reproduction)". Modes of submissiveness that all draw on compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory motherhood. The continued normalisation of heteropatriarchal unions and white motherhood are taken as the only true sign of accomplishment for white Afrikaans women (Van der Westhuizen 2017:199).

Does this delineate white Afrikaans womanhood or can white Afrikaans female subjectivity be (re)negotiated, (re)constructed, (re)defined and (re)invented as suggested by scholars Hattingh, Jordan and Economou (2020) and Sonnekus (2019)? Forging white Afrikaans female subjectivities that go against *ordentlikheid* (respectability) by challenging or rejecting 'traditional' conventions. Thereby, presenting new modes of Afrikaner womanhood, for instance:

1. The well-known Afrikaans embroidery artist, Hannalie Taute, whose work transgresses and deliberately rejects the norms of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid*[26]. The female subjects presented in her artwork are nude, autonomous, defiant, transgressing 'traditional' gender norms (displaying forbidden pleasure), foul-mouthed with dirty thoughts, 'bad'. Theo Sonnekus (2019) explains that Taute's work "[exaggerates] Afrikaner female subjects who slip out from under the thumb

[26] Refer to Taute's solo exhibitions *Stink Afrikaners* (2016) and *Family Meeting* (2022) as reference to her work (Sonnekus 2019).

of patriarchy to become independent, powerful, desiring, and ultimately formidable human beings".

2. Leanie van der Vyver, a well-known Afrikaans artist who uses product design as commentary on the fashion and beauty industry (the dominant authority on female *ordentlikheid*), refers to her work *Scary Beautiful* and her latest design *Slinky* (the world's first penetrative fashion accessory) as examples of challenging the stereotypical boundaries of *ordentlikheid* (Saayman Hattingh, Jordan & Economou 2020).

To rephrase the question, can white Afrikaans women be constructed as difficult women, or do they still succumb to the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal of being *ordentlik*?

4.3 Post-feminist neoliberal white Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) versus (compelling) female or difficult woman character

In Chapter Three I explored the construction of a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character in selected American television drama serials. I discussed the difficult woman trope as theorised by Pinedo (2021), Hohenstein and Thalmann (2019) as well as Tally (2016). As stated, Pinedo (2021) defines the difficult woman character as not a straight-out antihero but someone who transgresses the 'traditional' norms of femininity "unapologetically and systematically". She is a nuanced, complex or complicated female character who exhibits characteristics other than being a stereotypical 'natural nurturer', 'mother' or 'housewife'. The difficult woman character displays identifiable or relatable traits which makes her recognisable to a twenty-first century audience; such as, exhibiting post-feminist, neoliberal individual agency, independence, empowerment and choice.[27] She can be described as 'likeable' or 'unlikable', abrasive,

[27] It is not my suggestion that only female characters who display post-feminist neoliberal signs or markers are recognisable or (compelling) female characters. A female character like Claire Beauchamp from *Outlander* (Moore 2014) whose story arc starts in 1945 have been constructed as a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character (see Chapter Three, Pinedo [2021:74-87]).

aggressive and morally ambiguous but she retains our sympathy throughout the narrative arc (allegiance) as her viewpoint or perspective guides our experience of events and locates her gaze (the female gaze) at the core of the story, aligning viewers with her character. Her story and experience(s) as a woman should not be side-lined, pathologized or diminished but treated honestly and sincerely.

To answer the research question: does Showmax and kykNET's *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) construct white Afrikaans female subjectivity in accordance with Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) or do these female characters conform to the description of a (compelling) female character or difficult woman character?, I outline the differentiating factors or characteristics of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) trope (discussed in Section 4.2) as a starting point from where the modernised version of *ordentlikheid* developed to see where and if some of these characteristic attributes correlate or if they oppose each other completely. Table 5 illustrates the characteristics of a difficult woman character in comparison to Afrikaner *ordentlikheid.*

	***Ordentlikheid* (respectability)**	**(Compelling) female or difficult woman character**
Behaviour	• Presentability • Self-improvement or -management • Policing of body • Hetero-femininity	• Femininity • Might behave in conventional masculine way
	• Good manners / politeness	• Abrasive/aggressive
	• Decency	• Morally flawed • Unlikable at times • Not uniformly good or bad
Post-feminist neoliberal worldview and practice	• Humility • Submissiveness • Subordinate	• Strong • Capable • Independent
	• Heterosexuality • Sexual control • Restraint/prohibited	• Hypersexuality • Varied sexual identities • Varied sexual partners

	• Piety	• Varied/non-specific – religious views
	• Racial purity/white reproduction	• Non-specific gender and race
	• Self-sacrifice • Self-to-/in-service-of- others	• Highly ambitious
	• Domesticity/housewifeliness	• Defined by work/career-driven
	• Compulsory motherhood/nurturing	• Does not obey conventions of traditional femininity

Table 5: Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) versus difficult woman characteristics. (Van der Westhuizen 2017).

The two suggested female television character tropes (i.e., the *ordentlike* [respectable] white Afrikaans woman and the difficult woman character) differ immensely. White Afrikaans women who display traits of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) conform to 'traditional' gender stereotypes of being polite, nurturing, selfless, maternal, confined to a domestic life, displaying status through consumer culture (Van der Westhuizen 2017). As mentioned, this can be likened to the post-feminist neoliberal female subject. This female subject takes full responsibility for shaping her own identity through 'self-creation', forging her own unique self (presentability) and creating the life she wants (domesticity), focusing on her own well-being instead of politics, social justice or inequality. She (re)constructs and (re)designs the self through self-monitoring and -management (see Chapter Two Section 2.3); however, still retains heteronormative tenets of compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory motherhood and domesticity (being a useful wife and mother).

The opposing difficult woman character does not normally obey/conform to the notions of 'traditional femininity'. Also, she is described as presenting post-feminist neoliberal attributes of independence, agency, empowerment and choice. However, she has been constructed as abrasive, aggressive, unlikable or morally ambiguous. Though she might be morally ambiguous and commit murder, she retains viewers' sympathy because her perspective (the female gaze) guides viewers' understanding or experience of events

(Pinedo 2021). However, it is also possible for a difficult woman character to feature 'traditional' or conventional stereotypical traits as is the case in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), with Madeline, Celeste and Jane. As argued, these female characters complicate and deconstruct prevailing notions of the 'natural nurturer', 'mother' and 'housewife' (see Chapter Three Section 3.6). Considering this, I added Van der Westhuizen's (2017) post-feminist neoliberal identity configurator *ordentlikheid* (respectability) to my interpretive framework (Figure 7), as a recognisable feature for identifying white Afrikaans female subjectivities in Afrikaans television drama series. Figure 7 thus presents the revised interpretive framework as constructed in Chapter Three Section 3.3.

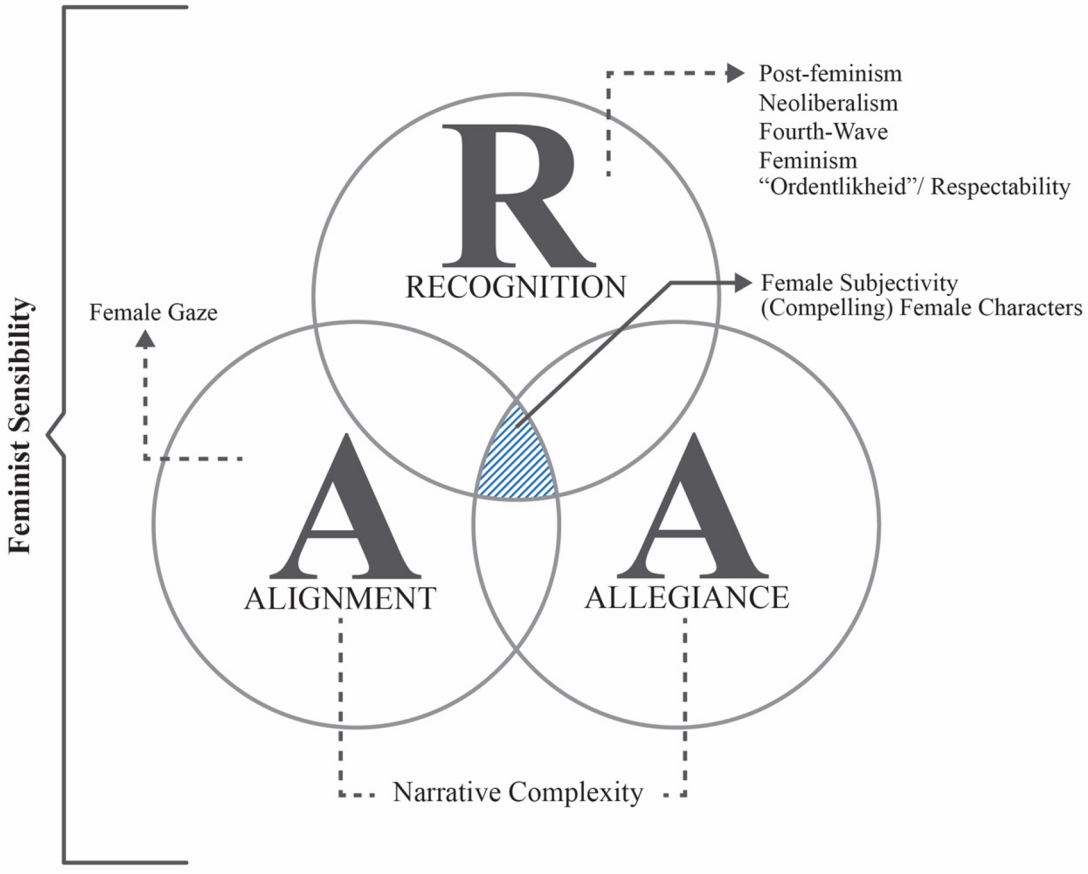

Figure 7: Interpretive framework for the analysis of female subjectivity in *Waterfront*

To explore the construction of female subjectivity in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), I examine the three female protagonists in the serial narrative, using Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of post-feminist neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability) in conjunction with my interpretative framework (Figure 7) which is based on Smith (1995)'s lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance. Also, I use my analysis of the aesthetic strategies used in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) (see Section 4.4), as a supporting structure for exploring Julia, Anna and Kate's female subjectivity.

4.4 *Waterfront:* Shot size and shot angle analysis

Tables 6 to 8's content were gathered watching the pilot episode 'Episode 1' of *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b), a 48-minute-long episode, which includes the series intro as well as the opening and end credits. I set up a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the headings time, shot size, POV shot, shot angle, and shot information (see Attachment B[28]). I analysed every shot used within the pilot episode by counting the different shot sizes used, the various POV shots used as well as the camera angles. Percentages were then added to the amounts used.

Shot Sizes	*Waterfront*	Percentages
Extreme closeup shot	28	7%
Close shot	84	21%
Medium closeup shot	121	30%
Medium shot	89	22%
Cowboy shot	16	4%
Medium full shot	2	0%
Medium wide shot	20	5%
Full shot	4	1%
Wide shot	38	9%
Establishing shot	4	1%
TOTALS	**406**	**100%**

Table 6: *Waterfront* basic shot sizes.

[28] Attachment B - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GOqpCM9xPodz4vOXFd1QFfI4vRyunOUM/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107349457800719427648&rtpof=true&sd=true

(Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

Point of View	***Waterfront***	**Percentages**
Objective POV	160	39%
Subjective POV	124	31%
Indirect-subjective POV	39	10%
Director's interpretive	21	5%
OTS	62	15%
TOTALS	**406**	**100%**

Table 7: *Waterfront* point of view shots.
(Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

Camera Angle	***Waterfront***	**Percentages**
Eye level	381	94%
Low angle	13	3%
High angle	11	3%
Birds-eye view	1	0%
TOTALS	**406**	**100%**

Table 8: *Waterfront* camera angles.
(Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

Interpreting the information in Tables 6 to 8, I ascertained that the drama serial *Waterfront* made use of 406 shots throughout Episode 1 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b). The closeup (21%), medium closeup (30%) and medium shot (22%) are used most throughout Episode 1 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b). The frequent use of these shots is a standard film and television feature to emphasise individual subjects, their interior state, feelings and emotions, as well as their actions and reactions. Nonetheless, my analyses have found that Jaco Bouwer, the director of *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), frames his characters from the side (favouring profile shots), flattening the character's identity and subjectivity and emotional response, thus, limiting character dimension and depth. Also, Bouwer prefers the objective POV (39%) to the subjective POV (31%) in Episode 1 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b). The subjective POV is used 22% less in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) than in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). This use of the profile shot and the objective POV is impersonal, preventing viewer participation and in effect

viewer alignment. Audiences are given limited access to the main character's subjectivity, rendering the audience mere observers of the action. Therefore, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) limits audiences' subjective access to the character's interior state, feelings and emotions, (de)centring viewer identification. The wide shot is only used 9% in Episode 1 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b), 17% less when compared to HBO's *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), and the establishing shot only 4%. This limited use of the wide and establishing shots by Bouwer veils the character's surrounding environment - (see Attachment B for the full analysis of *Waterfront* [Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a]).

4.5 Female protagonists in *Waterfront*

The serial narrative *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) is based on the lives and experiences of Julia Bruwer, Anna Myburgh and Kate Myburgh, as well as their relationship with their patriarchal father. Also, it focuses on themes such as family relationships, patriarchal oppression, rejection and failure as well as sibling and business rivalry. In contrast to *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) cannot be defined or described as feminist in genre since the serial narrative does not promote a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017). Though *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) deals with patriarchal oppression as a theme and the lives and relationships of three sisters are explored, its focus is not on women or sisterhood or empowerment, and the narrative does not articulate or engage with contemporary 'popular' or fourth-wave feminism. Also, the serial narrative does not feature a female ensemble cast and does not solely deal with women's stories and experiences.

I explore the construction of female subjectivity in the selected Afrikaans television drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) by examining Julia, Anna and Kate using my interpretive framework (Figure 7) based on Smith (1995)'s lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance combined with my own television datasets as set out in Section 4.4, incorporating current socio-political and -economic frameworks – post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism as well as Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) as identity configurator.

4.6 How does *Waterfront* construct female subjectivity?

Julia, Anna and Kate display socio-politic and -economic post-feminist neoliberal traits which as described by Karam (2019:42), Van der Westhuizen (2017:195) and Wilkes (2015:110) feature these signs and markers: independent, educated, professional, wealthy, privileged, white, thin, heterosexual, hyper-feminine/hetero-feminine (beautifully made-up) women, displaying their status through commodified femininity (consumer culture and the consumption of luxury goods). However, the three female protagonists lack the following two post-feminist neoliberal qualities: being naturally maternal and domestic (Karam 2019:42; Van der Westhuizen 2017:195; Wilkes 2015:110). To answer the question: How does *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) construct female subjectivity?, I probe the three female protagonists individually to discern whether white Afrikaans female characters can be constructed as (compelling) female characters.

4.6.1 Julia Bruwer

Julia (Milan Murray) is one of three female protagonists in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) whose story contributes to driving the narrative but whose perspective (also articulated in acts of looking, her female gaze) is not located at the narrative's centre. Julia lives in a modern apartment in the Waterfront in Cape Town with her husband Wouter Bruwer (Hannes van Wyk). She had a privileged upbringing as her father (Ben Myburgh played by Dawid Minnaar) was an esteemed yacht builder and well-known in Cape Town (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g). She is displayed as entitled, upper-class, with a high moral orientation, which is indicated when she introduces herself with her maiden name. She took her husband's surname (Bruwer) when they got married, but she prefers to use her maiden name when speaking to people, especially people who are lower in class, for example, suppliers (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017c): *"Sê vir hom dis Julia Myburgh…ja presies, Ben Myburgh se dogter."*[29]

[29] "Tell him its Julia Myburgh … yes, exactly. Ben Myburgh's daughter."

Julia is a post-feminist neoliberal upper class (educated, economically independent, wealthy) woman. She has a BCom degree, but prefers to do welfare work for a living (she arranges fundraisers) – an initiative she started with her late mother. Van der Westhuizen (2017) describes this mode of existence as being idle (sitting pretty); whereby a woman's leisure activities denote her status, for instance living in a big house, driving an expensive car, holidaying abroad, consuming luxury goods. Entertaining hobbies instead of career achievements. On the surface, Julia appears to be economically independent and empowered, but Wouter describes Julia and her sisters as dependent and unable to stand on their own two feet. He tells her the following as an indication of her entitlement (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g): *"Julle was julle hele lewe lank aan 'n toutjie gelei, en nou's hy geknip. En almal spartel, want niemand het julle ooit geleer om op julle eie voete te staan nie."*[30]

She is presented as elegant and sophisticated (beautifully made-up), displaying her status through commodified femininity – wearing expensive clothes and designer shoes (Jimmy Choo's). This description of Julia can be likened to the post-feminist neoliberal female subject as Van der Westhuizen (2017:195) suggests; a modernised version of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) – hyper-feminine, tailor-made to be *ordentlik* (respectable) again, which is accomplished through consumerism. Given the above, Julia can be considered as a **recognisable** female character.

Julia's self-worth is made-up of how other people see her and her 'well-esteemed' family. While walking on the peninsula with Anna, she stops, staring through the shop window, saying (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g):

Julia: *"Oe dis mooi."*
Anna: *"Wat? Die handsak of die prys?"*
Julia: *"Ek is nie so oppervlakkig nie."*
Anna: *"Nie?"*

[30] "You've been strung along on a string, and now it's been snipped. And you're all flailing, because no one ever taught you to stand on your own."

Julia: *(Thinking) "Okay jy's reg, ek is seker"*
(Exclaiming) "Sjoe, dit was bevrydend."[31]

Finding liberation in her self-reflection, even though shallowness can be described as an unlikeable trait. Julia acknowledges who she is. Therefore, she has individual agency (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.2). Also, while having tea at the Waterfront before the reading of her father's testament, she tells Anna (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017e): *"Hey ... hey ... nee man ... moenie nou hier huil nie, dis net ammunisie vir 'n skinderstorie."*[32]

Julia is the oldest of three sisters. Her sisters describe her as an outspoken, stubborn, narcissistic and shallow person (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g, 2017k) who struggles with severe obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and anxiety. Her struggles with OCD and anxiety are a direct result of her inability to live up to her father's high expectations. The audience experience Julia's 'failures' as a child through the use of analepsis (flashbacks) (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017f):

Ben: *"Een van die eiers is gebreuk, ou sus."*
Julia: *"Jammer pappa, ek sal gou ..."*
Ben: *"Nee dit sal nie nodig wees nie. Ons wil nie mors nie, of hoe? Ek sal dit vandag so eet."*[33]

Through flashbacks, audiences are allowed subjective access to Julia's subjectivity and interiority (feelings of 'failure'), which allows audiences to emotionally evaluate and respond to her character and experiences. This narrative strategy **aligns** audiences with her character. The adult Julia is shown again making eggs for her and her husband. She

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[31] Julia: "Ooh, that's pretty."
Anna: "What? The handbag or the price?"
Julia: "I'm not that shallow."
Anna: "Not?"
Julia: (*thinking*) "Okay, you're right. I guess I am." (*exclaiming*) "Wow, that was liberating."

[32] "Hey … hey … no man … don't cry here, it's just ammunition for gossip."

[33] Ben: "One of the eggs are broken, old girl."
Julia: "Sorry daddy, I'll quickly …"
Ben: "No, that won't be necessary. We don't want to waste, do we? I'll have it like this today."

throws more than a dozen eggs away when they do not turn out perfectly (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017d). This ingrained search for perfection, recognition and approval continues after her father's death. The patriarch's impetus remains part of her being.

Throughout the series, Julia is portrayed as jealous of her sister Anna and the preferential treatment Anna received from Ben. This impacted her self-esteem from childhood and continues to affect her as an adult. Julia tells Anna (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g): *"Toe ek hoor ma is swanger met jou, toe het ek geweet ek gaan vir die res van my lewe bemoerd wees … Dis nie woede nie. Dis rou, siedende jalousie. Want van die dag wat jy gebore is, het almal geweet, dis die upgrade van Julia."*[34]

When Anna leaves SA in search of work abroad, Julia has to take care of their father – buying him shirts, arranging doctor's appointments, and putting flowers in his office (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017d; 2017e). After Ben's death, at the reading of his testament, when Julia finds out that Ben left his whole estate to Anna, she is devastated, resulting in an emotional breakdown (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017e): *"Hoe kon hy? Na alles wat ek vir hom gedoen het … Ek het my bek gehou. Ek het sy stront opgevreet. Dis nie regverdig nie. Hoekom? Kon hy nie net een keer, een keer …"*[35]

This is an emotional moment for Julia's character and the rejection she experiences; which should provide viewers subjective access to her inner life and mental perspective (Bolton 2011:3) however, the camera focuses on Wouter (her husband) sitting outside the bathroom door listening to Julia. This camera angle detaches viewers from Julia's emotional breakdown, from her experience and subjectivity, disabling viewer **alignment**. I want to argue that this moment should have been portrayed from Julia's perspective

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[34] "When I heard mom was pregnant with you, I knew I'd be cranky for the rest of my life … It's not rage, it's … raw, seething jealousy. Because from the day you were born, everyone knew, that's Julia's upgrade."

[35] "How could he? After everything I did for him ... I kept my mouth shut. I ate up all his shit. It's not fair. Why? Couldn't he for once, just once …"

(constructing a female gaze), focusing on her character and her emotions with closeups or extreme closeups, and not from Wouter's perspective. This would have allowed audiences to sympathise more with her character and actions, creating emotional investment in her character's story arc. Julia's voice-over narration evokes a form of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) by being "rendered silent at the knees of a godlike father" (described by Van der Westhuizen [2017] in Section 4.3). Though Ben does not exert physical violence toward his daughters, he dominates them through patriarchal authority.

Julia's relationship with her husband, Wouter, is also strained due to her continuous search for her father's approval, recognition and love. Her severe struggle with OCD and anxiety adds to their marital problems as she exerts her anger and emotions toward Wouter (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g): *"Tien jaar, Jules. Na tien jaar is ek steeds hier. As daai voordeur toegaan is ek die een wat die emosionele houe vat. Ek is steeds hier, ek is nie jou pa nie."*[36] Wouter stresses to Julia that he is not her father. Wouter tells Julia that he has always been there for her, unlike her father. He further states that he always treats her with respect and kindness even though she exerts her anger, frustration and pain towards him. He (Wouter) has never abandoned her. What is important here is the lasting effects of patriarchal oppression and how it impacts on other relationships, such as marriages.

Julia's struggle with OCD and anxiety plays a significant role in her decision not to have children – telling family and friends they are unable to conceive. However, Wouter desperately wants children; in Episode 7 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h), he secretly meets with a social worker to discuss adoption as a single parent. Julia explains to Kate how ashamed she feels for not wanting children: *"Ek wil nie kinders hê nie, wat sê dit van*

[36] "Ten years, Jules. After ten years, I am still here. When that front door closes, I'm the one taking the emotional blows. I'm still here, I'm not your dad."

my?"[37] (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017j). I want to link this feeling of shame to Celeste's character in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). As discussed in Chapter Three Section 3.6.3, Celeste feels ashamed for wanting more than just motherhood, for needing both motherhood and a career to be fulfilled. However, Julia feels ashamed for not wanting to be a mother.

Julia tells Kate about Stefan Jordaan's (Edwin van der Walt) birth, how their father reacted to Stefan as a new-born baby, and how that made her feel (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017j):

> Julia: *"Toe sy daai dag met Stef daar aankom. Ek sal dit altyd onthou. Ek het hom nog nooit so gesien nie. Alles het verander. Sy gesig het sag geword en toe hy daai babatjie vashou … dis die gelukkigste wat hy nog ooit was, en nooit weer daarna nie."*
> Kate: *"Is dit hoekom jy nooit wou kinders hê nie? Was jy bang hy …"*
> Julia: *"Bang dat hy nooit so na my kinders sou kyk nie? Ja. Ek het geweet hy sou nie."*[38]

Julia might want to be a mother innately; however, her self-worth has been so fundamentally damaged by Ben's continuous rejection of her and his favouritism towards Anna that the mere thought of him rejecting her child leaves her not wanting children. This conversation between Julia and Kate allows audiences to emotionally evaluate and respond to Julia's character and her actions.

Julia tells Anna how angry she felt when Anna left, and that she hated her for leaving because their father completely withdrew himself from her and her younger sister Kate. When Ben then asks Julia for Anna's email address after she had been gone for four years

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[37] "I don't want children, what does that say about me?"

[38] Julia: "The day she arrived with Stef. I'll always remember it. I'd never seen him like that. Everything changed. His face softened and when he held that little baby … that was the happiest he'd ever been, and never again thereafter."
Kate: "Is that why you never wanted kids? We're you scared he'd …"
Julia: "Scared he'd never look at my kids like that? Yes. I knew he wouldn't."

without a word, Julia's bitterness and resentment intercede and she decides to give Ben the wrong address (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017k):

> *"Toe jy hier weg is … ek het jou gehaat … ek weet dit klink kras, maar na ma se dood het hy onttrek, hy't nie met my of met Kate gepraat nie. Maar toe jy hier weg is, toe's dit asof hy saam met jou hier weg is … Maar toe kom hy in loer, en hy't hier kom eet. Ons het gesels en dis asof ek hom vir die eerste keer leer ken het … 'n Jaar gelede toe vra hy vir jou e-pos adres, en toe verander alles … Toe gee ek vir hom die verkeerde een want ek wou nie …"*[39]

Evaluating Julia's moral structure and orientation, she comes across as entitled, narcissistic and shallow. These unlikable character attributes are indicated in her behaviour towards characters who are lower in class, for example, in her interaction with a waiter in the Waterfront restaurant, (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017e):

> *"Warm melk asb … Kan ek asb 'n nuwe serviette kry die ding lyk asof 'n kar daarmee gewas is …"*

> *"'n Latte vir haar asb? En regte koffie nie poeier nie, en volroom melk nie daai afgewaterde gemors nie."*[40]

Character behaviour, as suggested by Smith (1995), fosters **allegiance** as it allows viewers to evaluate and emotionally and cognitively respond to the character and their actions, which in this case could mean sympathy or antipathy towards Julia. I would like to compare this to Douglas Howard's (2013) description of the construction of 'reprehensible' characters whom audiences are made to sympathise with. This is the situation viewers find themselves in with Julia. I would not call Julia reprehensible; however, she is quite unlikable, but viewers still sympathise with her character and actions because they are emotionally invested in her character's story arc.

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39 "When you left here … I hated you ... I know it sounds crass, but after mom's death he withdrew, he didn't speak to Kate or me. But when you left, it was as if he left with you … But then he popped in, and he came for supper. We chatted and it was as if I got to know him for the first time. A year ago he asked for your email address, and then everything changed … Then I gave him the wrong one, because I didn't want to …"

40 "Warm milk please … Can I have a new napkin? This looks like it's washed a car … A latte for her please? And real coffee not powdered, and full-cream milk not that watered-down rubbish."

The use of analepsis (discussed in Chapter Three Section 3.4) allows audiences subjective access to Julia's character, aligning them with her character's childhood experiences and the lack of love, approval and recognition (rejection) she received from her father. Also, audiences experience Julia's love and endearment for her mother Elise Myburgh (Joanie Combrink), who had terminal cancer and whose husband was cheating on her with another woman. These flashbacks foster emotional investment in Julia's character arc, creating allegiance with her character. The use of aesthetic strategies such as extreme closeups, closeups, medium closeups and the subjective POV, allows audiences greater access to Julia's interior state (her anxiousness and compulsive behaviour). However, some shots disable viewer alignment, detaching audiences from the character's perspective or internal state. Bouwer (as set out above in Section 4.4) likes to frame characters from the side (favouring profile shots), often flattening the character's identity, subjectivity and emotional response, therefore, limiting character dimension and depth (see Figure 8 below).

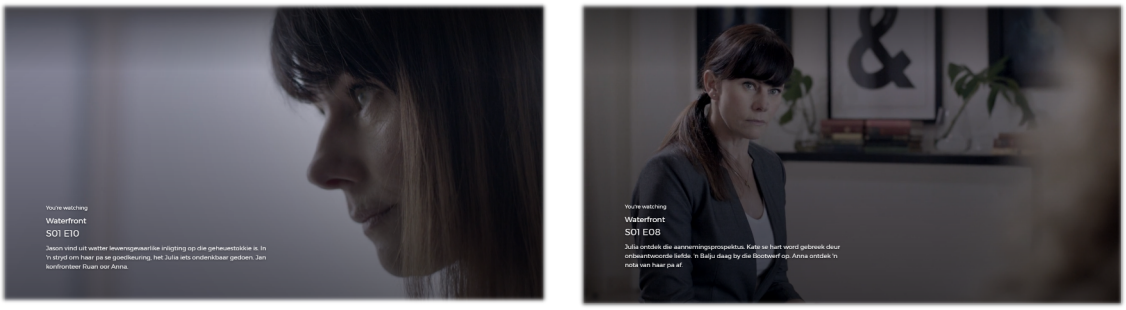

Figure 8: Framing of Julia's character on *Waterfront*. (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

Julia's subjectivity is constructed by allowing her to be complex or complicated in her own right. She has female agency but features Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) through aspects of presentability, hyper-femininity (consumer culture), submissiveness (silence at the knees of a godlike father) and domesticity (being a housewife who occasionally arranges fundraisers – welfare work/being a-self-for-others, taking care of her father and helping to raise Stefan). However, Julia features difficult woman attributes

such as being abrasive, narcissistic and shallow (unlikable traits). Also, she does not obey the conventions of compulsory motherhood.

Therefore, Julia has been constructed as a recognisable female character with human characteristics such as anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred, narcissism and shallowness but also protectiveness, endearment and love which she displays towards Kate and Stephan. Using analepsis, audiences are allowed subjective access to Julia's childhood, aligning viewers with her character's experiences and 'failures' as well as her inner need for love and acceptance. The rejection she feels and the 'failure' to live up to her father's expectations combined with the emotional consequences (anxiety and OCD) allows viewers the opportunity to evaluate her character and actions, fostering allegiance with her character through sympathy and sometimes antipathy. Julia's perspective helps drive the narrative, but in contrast to *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), her gaze (the female gaze) is not located at the story's core. Her sexuality is not explored within the serial narrative; therefore, it is not considered an essential part of her subjectivity. I argue that Julia has been constructed with female subjectivity. However, her subjectivity has been limited by framing her character from the side, detaching viewers by not displaying her perspective when having an emotional breakdown, as well as not featuring her sexuality as an essential part of her subjectivity. Nonetheless, I argue that Julia is a compelling female character because, as evident in the above, she demonstrates recognisability and features alignment and allegiance.

4.6.2 Anna Myburgh

In this sub-section, I demonstrate why Anna is a compelling female character. Anna (Rolanda Marias) is a post-feminist neoliberal upper-class, privileged, educated, economically independent and highly ambitious woman (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017g). She displays difficult woman attributes – though she is a mother, she does not display the conventions of a 'natural nurturer' but is career-driven. She is more defined by work than motherhood (she leaves her son Stefan behind to follow a career abroad). The career she

has chosen or aspires to have, being a yacht builder, could be considered a masculine career choice.

Anna wanted to follow in her father's footsteps, but Ben had been afraid of her talent and ideas – of its unconventionality. Anna can be described as a stubborn, capable woman who still experiences subordination and subjugation from her patriarchal father regarding her career as well as her personal life, consequently experiencing post-feminist subjectivation (Butler 1997:83). She is heterosexual and hyper-feminine (beautifully made-up), displaying her status through commodified femininity (wearing expensive clothes and shoes). Anna amusingly asks Julia if she can have her Jimmy Choo's should Julia decide to take her own life. Therefore, it can be said that Anna is a **recognisable** female character who displays post-feminist neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability) through decency, presentability, hyper-femininity and submissiveness (Van der Westhuizen 2017).

Anna is the middle child and her father's favourite. Since she was a little girl, she has had a passion and interest in yachts and yacht building (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017c; 2017h), spending most of her time with her father at his boatyard and looking up to him as a mentor (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017k). As a young woman, she designs a modern yacht with software that any engineer or programmer can control from any part of the world. Anna's design is revolutionary and can change the yacht building industry; however, her design is faulty. This modern design causes a rift between Anna and her father.

Ben is a traditional, 'old-school' yacht builder and fears the potential of Anna's design, and the modernised material, mechanics and software she wants to use. Also, he knows that her design is faulty and uses this against her, obstructing her growth. Viewers are allowed subjective access to Anna's past experiences through flashbacks of Ben and Anna arguing about her design. This **aligns** the audience with her character. Ben tells Anna (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h): *"Hoekom iets probeer reg maak wat nie gebreuk is nie,*

Anna? ... Waar is die vakmanskap, my kind? ... Hierdie is 'n kommersiële klap in die gesig van elkeen wie se sweet op die fabrieksvloer lê."[41]

The argument between Ben and Anna keeps mounting until he tells her that her yacht will never be built on his boatyard, and that she should leave and not come back (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h; 2017k):

> Ben: *"Hierdie gemors sal nooit op my bootwerf gebou word nie ... Hierdie vier mure, is gebou op lojaliteit, integriteit, eerlikheid en 'n ysende wil om nie 'n kompromie vir ons vakmanskap aan te gaan nie. Eeue-oue tradisies is vasgevang in elke boot wat ek bou! Jy kan nie 'n seiljag met 'n username en password bou nie! Hierdie ... sal nooit van die grond af kom solank ek leef nie."*
> Anna: *"Asb pa?... Jy kan dit net nie wegsteek nie né? Kon nog nooit nie. Die teleurstelling. Maak nie saak wat ons doen nie, dit sal altyd in jou oë geets wees."*
> Ben: *"Jy sit nie weer jou voete in my bootwerf nie."*[42]

After the argument, Anna is deeply hurt. She packs her bags and leaves for London, leaving everyone behind to try to make something of herself and show her father it can be done. Unfortunately, Ben dies before she gets the chance to build her yacht. After Ben's death, Anna tells Julia (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017e): *"Die ironie is, al kry ek dit nou reg om die boot te bou, ek sal dit nooit vir hom kan wys nie."*[43] Anna feels like she failed. She left everyone and everything behind to show her father it can be done but

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41 "Why try to fix something that isn't broken, Anna? … Where is the craftmanship, my child? … This is a commercial slap in the face of everyone whose sweat lies on this factory floor."

42 Ben: "This nonsense will never be built on my boatyard ... These four walls are built on loyalty, integrity, honesty and an iron will to never compromise on our craftmanship. Age-old traditions are encapsulated in every boat that I build! You can't build a yacht with a username and a password! This… will never see the light of day, not while I'm alive."
Anna: "Please dad? You just can't hide it, can you? Never could. The dissapointment. No matter what we do, it'll always be etched in your eyes."
Ben: "Don't set foot in my boatyard again."

43 "The irony is, even if I do get the boat build now, I'll never be able to show it to him."

failed in the end (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017e): *"Mislukking, bly mislukking, maak nie saak hoe jy hom inkleur nie."*[44]

Rejection and 'failure' - failure to live up to a patriarchal father's high expectations - comes through as a theme in all three female characters' story arcs. By the end of the season, viewers realise that Ben regretted his decision to chase Anna away, not giving her credit, recognition and the approval she deserved. Ben decides to make up for his mistakes by fixing the flaw in Anna's design and secretly building her boat himself (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017n). I suggest that this storyline decision subjectively diminishes female empowerment (feminist sensibility [Ford 2017]), whereby the male character is given credit for the accomplishment and not the female character to whom it was due – intensifying Anna's feelings of not being good enough, a disappointment, failure.

Anna spends her whole life looking up to Ben, wanting to be like him, yearning to impress him, and she explains to the investigating officer, Dirk Wyngaardt (Albert Pretorius) (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h): *"My pa … Vir so lank. Hy was ons hele bestaan … Sy dood herinner my net aan my mislukking."*[45] Wyngaardt's interrogation of Anna provides audiences subjective access to Anna's past, her inner thoughts, feelings and desires, **aligning** audiences more with her character.

When Anna leaves SA to pursue her dreams abroad, she leaves her son Stefan and his father Ruan Jordaan (Stian Bam) behind. Ruan, the love of Anna's life, asked Ben to marry Anna, but Ben refused, exclaiming that Ruan was not good enough for his daughter (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h). The rejection and embarrassment Ruan experiences prevents him from asking Anna to marry him and he lets her go, submissively giving in to Ben's refusal. At the end of the season, they have the following exchange (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017n):

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44 "Failure remains failure no matter how you disguise it."
45 "My dad … For so long. He was our entire existence ... His death only reminds me of my failure."

Anna: *"Hoekom het jy my nooit gevra om te trou nie? Jy het my pa gevra."*
Ruan: *"Dink jy ek wil twee keer deur dieselfde vernedering gaan?"*[46]

Then, Anna tells Ruan that all she wanted was for Ruan to stand up for them, for their relationship and family, to challenge her father, to oppose him: *"Vir twintig jaar skerm jy besluiteloos om my en ek wag! Ek wag vir jou om my te kom haal, om vir my te sê ek hoef nie meer alleen te voel nie, om vir hierdie, om vir ons op te staan! Maar jy het nooit nie. Wie's die laffaard, Ruan?"*[47] (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017n) Only in the season finale (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017n), when Stefan is accused of Ben's murder, does Ruan decide to take the blame for Ben's assisted suicide – offering his life for the life of his son.

Anna does not have a good relationship with her older sister Julia, partly because of Julia's jealousy towards Anna but also due to feelings of guilt and shame. Having left everything and everyone behind (Julia becoming the stand in – looking after their father and Anna's son). However, Anna does have a good relationship with her younger sister Kate. She secretly travels back from London to be with Kate when Kate decides to have an abortion (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017i; 2017l). Anna promised her mother on her deathbed to look after Kate, but, due to her ambitiousness and career aspirations, failed to do so, of which she is ashamed.

When examining Anna's moral structure or moral orientation, she has traditional, normative moral values or principles. Higher education is important to Anna, which is clear when she scolds Stefan for dropping out of university so that he can follow in his mother and grandfather's footsteps by becoming a yacht builder instead of a lawyer (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017f). Also, her values can be evaluated in her behaviour towards others (especially characters who are presented as lower in class or minor characters in

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[46] Anna: "Why did you never ask me to marry? You asked my dad."
Ruan: "Do you think I want to endure the same embarrassment twice?"

[47] "For twenty years you've been dancing around me indecisively, and I wait! I wait for you to come fetch me, to tell me I don't have to feel alone anymore, to stand up for this, to stand up for us! But you never did. Who's the coward, Ruan?"

the narrative), for instance: Anna is fond of Fiona Abrahams (Euodia Samson), the woman who worked for her father. She affectionately calls her Fi (nickname) and always treats her with kindness, respect and endearment. Visiting Fiona to have intimate conversations about her childhood and her father (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017f; 2017h). These interactions allow viewers to emotionally evaluate this character and her actions, which is an important practice for creating viewer **allegiance**.

Using aesthetic strategies such as analepsis (flashbacks) – viewers are allowed to experience and emotionally evaluate Anna's childhood, ambitions and desires or aspirations – her inner life and mental perspective (Bolton 2011:3). These flashbacks create emotional investment in Anna's character arc, fostering allegiance with her character and the serial narrative. The use of other television aesthetics such as closeups, medium closeups and the subjective POV, allow audience's greater access to Anna's interior state (feelings and emotions), how she experiences Ben's death and the disappointment (failure) she feels by not being able to build her boat (to show her father). As argued in Section 4.4 the profile shots used by Bouwer flatten the character's identity and subjectivity (emotional responses) and limits the character's dimension and depth (see Figure 9 below). Anna's perspective is one of the main perspectives that helps drive the narrative; however, her gaze (the female gaze) is not located at the story's core and her sexuality is not constructed as an essential component of her subjectivity.

Figure 9: Framing of Anna's character on *Waterfront*. (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

However, Anna is portrayed as a recognisable female character who displays deeply human characteristics such as guilt, rejection and failure but she also features ambition, kindness and desire. Her female subjectivity is constructed by allowing her to be complex or complicated in her own right. The serial narrative allows viewers subjective access to Anna's character using analepsis (flashbacks) as well as dialogue (interrogation by officer Wyngaardt), aligning audiences with her character's story arc. Also, viewers follow her journey and experience, her ambitions and failures through her perspective, which Smith (1995) calls spatio-temporal attachment.

Anna features aspects of post-feminist neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability): decency, presentability, hyper-femininity (consumer culture) and submissiveness (Van der Westhuizen 2017). Also, she displays difficult woman characteristics of independence, capability, smarts and ambition (Pinedo 2021). Her character is constructed as a mother; however, she does not display the stereotypical characteristics of a 'natural' nurturer, in other words, she is defined by work (having a career) more than motherhood. Anna's behaviour towards and interactions with other characters like Fiona (lower in class), provides audiences the opportunity to emotionally evaluate her character, to foster allegiance toward her character and her character's journey – creating emotional investment in the story arc.

Considering the above, I argue that Anna has been constructed with female subjectivity and more depth and dimension than the other two female characters. Her character is more fleshed out compared to Julia and Kate. Nonetheless, her subjectivity is limited due to the use of 'preferred' television aesthetics – framing her character from the side and not locating her gaze (the female gaze) at the story's core. However, I argue that Anna has been constructed as a compelling female character.

4.6.3 Kate Myburgh

Lastly, I explore the youngest sister, Kate. Kate (Trix Vivier) has been outlined as a (compelling) female character; however, I demonstrate that Kate is the least developed

female character in the serial narrative. Kate is a post-feminist neoliberal privileged, independent, creative young woman. She never went to college or university but makes *alebrijes* (Mexican folk art) for a living, which she sells at the Waterfront. She tells officer Wyngaardt (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017k): *"Wel dit was dit, of chirurgie, en ek uh… verkies die flexi ure wat die my bied."*[48] Once again entertaining hobbies instead of career achievements, as is the case with her eldest sister Julia – which Van der Westhuizen (2017) refers to as being idle or "sitting pretty".

She is hyper-feminine (beautifully made-up) and displays her status and beauty through commodified femininity (consumer culture). Though Kate cannot make a fortune from the art she sells, she lives an entitled, privileged and expensive life. She has an apartment in the Waterfront in Cape Town, drives a Mini Cooper and wears expensive clothing. Therefore, Kate displays post-feminist neoliberal attributes and features Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) through her hyper-femininity, presentability and submissiveness (Van der Westhuizen 2017). Also, she features difficult woman traits; she drinks, smokes, deliberately flirts, and has sexual encounters (affairs) with married men (Pinedo 2021). During the serial narrative, audiences learn that Kate had an abortion after falling pregnant with a married man's child. Having an abortion would not be described as behaving in a 'traditional' stereotypical feminine way and would not be considered *ordentlik.* I suggest that Kate has been constructed as a **recognisable** female character.

Kate, also known as Kiewiet (nick name), is the youngest of the three sisters. When we first see Kate running on the peninsula – closeups and extreme closeups are used, framing her face. The camera then lingers on her body, specifically her breasts and buttocks (objectifying her). We see her again after her run, going into her apartment, now wearing less clothing. Up to this point, the serial narrative has not introduced this character but focuses the viewer's attention on her bodily features, beauty, and seductiveness. Only halfway through Episode 1 (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017b) is she introduced to us by her

48 "Well, it was either this or surgery, and I uh … prefer the flexi hours this offers."

father as Kiewiet. This first impression, the lingering focus on Kate's body and beauty can be referenced to Mulvey's (1975) male gaze (eroticising the female character), instead of centring her subjectivity and agency by constructing a female gaze.

Since she was a child, Kate never got any attention, love or affection from her father (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017c; 2017h). Ben was always busy with work or mentoring Anna. Kate would later learn that her birth was not planned, that her father was having an affair and her mother discovered this. Kate was the result of her parents trying to hold on to their fractured marriage. Ben told Anna that Kate was (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017h): *"Sy mooiste fout"*[49]. Kate later tells officer Wyngaardt (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017k): *"Hulle het dit van my af weggesteek. My lewe lank ... Ek het gedink my ouers het die perfekte huwelik, maar ek moes nie eintlik hier gewees het nie ... Ek is die gevolg van 'n pa wat bang was hy gaan as geskeide man aansien verloor en 'n ma wat nie alleen wou oud word nie*."[50] Kate's knowledge of her being 'a mistake', leads to feelings of (un)belonging[51] and rejection.

Throughout her childhood and as an adult, Kate is in sustained need of attention, seeking love and affection from her father. When she does not receive it, she deliberately flirts with her father's friends and later has an affair with Albert Hugo (Paul du Toit), her father's broker, to spite him. Six months before Ben's death, Kate finds out that she is pregnant with Albert's child. One night while Ben visits Kate, he accidentally sees a sonar photo of Kate's twelve-week baby on her refrigerator and asks her to abort the child (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017m): *"Jy wou weet wat ek dink."*[52] Kate replies sobbing: *"Maar*

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49 "His most beautiful mistake."

50 "They hid it from me. My whole life ... I thought my parents had the perfect marriage, but I shouldn't actually have been here ... I'm the result of a father who didn't want to lose face as a divorcee, and a mom who didn't want to grow old alone."

51 (Un)belonging denotes a process of alienation or detachment from feeling at home (Jacobs 2017:101).

52 "You wanted to know my thoughts."

… maar dis my kind."[53] This is an opportunity for the serial narrative to explore Kate's subjectivity and agency as well as abortion as such, especially because in this case, it is forced. Abortion and abortion laws have received increased attention in many first-world countries, especially since the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, 410 US 113 (1973) – which I argued is a fourth-wave feminist issue (see Chapter Two Section 2.4). However, the serial narrative does not explore this topic or Kate's experience of being forced to have an abortion. I suggest that the abortion plot line could have been explored using analepsis and brought a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017) to the serial narrative.

Viewers only find out after the fact and only when Kate opens up to Julia about the abortion, expecting to be interrogated by officer Wyngaardt on how the abortion affected her relationship with her father. I suggest that by not engaging with or exploring this topic and Kate's experience of the abortion, as well as the physical and psychological after-effects, limits audiences' subjective access to Kate's interior state, feelings and emotions. Therefore limiting Kate's subjectivity (consciousness), (de)centring viewer identification and preventing viewer **alignment**. Also, I suggest that this incident is a form of post-feminist subjectivation (Butler 1997:83) whereby Kate has post-feminist neoliberal independence, freedom and choice. However, she still experiences subjugation from her father by submissively complying with his instructions and not choosing her own wants and desires of keeping her baby. She does not challenge him, and she does not oppose him. Once again, this incident can be seen as submitting to Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability) by being rendered "silent at the knees of a patriarchal father" (Van der Westhuizen 2017:198).

Also, Kate's need for love and attention boils over into her relationship with her sister Anna, when Kate kisses Ruan after having a few drinks. When Anna finds out she is hurt and angry, but also disappointed in herself, feeling guilty and ashamed for not fulfilling her promise to her mother. Anna tells Kate (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017k):

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53 "But … but it's my child."

Anna: *"Ek het 'n belofte verbreek … 'n Paar weke voor ma se dood het sy my gebel en gevra ek moet oorkom. Toe ek in die kamer stap … sy was so klein … net 'n bondeltjie onder die laken. Sy was so moeg, sy kon skaars praat, maar … sy het my net een ding gevra … Belowe my jy sal na Kiewiet kyk?"*
Kate: *"Ek is jammer …"*
Anna: *"Nee … nee. Ek is die een wat jammer is."*[54]

Otherwise, Kate has a good relationship with both her sisters. When their mother passed, Julia helped raise Kate; therefore, she acts as a mother figure towards her. Every time Kate's heart is broken or goes through a rough patch, Julia takes her in and helps her pick up the pieces. However, when Kate goes for the abortion, she calls Anna for help, afraid of disappointing Julia (her mother figure). Kate looks up to Julia as a mother figure, when Julia does not see herself as a mother, which she establishes by not wanting to have children.

After Ben's death, at the reading of the testament, when Kate learns that Anna is inheriting her father's whole estate, she is devastated, hurt and angry, asking Anna (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017f): *"Hoe voel dit Anna? Om te weet pa het jou bo sy ander dogters verkies?"*[55] Kate clearly resents Anna for the continued rejection and abandonment she feels.

Kate's female subjectivity is limited. Though she features identifiable and relatable characteristics and can be described as a recognisable female character, her dimensionality is restricted to her need for love and affection. Her sexuality (in this case

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[54] Anna: "I broke a promise ... A few weeks before mom's death, she phoned and asked me to come over. When I walked into the room … she was so small … just a little bundle under the sheet. She was so tired, she could barely speak, but … she asked one thing of me. Promise me you'll look after Kiewiet?"
Kate: "I am sorry …"
Anna: "No … no. I'm the one who is sorry."

[55] "What's it like, Anna? Knowing dad preferred you over his other daughters."

a dire need for love and attention) is portrayed as an essential part of her subjectivity. However, her body is often objectified, using closeups and extreme closeups. The camera lingers on her breasts and other parts of her body, eroticizing it (favouring a male gaze), rather than focusing viewers' attention on her interiority (thoughts, beliefs, emotions, feelings, wants and desires), dismantling viewer **alignment** (see Figure 10 below). The serial narrative sometimes conveys her viewpoint, actions and reactions, but her gaze (the female gaze) is not located at the story's core.

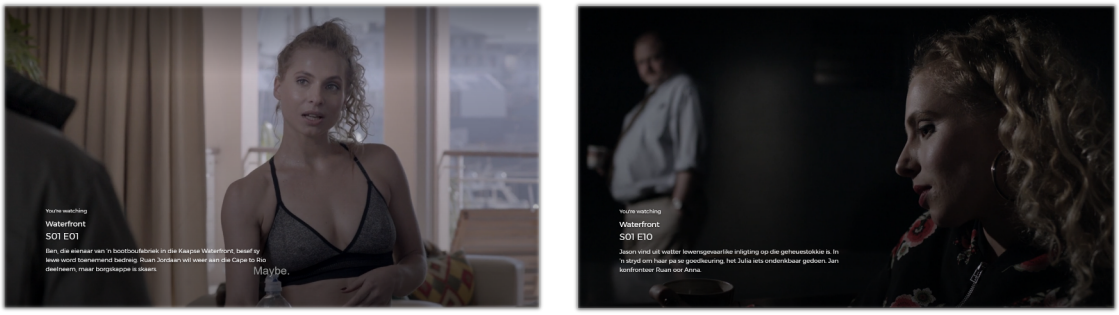

Figure 10: Framing of Kate's character on *Waterfront*. (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

As with the other characters, Kate is also often framed from the side (favouring profile shots). For the viewer, this framing flattens Kate's identity, subjectivity and emotional response by visually limiting her character's dimension and depth. Audiences do not experience Kate's backstory, childhood, memories or her experience of having a forced abortion through analepsis (flashbacks) or dialogue of the event. Only what she is willing to share with other characters (which barely scratches the surface). Having an abortion can be an emotional and traumatising experience. However, audiences are not allowed subjective access to Kate's experience and, therefore, cannot emotionally and cognitively evaluate what Kate went through. For that reason, the amount of sympathy viewers are allowed to feel towards this character and her actions, which should foster emotional investment and **allegiance** in her character's story arc, is limited and diminished. Only when officer Wyngaardt interrogates her, are viewers allowed access to Kate's internal state, emotions and feelings. Therefore, I argue that Kate could have been a compelling

female character; however, her character has been underdeveloped and lacks dimension and depth. Her female subjectivity has not been constructed and fleshed out as well as Julia or Anna's character.

4.7 Conclusion

Waterfront (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) features female subjects who are autonomous and multi-dimensional, featuring post-feminist, neoliberal attributes including Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability): white, privileged (upper-class), educated, economically independent, wealthy, heterosexual, hyper-feminine women, displaying their status through commodified femininity (consumer culture) (Van der Westhuizen 2017).

Also, these women feature difficult woman characteristics, which make them interesting and compelling female characters (Pinedo 2021).

1. Unconventional motherhood: Julia choosing not to be a mother, Anna leaving her son Stefan to follow her career aspirations and Kate being forced to have an abortion.
2. Julia features unlikable traits such as jealousy, narcissism and shallowness.
3. Anna is highly ambitious (career-driven).

However, I conclude that *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) falls short compared to popular international drama serials such as *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). As suggested in Chapter Three Section 3.7, *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) constructed female character arcs and themes in a nuanced, complex and non-stereotypical manner – deconstructing 'traditional' gender stereotypes of the 'mother', 'wife' and 'natural nurturer'. *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) also features a female ensemble cast, portraying women's stories and experiences, focusing on woman- or sisterhood and empowerment and articulating and engaging with popular contemporary fourth-wave feminism (feminist sensibility [Ford 2017]).

While *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) is a story about complex family relationships, it does not have a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017), it does not focus on women, sisterhood, or female empowerment, nor does it articulate or engage with popular contemporary fourth-wave feminism. As suggested, the serial narrative did have the opportunity to explore and engage with fourth-wave feminist issues such as abortion and could have focused more on female empowerment and sisterhood, but chose not to.

Patriarchal oppression (authority, control and domination as exerted by Ben) – which is a feminist issue - is one of the major themes in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). However, the three female protagonists have not been constructed to rise above it (overcome it). The only character who displays female empowerment is Julia (slowly taking less pills and overcoming her feelings of anxiety towards the end of the season). The sisters are saved (financially at least) by the yacht their father secretly built, which Anna should have built as it was her design. Their personal lives have not changed. As stated, this storyline disables female empowerment. The decision to portray Ben (the patriarchal oppressor) as the ultimate saviour who provides his daughters with financial security and stability by building Anna's yacht reasserts his authority (patriarchal power). For the rest of their lives, they will be indebted to him, never overcoming their feelings of rejection, disappointment and failure.

The use of television aesthetics to construct female subjectivity varies in these two shows. Vallée frames the female protagonists in *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) from the front (providing the audience with more character dimension and depth), whereas Bouwer frames his female characters from the side (limiting character dimension and depth). Vallée uses the subjective POV more often than Bouwer, aligning viewers with the female characters. The sustained use of the subjective POV allows viewers subjective access to the characters subjectivity and interiority (beliefs, feelings, emotions, wants and desires); what and how they are experiencing things – centring viewer identification. Whereas Bouwer prefers the objective POV, limiting character alignment. Both serial narratives use analepsis (flashbacks) and exterior markers to create allegiance with the characters;

however, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) limits the use of flashbacks (experiences/memories) where Kate is concerned; therefore, audiences cannot fully evaluate or emotionally respond to Kate's character and actions. Another major difference between *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) and *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) is the construction of the female gaze; the former does not make use of the female gaze to construct female subjectivity and favours a male gaze (objectifying Kate), whereas the latter deploys the female gaze to construct female subjectivity as well as to display female sexual pleasure and violence against women (deconstructing the male gaze by de-eroticising and de-fetishising nudity and sexual violence).

Therefore, I argue that the Afrikaans drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) falls short of constructing nuanced, complex and non-stereotypical female subjectivities. The female characters constructed does display post-feminist, neoliberal attributes and two out of the three can be described as compelling female characters, though they still convey notions of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* (respectability). Comparing the analysis of *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) to *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a), I suggest that it is possible to imagine new modes of white Afrikaans female subjectivities - modes of white Afrikaans female subjectivities that go against Afrikaner *ordentlikheid*.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This dissertation answered the research question of how selected women-centric television drama serials construct female subjectivity. Two television drama serials were selected to function as the object of inquiry, the American HBO drama serial *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) and the locally produced Afrikaans drama serial *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a). The study objective was to explore what it is that constitutes a compelling female character to enable me to critically analyse the construction of female subjectivity in both serial narratives. I defined a compelling female character as a character who has been constructed as an identifiable (recognisable) human being with subjectivity (interiority, feelings, emotions, desires, fears and consciousness) and agency, aligning viewers with her character. She can be heroic, anti-heroic, complex, complicated, independent, empowered, or morally ambiguous, as long as her story is treated candidly. The female character's perspective/viewpoint should drive the narrative (female gaze), fostering sympathy or antipathy with her character. Thereby creating allegiance with the character and emotional investment in the character's story arc and, the serial narrative. This operational definition of a compelling female character foregrounded the creation of an interpretative framework (Figure 2 and 7), which was used to analyse the construction of female subjectivity in women-centric long form television drama serials.

5.1 Chapter capsules

Chapter One introduced the study and the empirical research question: *How do selected women-centric television drama serials construct female subjectivity*. Here, I established the construction of female subjectivity as my line of inquiry and provided evidence that female representation behind-the-scenes and on-screen was a constitutive force. This line of inquiry was cemented in Chapter One and implicitly and at times explicitly persisted through the other chapters.

Chapter Two focused on defining female subjectivity. It identified post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism as discourse and ideology infiltrating, impacting

and influencing the construction of contemporary female subjectivities. Demonstrating the practise of 'self-creation', creating and re-creating the 'self' at will.

Chapter Three investigated female protagonists in popular women-centric television drama serials, focusing on *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a). An interpretive framework was built to analyse the construction of female subjectivity based on Smith (1995)'s lexicon of recognition, alignment and allegiance in addition to television aesthetic strategies which set the analysis in motion.

Chapter Four explored white Afrikaans female subjectivities in post-apartheid SA and the transformation from *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) ideal to post-feminist, neoliberal *ordentlikheid* (respectability). This identity configurator was added to the interpretative framework built in Chapter Three which served to analyse the construction of white Afrikaans female subjectivity in *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a).

5.2 Contribution to scholarship and reflection on study

This study argued that socio-cultural, -political and -economic ideologies related to post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism inform contemporary women-centric television. I established that the contemporary post-feminist neoliberal female subject, constructed in long form television drama serials, conveyed the following signs or markers: a white, educated, professional woman who promoted an aesthetic of wealth and privilege. I suggested that the post-feminist neoliberal female subject took full responsibility for shaping her own identity, subjectivity and individual agency, through the notion of 'self-creation', which she accomplished through self-investment, -management and -presentation (Genz 2009; Gill 2007; Karam 2019; McRobbie 2009; Rottenberg 2013; Wilkes 2015). In the context of the serials discussed in this study, this female subject is nonetheless hyper-feminine and heterosexual.

Furthermore, I suggested that though the female characters have been constructed to fit the post-feminist neoliberal mould, they also criticised some of its tenets, such as

motherhood, having a career or balancing both. Another rejection of post-feminist, neoliberal tenets was through the portrayal of violence against women and the solidarity or kinship and female empowerment it constructed as it organised itself around a collective 'we' instead of the neoliberal individualistic 'I'.

Big Little Lies (Kelly 2017a) presented a feminist sensibility by engaging with and articulating current feminist politics, ideas and concerns (Ford 2017:34). *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), on the other hand, had the opportunity to engage with feminist topics such as abortion, and to construct female empowerment and agency; however, opted for a more patriarchal authoritative ending. This ending aligns with Van der Westhuizen's (2017) notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) – therefore, rejecting a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017).

I demonstrated that female subjectivity in long form television drama serials was not solely constructed based on a character's recognisability, as noted in the selected conceptual and theoretical framework. Other crucial components required to construct female subjectivity as outlined in the interpretative framework (Figure 2 and 7) were alignment and allegiance as well as television aesthetic strategies such as the female gaze (Pinedo 2021). Pinedo (2021:11-12) defined the female gaze as: "A structure of looking that centres the narrative from a female perspective and is organised around female empowerment in the story space and viewing experience". The construction of a female gaze foregrounds viewer alignment. Also, when the female gaze was negated, as I argued in my discussion of *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), viewer alignment was disabled and it diminished female subjectivity.

The above mapping of contemporary post-feminist neoliberal female subjectivities as constructed in women-centric television drama serials, internationally and locally, contributed toward existing research on female characters, with specific reference to the construction of female subjectivity in long form serial narratives. Consequently, it contributed to research in the field of television studies and feminist media studies.

Big Little Lies (Kelly 2017a) constructed female subjectivity by creating compelling female characters. Characters who portrayed 'traditional' gender stereotypes deconstructing prevailing notions of 'the natural nurturer', 'mother' and 'housewife'. In addition, *Big Little Lies* (Kelly 2017a) employed a female gaze, and the serial narrative was written and created from a female perspective. The female characters feature Smith's (1995) practices of recognition, alignment, and allegiance and the serial narrative conveys a feminist sensibility (Ford 2017). I found it problematic that this highly popular serial only explored heterosexual relationships and marriages (normative family unions), as it did not engage with queer ways of being. Furthermore, the series did not explore race (the story world was built around white female privilege).

Waterfront (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) succeeded in constructing female characters that were compelling, and that did not conform entirely to the notion of *ordentlikheid* (respectability). As such, these female characters displayed Smith's (1995) practices of recognition, alignment, and allegiance. They also featured post-feminist, neoliberal tenets by being career-driven, highly ambitious, unconventional mothers or rejecting motherhood all together, suffering from mental conditions and emotional trauma. These were layered, complex female characteristics to explore. However, the key problems were that this serial narrative was not written or created to convey a female perspective; it did not employ a female gaze or promote a feminist sensibility. Furthermore, the female characters did not rise above their stranglehold but always submissively succumbed to their father's patriarchal control, which was linked to Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* by 'keeping the crown on his head' (Van der Westhuizen 2017:149).

Chapter Four focused specifically on the construction of white Afrikaans female subjectivities in Afrikaans television drama serials, which contributes towards the limited amount of research that is currently available on white Afrikaans female characters in the Afrikaans television landscape, which Mkosi (2016) emphasised as "a serious lack of strong female representation within film and television roles in [SA]". Moreover, this chapter iterated Van der Westhuizen's (2017: 23-33) findings on Afrikaner *ordentlikheid*

(respectability) whereby *ordentlikheid* constructed white, female Afrikaner identity in terms of appearance, demeanour and moral character. Nonetheless, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a) has provided audiences with examples of 'new' modes of white Afrikaans womanhood, modes of white Afrikaans female subjectivities that go beyond Afrikaner *ordentlikheid.*

The shortcomings and limitation of this study:

1. **Conceptual and theoretical framework:** I specifically used post-feminism, neoliberalism and fourth-wave feminism as the theoretical framework for this study, as my focus was on the construction of female subjectivity in long form television drama serials. This choice of framework also facilitated in building my interpretative framework and establishing the recognisability of female characters. This choice of framework could have been a limitation on this study and other possible conceptual and theoretical frameworks, such as sociological, psychological, or even cognitive, could have proven beneficial for the study of female subjectivity. Further exploration of fields in anthropology and narratology in this regard might prove advantageous.
2. **Genre of serial:** The choice of a specific serial genre - long form drama serials - might also prove to be biased or a limitation of the study, as this is my preferred genre of study. Another genre of women-centric or female driven series/serials or feature films (such as historical series, comedy, science fiction, or horror) might also prove to be a valuable alternative field of study.
3. **Choice of serials:** There were numerous international women-centric television drama serials to select for this study. However, my choice of Afrikaans drama serial was limited, and I could only find one, *Waterfront* (Kruger & Swanepoel 2017a), that fit this study's criteria. It is, however, important to note that on 29 November 2022, a Showmax original production was released called *Donkerbos* (Scheepers 2022) - an Afrikaans crime thriller with a female protagonist Fanie (Erica Wessels) at the helm. The release of this long form drama serial was too

late for inclusion in this current study, but the series could prove valuable for further research on female subjectivity in Afrikaans-language genre series.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

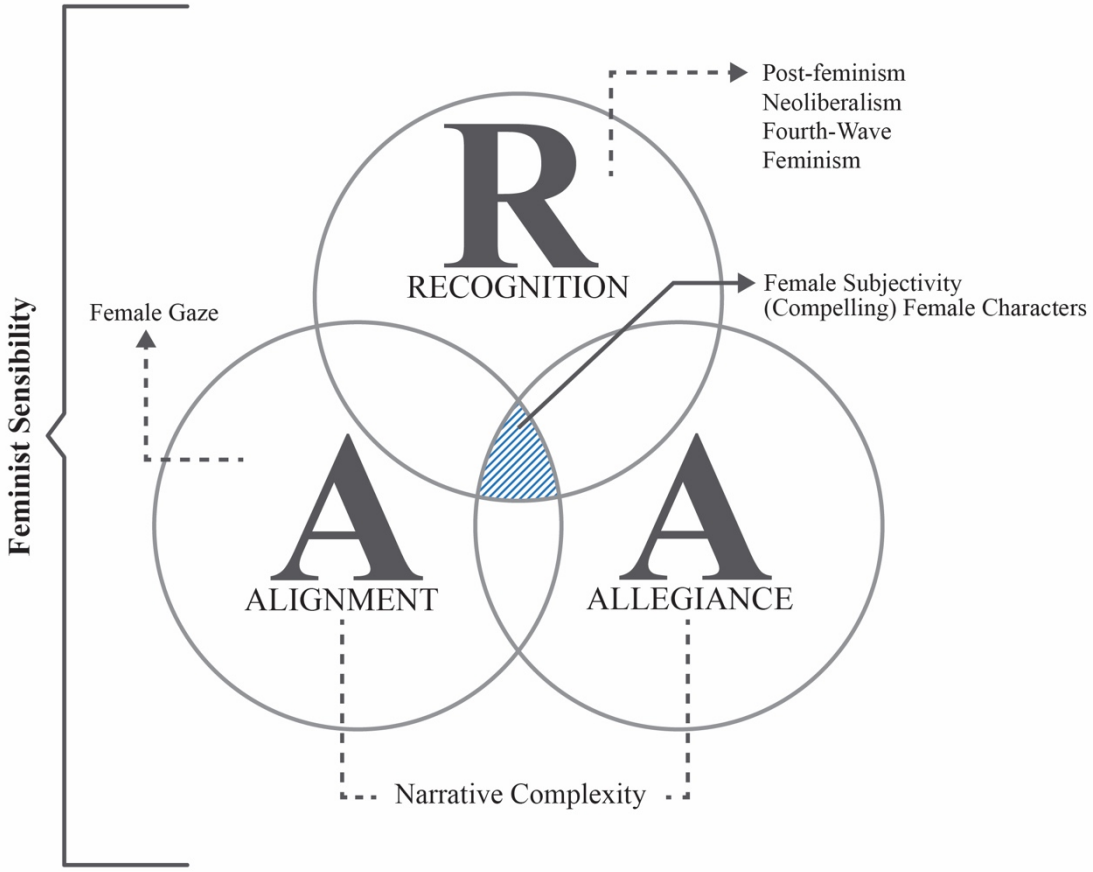

Figure 2: Interpretive framework for the analysis of female subjectivity in women-centric television drama serials.

This interpretative framework (Figure 2) has demonstrated the synergy of recognition, alignment and allegiance (Smith 1995) in constructing female subjectivity. It has also proven valuable for analysing female subjectivity in long form television drama serials by establishing what constitutes a compelling female character. In addition, it laid the foundation for narrative complexity in television series and serials. This interpretative framework of analysis can be beneficial to future scholars to either adopt or alter for

further research on female subjectivity in future studies of popular media specifically, television and film.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that Afrikaans television drama serials still fall short compared to international popular television drama serials when it comes to women-centric storytelling and the construction of compelling female characters. The Afrikaans television industry in SA has not seen a significant rise in women-centric television drama serials, comedy series or dramedies compared to the international television landscape. The reason behind this might be, as Mkosi (2016) suggested: "Lack of ownership, a serious lack of strong female representation within film and television roles, limited access to financial resources, limited knowledge of the business side of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI's) and a general lack of opportunities".

However, there has been an increase in Afrikaans feature films telling women-centric stories in recent years, films such as *Toorbos* (Van Rooyen 2019), *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (Joshua 2018), *Stroomop* (Botha 2018), *Krotoa* (Durrant 2017), *Vaselinetjie* (Van Rooyen 2017), *Tess* (Rickards 2016), *Sink* (Innes 2016) and *Dis ek, Anna* (Blecher 2015). Due to this study's scope, focusing specifically on television as a medium, I did not explore the construction of female subjectivity in women-centric Afrikaans feature films and would like to suggest this lens of inquiry for further research. It could prove valuable to explore whether women-centric Afrikaans feature films and more recent shorts construct and promote a female gaze and whether they articulate or promote a feminist sensibility. As mentioned in the previous section, it could also prove advantageous to explore female subjectivity in different genres of television or film such as historical, comedy, science fiction, horror and possibly even looking at children's series/serials.

I hope that this study and other Afrikaans television series/serial studies might initiate change and that more Afrikaans narratives will be told from a woman's point of view.

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