"Girls Can Do Anything", Can't They?

A Close Study Into the Representation of Female Teenage Identity Construction in

Popular Global Teen Series *Elite* (2018-)

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Abstract

For today's so-called Netflix generation, teen series are a primary source for self-identification, finding role models and educating themselves on the various aspects of teenage life. However, teen series have traditionally been inundated with stereotypical representations of female adolescence. Now, with the growing importance and visibility of postfeminist movements, teen series are increasingly adapting to this societal quest for gender equality and female empowerment. With the ongoing concerns about both these postfeminist and stereotypical manifestations in mind, a critical stance towards one of today's most popular teenage series *Elite* is, at the very least, highly necessary.

This study answers the following question: How does the recent popular global coming-of-age teen series *Elite* (2018-) negotiate (non-)traditional representations of female teen identity construction? By drawing on theories of representation, gender, postfeminism, identity and Orientalism, all applied to traditional and non-traditional representations of female teenage identity in teen series, this study offers a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the contemporary teenage girl on screen. This study is conducted from a postfeminist perspective and by conducting a Multimodal Discourse Analysis. This method has proven to be appropriate and successful in exploring the compatible ways in which both text and images are used to shed light on the representation of female teenage identity construction.

The analysis of *Elite* showed that the overarching theme within the representation of female teenagers' identity is that of postfeminist Girl Power, whereby the girl characters are portrayed as (sexually) empowered, confident, intelligent and independent women. This study highlighted the importance of space and context in determining the empowered or submissive position of female teenagers, both within the narrative and indirectly in society. The contexts of (1) home, (2) school, (3) nightlife, (4) socioeconomic status and (5) spaces of love and intimacy were found to influence not only how female teenage identity is constructed, but also how it is expressed. Yet, before celebrating this promising future for female teenage representation, one must not ignore or underestimate the stereotypes and postfeminist pitfalls that still exist in duality with this young female empowerment in teen TV. Especially in the areas of intersectionality and race, there is still much ground to be gained if we are to achieve an empowered representation of young womanhood, beyond the white, Western manifestation of freedom and agency, and extending towards the multiple social, economic and cultural layers of post-modern societies.

KEYWORDS: *Representation, Femininity, Teenage Identity, Sexuality, Teen series*

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Introduction

We are 16 years old. If we don't lose ourselves now, then
when? We have all our lives to find ourselves again.

— Marina, in *Elite*

The shift between childhood and adulthood marks a crucial phase in the identity construction of young women. Teenagers begin to experiment and explore who they are, based on and shaped by different social contexts and relationships (Jones & Deutsch, 2013; Steensma et al., 2013). While living in a mediated world, both mass media and digital media have a significant impact on teenagers' identity construction (Buckingham, 2008). Today, Gen Z and Y are growing up in an "on-demand media world" (Matrix, 2014, p. 133), where platforms such as Netflix and HBO offer teens new opportunities for media consumption, such as binge watching. Series that are aimed at and appeal primarily, but certainly not limited to, an adolescent audience are defined as teen series (Meyer & Wood, 2013).

Whereas teen series used to focus mainly on friendship and romances (Pasquier, 1996), since the 00s there has been an upward trend in the explicit focus on sex, drugs, alcohol and violence (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; 2013). Recent teen series such as *Sex Education* (2019-), *Euphoria* (2019-) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020) achieved high popularity and controversy, as did the teen series *Elite* (2018-). The Spanish Netflix original has been a huge success worldwide since the first day it aired. In January last year, Netflix declared that the teen crime series was the most successful binge show on a global scale, with nearly 140 million viewers (Forbes, 2020). While it deals with aspects such as crime, power, class, sex, drugs, religion and complicated relationships, this teen series has caused controversy, but mostly favourable reviews.

1. Female 'Role Models' for the Netflix Generation

During their coming-of-age phase in life, teenagers are looking for role models to identify with (Buckingham, 2008; Jones & Deutsch, 2013) and these role models are nowadays often found within television series (Buckingham, 2008; Jones & Deutsch, 2013). In the 1990s, teen series were mostly criticised for being "not realistic *enough,* and because of this, gave children misleading expectations of life" (Pasquier, 1996, pp. 352). Now, twenty years later, teen series are often still seen as an unrealistic and stereotypical representation of teenage life (van Damme, 2010). Girl characters in teen series are often dressed in sexy clothes, have skinny postures, engage in typically 'female' activities such as shopping, and are portrayed in relation to their male counterparts as submissive and insecure (van

Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). Although these portrayals of the young high school girl seem normal, innocent and amusing, it is mainly these normalised representations that problematically reinforce and perpetuate existing gendered power structures and expected feminine behaviours (Lauzen et al., 2008).

In recent years, under the postfeminist label Girl Power, young female characters in teen series increasingly embody empowerment, intelligence and independence (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). Given the importance and visibility of postfeminism today, and the wide appreciation for *Elite*'s progressive content, it is incredibly relevant to examine how the female characters' identities are constructed and whether traditional gender norms are reproduced or rejected. Media representations are considered to be strongly connected to the real world (Molina-Guzmán, 2016). Although these representations are not essentially the truth, they do show us, often indirectly and unobtrusively, existing social conventions and the way power is distributed. Thus, analysing teenage female identity in teen series will shed light on the assumptions about and positioning of young women in our post-modern society (Poole, 2019) and the expectations that are perpetuated about how girls are supposed to dress, behave and be.

2. Societal Relevance

As stated by Wodak (2014), "critical analysis itself is a practice that may contribute to social change" (p. 305). Apart from the fact that popular culture both *reflects* and *influences* the assumptions about, in this case, female teenagers in society (Moberg, 2009), the portrayal of young women in such teen series is also significant for the way young girls construct their own identity. Through high levels of media consumption, teenagers give meaning to themselves and the world around them and reproduce behaviours with which they identify (van Damme, 2010; Gillig & Murphy, 2016).

As teen series also function as important source of education on aspects such as sexuality (Aubrey et al., 2020), research into the representation of female teenage characters will be of great interest and relevance to young girls (whether loyal fans of this series or girls in general). This study will provide young girls a reliable and revealing source to recognise both traditional, stereotypical and non-traditional portrayals that they use as role models for their own identity construction. This will help them to address unfeasible, generalised and unrealistic norms and expectations of femininity, but also to discover what empowered position a woman can (and should) occupy within society and the various expressions that femininity entails.

Moreover, to realise (small steps of) social change, we must look at the heart of the matter: the makers of teen series. This study will create awareness among the producers of such teen series about

the powerful, educational role they fulfill for youths on various aspects of their adolescent lives (van Damme, 2010; Gillig & Murphy, 2016). More importantly, this study will be of great value to these producers in understanding how they are in a position to change the status quo, by breaking with the dominant stereotypical portrayal of young womanhood and creating realistic, diverse images of femininity in its truest form.

3. Scientific Relevance

This study will contribute to existing research by highlighting a non-American perspective of female teenagers' representation in teen series, by conducting a rigorous analysis of a Spanish series with a global audience. Moreover, the vast majority of previously conducted studies on female teen identity or gender roles were conducted a decade ago (Aubrey, 2004; van Damme, 2010; Kim et al., 2007). A recent study on the construction of female identity as a whole in current teen series is lacking, as is any research on the popular teen series *Elite*. The little research on recent popular teen series tends to focus on, for example, the impact of *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020) on adolescent suicides (Hong et al., 2019; Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2019) or queerness in *Sex Education* (2019-) (Hilkemeijer, 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2020). Therefore, it remains important to continue to examine today's most popular series that appeal to youth to understand how societal assumptions about femininity and teenage life are changing.

Previous studies demonstrated the effects of mass media and (teen) series on adolescents' identity and their perception of the world around them (Aubrey et al., 2014; Brown and Bobkowski 2011; L'Engle et al., 2006). Other scholars indicated how teen series represent gender stereotypes (ter Bogt et al., 2010; García-Muñoz and Fedele, 2011; Gerding and Signorelli, 2014) and how teen sexuality is constructed (Aubrey, 2004; van Damme, 2010; 2013; Kim et al., 2007). However, other crucial aspects of teenagers' identity construction, such as religion, ethnicity and class, are often excluded and underexposed. Moreover, most of these studies are devoted to female and male representations, whereas a focus on only teenage girls' identity construction would allow for a more in-depth analysis of female representation.

Additionally, *Elite* features a female Muslim character. Although much research has been done on the representation of Muslim women in the media (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Bullock, 2002; Siraj; 2012), research on media representations of Muslim teenage femininity is scarce. Despite modern teen series increasingly represent racial diversity in their cast (e.g. *Sex Education* (2019-), *Never Have I Ever* (2020-), *Stranger Things* (2016-)), Muslim (teen) characters are still underrepresented. This study will enrich the existing discourse by implementing an intersectional approach to female teenage identity

construction. This study highlights the gendered power structures that exist within the different social and cultural strata of our contemporary society and fills the research gap by revealing (and challenging) traditional and non-traditional societal expectations regarding female teenage identity construction as entirety. This study will act as a relevant source for future studies related to female teenage identity in popular culture and provide the opportunity to indicate representative changes over time. In light of the different research gaps mentioned, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research question:

> *How does the recent popular global coming-of-age teen series Elite (2018-) negotiate (non-)traditional representations of female teenage identity construction?*

4. Implementation and Structure of the Study

Most of the above-mentioned studies on the representation of (female) teenagers in teen series are conducted through quantitative or thematic analysis, and by analysing only a selection of episodes per series. Since this study focuses on the identity construction of female characters, an analysis of all episodes from the series is required to provide insight into how these identities develop and which (internal and external) factors were most prominently involved. Language is a crucial factor in naturalising certain thoughts, values and identities, while at the same time it also has the potential to reshape this hegemony (Huckin, 1997; Wodak, 2014). Images are powerful in conveying implicit meanings and serve as a reflection of society's ideas, values and (gender) discourses (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Complementary to these previous studies, my research will closely analyse both visual and textual elements through a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 31), as it is precisely the reinforcing compatibility of these two elements that can reveal deeper meanings.

This thesis will proceed with an in-depth theoretical framework, in which I critically draw on theories of identity, gender, postfeminism and Orientalism, all of which are applied to (non-)traditional representations of female teenagers in teen series throughout time. Subsequently, the methodology chapter will address the different steps involved in conducting the aforementioned Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Moreover, this chapter covers the sample description, data collection, operationalisation of the concepts of female empowerment/submissiveness and sexuality, followed by a critical reflection on my position as researcher and the study's credibility. Next, the results are elaborated and linked to key concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. The last chapter contains

the conclusion, in which my research question is answered and the scientific and societal implications and limitations are presented.

Theoretical Framework

With the high popularity of teen series and the impact they have on their (partly) young audience (Buckingham, 2008), it is important to understand how traditional representations of female teenage identity are constructed and depicted in teen series *Elite*. This chapter will examine what these traditional representations entail, using previous research on female representations in (teen) TV and using examples from case studies and empirical research. To gain an understanding of how non-traditional representations are established, the following sections develop the concepts of postfeminism and gender, subsequently relating them to contemporary representations of the teenage girl on screen.

1. Teenage Identity Construction

During adolescence, which marks the shift between childhood and adulthood, teenagers begin to explore who they are, based on and shaped by different social contexts and relationships (Jones & Deutsch, 2013; Steensma et al., 2013). Identity implies the "values, principles, and roles that an individual has adopted as his or her own" (Steensma et al., 2013, p. 290). The formation of one's identity depends on individual characteristics, contexts of development and different domains in which identities are performed, but which are interdependent and strongly interconnected (Grotevant, 1987). These domains include religion, profession, gender roles, (intimate) relationships and friendships (Steensma, 2013). Other identity domains are morality, sexuality and physical appearance (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). Individual identity characteristics include various dimensions of personality, such as self-esteem and the openness to new experiences. One's context refers to the culture and society in which someone finds her/himself, the ideologies that exist in this culture, but also to family, friends and school (Grotevant, 1987; Steensma et al., 2013).

During this phase in life, adolescents increasingly distance themselves from their parents, find support in their friends and peers (Eleuteri et al., 2017), and seek affiliation with a particular group they feel they belong to (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016). Since representations derive from the context in which they are produced, it is therefore necessary to place the representation of female identity construction in teen series within contemporary, Western discourses on gender, sexuality and religion.

2. Gender and Representation

As stated by Stuart Hall, "representation is the production of meaning through language" (1997, p. 14). Hall emphasises the link between media representations and the real society, or the "out there" (Molina-Guzmán, 2016, p. 440). Therefore, the analysis of teen series offers a reflection of the social, cultural and

political (gender and racial) power structures and differences that exist within society. These representations are not one objective reality, nor the truth, but rather different constructed realities. Moreover, analysing the representation of female teenage identities in teen series will not shed any light on female teenagers themselves. But, it does illustrate the way they are perceived and positioned within their contemporary social context (Poole, 2019). Thus, representations derive not only from the product itself, but also from the ideological hegemony and gender discourses that exist in society. These discourses involve both language and practice, and produce our knowledge about people or concepts. Since media representations convey certain ideologies and discourses, and thus knowledge, these representations are strongly linked to power structures (Hall, 1997).

Stereotypes form an important aspect of representation and are powerful in creating, normalizing and maintaining discourses about people and groups in society (Fürsich, 2010; Poole, 2019). These stereotypes most often are negative, oversimplified portraits of powerless people, ignoring the personal differences of the people involved, dividing them into classes and leading to prejudice (Berg, 2002; Dyer, 1984). While living in a patriarchal society, the social differences and inequalities between males and females, and so gendered power structures, are maintained and reproduced through media representations (Heise et al., 2019; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011). Although traditional representations know many forms and evolve over time, they are usually rooted in stereotypical assumptions about femininity, defined by (and for) men (Gocsik et al., 2013).

2.1. Traditional Representations of Female Characters in Teen TV

To understand how traditional manifestations of female teen characters in teen series manifest, it is necessary to first go to the heart of the matter, by conceptualising gender. Gender is a complex social system that determines who, what and how individuals should be and act (Heise et al., 2019), and thus refers to the socially expected behaviors and rules that pertain to femininity and masculinity (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011). From this notion of gender, gender norms and roles derive. This entails the "unspoken rules that govern the attributes and behaviours that are valued and considered acceptable for men, women, and gender minorities" (Heise et al., 2019, p. 2441). Thus, femininity refers to the responsibilities, features and culturally defined roles that apply to every individual that is (by society) placed within this social category, while keeping in mind the power relations that exist between women and men (Heise et al., 2019). During adolescence, teenagers make sense of themselves by acting towards (or distancing from) those socially constructed gender roles (Steensma et al., 2013).

The notion of gender as social construct can be traced back to feminist theories that reject the hegemonic gender discourse in which femininity and masculinity are distinguished as two opposites. According to Simone de Beauvoir, someone becomes a woman rather than being born one, thus making a distinction between gender and biological sex (Butler, 1986). Butler, however, argues that this distinction is superfluous as it creates societal norms and expectations of what constitutes femininity (Butler, 2006). Therefore, as long as gender is seen as distinct from biological sex, the natural idea of gender roles is reproduced and individuals are still expected to play either a male or female role to be understood. Butler argues that gender is socially constructed on the body and that society is dominated by gender thinking (2006). Through constant reproduction and maintenance of cultural norms, these notions of what constitutes masculinity and femininity, and thus often stereotypes, are reinforced and perpetuated. This is the performativity of gender and points to femininity as something that is practised within and according to existing socio-cultural norms (Butler, 2006).

Through stereotypes a homogenised image is created of how women should look, behave, interact with others and what social roles they are expected to fulfill. As Lauzen et al. (2008) argue, "traditional portrayals of women thus serve the dual purpose of seeming "natural and normal," while simultaneously perpetuating the gender hegemony" (p. 201). Especially in teenagers' lives today, TV series function not only as entertainment and relaxation, but also to educate themselves. As these on-demand TV series are still dominated by stereotypical representations of gender roles and expressions (Kluch & Schuck, 2020), it is important to understand how female characters' representations in teen series manifest.

Females in teen series are often portrayed as well-groomed, skinny girls, whose looks and appearance are (dis)approved by their peers and determine their popularity and value. Very often, these teenage girls are dressed sexy, with smooth skins, long hair and not representative of their own age. This creates an unrealistic image of what a teenage girl should look like, which is reinforced by the fact that these characters are usually played by actresses who are much older than the character's age (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). Girls in teen series are often stereotyped as sneaky, damaged and/or complicated personalities, who engage in dating, dieting, shopping and competing with other girls. Moreover, their physical aspects usually overshadow the intelligence of the female characters. The study by Álvarez-Hernández et al. (2015) showed, through an analysis of Spanish teen films (2009-2014), that male characters often occupy leading positions, while female characters are portrayed as rather passive and having to be rescued or being dependent on male characters.

2.2. The Postfeminist Theory and Changing Representations of Female Teen Characters

The representation of female identity construction in teen series will be analyzed from a postfeminist perspective, to clarify representational changes. According to McRobbie, postfeminism "refers to the "undoing" of feminism that she believed started in 1990 in the UK and elsewhere" (Nash & Grant, 2015, p. 981). Postfeminism opposes previous feminist waves and is an assemblage of ideas covered under the notion of 'sensibility' (Gill, 2007; Riley, 2019). Postfeminist sensibility can be roughly explained as an ideology that is not only formed by its socio-cultural context, but also by feelings or ways of experiencing that are linked to this context (Riley et al., 2017).

Main characteristics or themes of this postfeminist sensibility are individualism, subjectification, choice and empowerment, hyper-sexualization, bodily property, among others. Bodily property implies that femininity and female bodies are the key source of female power and identity, but are therefore also under constant surveillance (by themselves, men and other women) and need to be remodelled. This latter is reinforced in the media by portraying women without flaws or imperfections, who meet idealistic beauty standards. Gill (2007) speaks of a sexualisation of culture to refer to the traditional, hegemonic ideology in media images in which women have to be sexually desirable and attractive to men, protect themselves from negative sexual consequences, have a good sexual reputation and are expected to be romantically and/or sexually involved with the opposite sex (Gill, 2007; Riley, 2019).

Under the growing visibility of postfeminism, however, this sexualisation rather implies the transformation of the passive woman into an active, powerful and clever subject, who chooses to be sexually desirable, rather than being sexually objectified by men. This female subjectification helps women make meaning of themselves and construct their female identity (Riley, 2019). Choice and individualism stand for the fact that women use their (sexual) femininity for their own benefit and pleasure, as an instrument of power and control. Postfeminist expressions that target younger women are defined as Girl Power, which can be traced back to the political youth movement of the 1990s. This postfeminist strand promotes and celebrates girls' empowerment, independence, intelligence and sexuality, and is expressed in various forms of media (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010).

This influence of postfeminism is increasingly present in the portrayal of female characters in teen series, challenging and reconstructing the hegemonic gender discourse. Female characters in teenage series are portrayed as independent and able to solve their own problems and make their own choices. They dress sexy and pay attention to their appearance, but for no one else but themselves. Whereas this great attention to appearance is considered stereotypical, within postfeminist theory it is precisely this that serves as means for female empowerment and equality (van Damme & van Bauwel,

2013). Importantly, postfeminist representations and female stereotypes are highly contradictory, but often coexist (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013; Riley et al., 2017). For example, girls are portrayed as independent and (physically and mentally) strong, but are at the same time vulnerable and highly dependent on their parents (Berridge, 2013). Another area in which female teenage empowerment is portrayed is through the expressions of (hyper-)sexuality, which is further elaborated in section 3.

Although postfeminist media representations recently have increasingly reflected black or queer women (Butler, 2013; Riley, 2019), this female empowerment is usually focused on white, heterosexual, cis-gender and affluent girls who meet society's high beauty standards, and thus excludes women of colour from this notion of female empowerment (Butler, 2013; van Damme, 2010; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Nash & Grant, 2015). McRobbie even states that the white race as norm and privilege is reinforced within the postfeminist theory (McRobbie, 2009). According to Jess Butler (2013), however, this exclusion stated by McRobbie should rather be replaced by the notion of "an affirmation of a white heterosexual subject". Postfeminism does not (fully) exclude non-white women, but it does perpetuate existing gender, class and race discourses and power relations. Butler (2013) highlights the problematic fact that women from racial or ethnic minorities are equated with white women in feminist rights. The intersection of other social identities, such as class, race, ethnicity and sexuality, that may lead to disadvantage or oppression of non-white women are thus not acknowledged (Butler, 2013; Ferber, 2012). As *Elite* features a Muslim female teenage character, section 4. elaborates on the intersectional oppression Muslim girls (might) experience.

Jackson and Westrupp (2010) emphasise concerns about and criticism of Girl Power's manifestations, as its consumerism completely overshadows the political significance of the feminist movement, and reinforces ethnic and racial distinctions (Butler, 2013). Through mass media, 'postfeminist girlhood' (Bullen et al., 2011) is disseminated and marketed. Girl characters' sexual subjectivity is often linked to attracting boys by buying certain products, such as clothes and make-up, to be sexually desirable and attractive (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). This reflects the hyper-feminine and hypersexual aspirations of post-feminist female empowerment (Bullen et al., 2011).

3. The Representation of Female Teenage Sexuality On-Screen
Sexual and gender identity occupy the most fundamental place in teenage life. During the late 90s, the main aspects of teen series entailed romance and friendship, which were hardly portrayed in an explicitly sexual way (Pasquier, 1996). From the 00' onwards, family issues, drugs, alcohol, sports and music became additional typical features of teen drama series (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013). Although the

main content of teen series remains the same, recently there has been an increasing emphasis on sex(uality) (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; 2013). This could be drawn back to the changing sexual behavior of teenagers, who are becoming more sexually active and experience sexual encounters on a younger age than twenty years ago (Aubrey et al., 2020).

van Damme and van Bauwel's study (2012) into (non-)US teen series from the early 00s, showed that teen series often insinuate the assumption that teenagers, from an age of 16, are expected to have and experiment with sex. Additionally, sex and sexual relationships are seen as fun and risk-free, rather than limited to committed relationships or having consequences (Aubrey, 2004; Aubrey et al., 2020; van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). These sexual portrayals in teen series not only reflect current teens' sexual behavior, but are also used by youth to set their own expectations, fulfil those of others and educate themselves about sexual encounters (Aubrey et al., 2020).

3.1. Traditional Representations and the "Double Standard"

Aubrey (2004) refers to a "double standard" (p. 506) in teen series to denote the gendered rules of sexuality and intimacy, distinguishing between the socially accepted norms of male and female sexuality. Through gendered sexual representations in popular culture, youth give meaning to themselves and their own sexuality (Aubrey et al., 2020). Especially through the continued reproduction of the dominant so-called "hetero-sexual script" (Aubrey et al., 2020, p. 1135), heteronormativity and gender inequality are reinforced. Other feminine scripts that perpetuate a hegemonic discourse about sex, female sexual stereotypes, and the previously mentioned double standard, is through the "good girls" script, the "feminine commitment" script, the "appropriation of female homosexuality" script and the "feminine courtship" script.

These scripts imply that girl characters are more interested in romantic relationships (which they consider more important than sex) and passively wait to be chased by boy characters. Teen series often focus on female characters' innocence and sexual vulnerability, for example by focusing on storylines about female characters' virginity and their (un)readiness to have sex (Berridge, 2013). Above all, the value of the teenage girl in teen series is determined by her sexual behaviour and negative sexual consequences are most often associated with their choices (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Kim et al, 2007; Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). This contrasts with boy characters who consider sex as part of masculinity, avoid any commitment, actively chase girls and are less accepted for being homosexual. The latter is at odds with the strong sexualisation of lesbian intimacy by males (Aubrey et al., 2020). Given that sexual intercourse in teen series is an important source of sexual health education for youth, it is important to

recognise which gendered sexual stereotypes are perpetuated and reinforced by such portrayals (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014).

Aubrey's study into young-adult television from the early 2000s (2004) showed that negative sexual consequences include not only physical, but also emotional and social ones. For example, a physical consequence is an unwanted pregnancy or STI and an emotionally and socially negative consequence is being rejected by one's peers (Aubrey, 2004). Ortiz and Brooks (2014) argue that negative sexual consequences are much more prominent in teen TV than positive ones, although the frequency with which these consequences are shown is not proportional to the frequency of intercourse between the characters (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). Contrary, van Damme and van Bauwel (2012) argue that teen series tend to draw more attention to physical, positive aspects of sex, of which sexual satisfaction or the expression of love after intercourse is an example (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). However, the (rarely portrayed) negative consequences associated with sexual intercourse are most often present when female characters initiate sex. These conflicting statements about the occurrence of positive and negative sexual consequences in teen series illustrate the (constantly) changing nature of the representation of teenagers' sexual activity and highlight the importance of examining the female sexual representations in *Elite*.

3.2. (Feminist) Contemporary Representations of Female Teenage Sexuality

Despite this double standard, scholars have shown that teen series recently often contain a more postfeminist representation through female empowerment and sexual agency. This is emphasised by the active attitude of the female teen characters, who are more open in talking about sex, but also initiating it, and focusing on their own pleasure (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). The double standard of some ten years ago is slowly disappearing, as female characters are increasingly expressive about their sexual desires and are recently more often represented as 'hypersexual' in teen TV (Ortiz and Brooks, 2014, p. 42). Moreover, female characters use their own bodies and attractiveness to achieve certain goals. As mentioned in section 2.2, sexual objectification has made room for sexual subjectification as characteristic of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007). According to this view, (young) women are sexually active, desirable and knowing. They dress up and behave in a sexy and extremely feminine way, but only for themselves. Although this could be seen as female empowerment from a postfeminist perspective, there is also a fine line with (self-)sexual objectification (see operationalization section in methodology chapter) (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012).

Yet, alongside the increasing focus on teenage sexuality and empowerment, intimacy and sexual intercourse are not explicitly shown, but limited to (many) conversations between characters (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). Usually, sexual intercourse is limited to hugging and kissing. Moreover, the focus is still mainly on heterosexual relationships and not much attention is paid to the real (emotional) consequences besides pregnancy, such as STIs (ter Bogt et al., 2010; van Damme, 2010; Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). These aspects, together with the general smooth portrayal of intimacy and sexual acts, are criticised to lead to an unrealistic image of female teenage sexuality.

It is important to place *Elite* within the Spanish context of gendered sexual representations in series that appeal to youth. Spanish teen series are often seen as emphasising an old model of love and sexuality, in an idealised and mythical way, where gender differences are dominant (Masanet et al., 2019). Often, Spanish teen series negotiate a "submissive cultural model of femininity and a dominant cultural representation of masculinity" (Masanet et al., 2019). The appreciation of romance and love is most always devoted to female characters and portrayals of sexual power and jealousy to male characters. Lacalle and Castro's (2018) study shows that in Spanish television series, female characters are most often held responsible for negative consequences of sexual intercourse. Moreover, the loss of virginity of female characters is seen as a highly symbolic element in the narrative that represents the transition from childhood to adulthood (Lacalle & Castro, 2018).

4. Racial Diversity and Othering: The Representation of Muslim Femininity

The construction of teenage identity depends on several domains, one of which is religion (Steensma et al., 2013). Since one of the female protagonists of the series is a Muslim girl, it is important to analyse her intersectional role as female Muslim in the series. After the 9/11 attack, Muslims are portrayed very negatively in Western media, often as barbaric and dangerous. Muslim women are highly stereotyped as passive victims (Navarro, 2010), without any agency (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). When stepping aside from representation and looking at young Muslim girls at school, these girls are often assumed to be hardworking, disciplined and focussed on themselves. Young Muslim girls have often been labelled as a danger to radicalize and are associated with forced marriages (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018).

As Holtzman and Sharpe argue, "race is largely a social, political and economic construct that has been used to establish hierarchies of power and privilege" (2014, p. 310). Racialisation is a revised term of racism that implies the oppression of groups of people based on both physical and cultural attributes by the group in power. Muslims are thus racialised by the religious beliefs they espouse, the way they dress, their cultural habits and the language they speak (Garner & Selod, 2015). The theory of the Other

and Orientalism originated with Edward Said (1978) and involves the distinction between the Orient (Middle-East) and the Occident (West), of which the latter considers itself superior. As Poole (2019) states, "Orientalism is a significant theory for understanding the historical production of knowledge about, in particular, the Islamic Other, in the Western world" (p. 471).

To achieve self-understanding and self-identification, the West creates images about the Orient, meaning that these images and representations are subjective and a constructed reality (Poole, 2019). Othering emphasizes and preserves hegemonic power relations, as only the one with power is able to construct a reality about the Other. The way these power structures manifest themselves and the form of racism that is specifically directed towards Muslims is known as Islamophobia. Orientalism plays an incredibly important role in the way Muslim women are perceived and treated in the West, the rise of Islamophobia, and their stereotypical portrayal in Western media (Garner & Selod, 2015; Saeed, 2007).

Besides the dominant negative and simplistic portrayal of Muslim women in contemporary Western media, Muslim women are very occasionally "westernised" in their representation (Navarro, 2010). This westernization means that Muslim women are represented as modern and professional, with Western cultural characteristics, whose economic or educational success is often emphasised. Regarding postfeminism and female (sexual) empowerment, is important to mention that "young Muslim women's relationship with neoliberal postfeminist female 'empowerment' is different than for white western women" (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). The postfeminist theory is adjusted to white, and sometimes black and South Asian, women living in a Western democratic and capitalistic society. It must thus be acknowledged that young Muslim women experience female empowerment, agency and choice differently (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018).

The veil is the embodiment of gender-based racialisation of Muslim women, as it is a distinctive external feature that sets them apart from the dominant way women dress in the West (Karaman & Christian, 2020). Within modern Western media, the hijab and burqa are associated with the oppression and subordination of Muslim women to men, assuming that women who wear veils have no other choice (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Navarro, 2010). The veil serves as a symbol of difference between 'them' and 'us' (Bilge, 2010), which "contributes to the macro-discourse of a "hybridized" Islamic threat, both cultural and terrorist" (Poole, 2019, p. 477). However, it is often not acknowledged that for many Muslim women, the hijab serves as a way of obeying God, experiencing freedom and expressing their Islamic identity (Navarro, 2010). Muslim high school girls often rather prefer to wear a veil to protect themselves from the sexualization of boys and consider it key for self-identification (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018).

As early as 1989, de Beauvoir used the term Othering to refer to the position of women in a patriarchal world. Also, the "two categories of the Other are linguistically co-identified and denigrated" (Pannekoek & Anderson, 2017, p. 119). Thus, a potentially occurring submissive representation of the Muslim female character in *Elite* is caused not only because she is a woman, but also because she is a Muslim living in a secularised, Western world. Secularisation entails that in the modern, Western society, religion is no longer fundamental in structuring people's daily lives (Stolow, 2010). This secularisation reinforces the dominant assumption that Muslims women are different from the (white) non-religious group in power. This means that the representation of Muslim female identity could be placed not only in the discourse on gender, but also highlights the intersection with race and ethnicity (Ali & Sonn, 2017).

To Conclude

In all, it can be argued that the identity construction of female teenagers is a very complex phenomenon, in which many factors and identity domains play a crucial role. While female teenagers in teen series have traditionally been portrayed as stereotypical girls who only pay attention to their appearance to be approved by others and who are highly dependent on males, in recent times teen series have been increasingly flooded with postfeminist (Girl Power) representations, focusing on female empowerment, sexuality and agency. However, this postfeminism in itself also risks jeopardising representations, especially through its emphasis on consumerism and the exclusion of non-white and non-Western races. These discourses on representation, gender, postfeminism, intersectionality and Orientalism indicate that studying representations of female teenage identity construction in popular teen series *Elite* remains of great importance in understanding how societal assumptions towards young womanhood are changing.

Methodology

1. Sample and Data Collection

To investigate how the representation of female teenage identity changes over time and is constructed in contemporary teen series, the crime/drama teen series *Elite* (2018-) was selected as case study. This Spanish Netflix original series has been a huge success worldwide since the first day it aired. In January last year, Netflix declared that the teen series was the most successful binge show on a global scale, with nearly 140 million viewers (Forbes, 2020). As (teenage) female identity construction is a dense and extensive concept that requires an analysis of development over time, I have chosen to analyse only one series in order to conduct a comprehensive and rigorous analysis.

The series *Elite* is chosen based on the following criteria: it must be a teen series, it must feature at least three teenage women (in larger, important roles), and the series must have been recently produced. These criteria relate to the relevance of the analysis and ensure that the series allows in-depth discussion about the representation of female identity construction. Another criterion is that the story of the series is centered in high school and is not science fiction. In this way, the construction of female identity is placed within the everyday context of teenage life and its reflection of postmodern society's values, ideas and discourses can be better understood. The operationalization section in this chapter will ensure that all (abstract) concepts, such as female teen sexuality and empowerment, have clear definitions to be analyzed.

Elite (2018-) is a Spanish Netflix original series produced by Zeta Ficción and directed by Darío Madrona and Carlos Montero. The cast of the series consists of six female teenage main characters and a few female side characters, besides multiple male characters. This research focuses specifically on how the identities of these female main characters, and their relationship with other characters, are portrayed and how gender is performed (Butler, 2006). The series, at the time this study is conducted, consists of three seasons with eight episodes each. In this research, all 24 episodes were analyzed. Further details about the series and characters are presented in Table 1 and 2 (Appendix A & B). Since the series is labeled by Netflix as a teen series and the story is set in an elite high school in Spain, this means that all criteria are met.

As only the scripts of season 2 and 3 were found to be available on the Internet, I had to transcribe season 1's script myself. To ensure the scripts were correct, I checked them while watching the episodes. The transcripts were analysed manually in Pages, by marking words or phrases and making notes. Having viewed all 24 episodes once already, I analysed the literal texts closely and critically, concentrating on the text as a whole and on the sentences and words individually. Especially when

analysing the text as a whole, a better insight is gained into the manipulative effect the text could have on its ordinary readers (Huckin, 1997). The way in which these manipulations can be brought to light will be elaborated in section 3.2.

Since *Elite* is available on Netflix, collecting the visual data was easy. In this study, the focus was on the scenes that contain a link to, or aspects of, the different domains of female teenage identity construction, such as sexuality, religion or gender. I decided to take screenshots of the scenes in which the female teen characters appeared and consistently save them in a folder on my laptop. However, I kept returning to the moving images of the scene to better understand the behaviour of the female characters and to place the specific shots in context.

The transition from one scene to the next is "when a film significantly shifts in time, space, or action" (Gocsik et al., 2013, p. 25). To make the analysis transparent and organized (Silverman, 2011), I conveniently established a so-called plot segmentation, presented in a diagram, in which the boundaries of each scene were noted (Gocsik et al., 2013). I made notes of the main events in each scene, general observations related to the female teen identity construction and the amount of screenshots taken per scene. A total of 983 screenshots were collected and roughly analysed. Based on the established plot segmentation and the performed textual analyses, the most relevant shots (5 to 10 per episode) were selected for further in-depth visual analysis. The way in which this visual analysis is carried out is described in section 3.1.

2. Operationalization

2.1. Female Submissiveness and Empowerment

Teen series are inundated with stereotypes regarding femininity (ter Bogt et al., 2010; García-Muñoz & Fedele, 2011; Gerding & Signorelli, 2014), but are recently also increasingly influenced by postfeminist empowerment (Berridge, 2013; van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). In the theoretical framework, I have elaborated on how traditional representations of female identity construction can occur in teen series. Examples of physical manifestations are that girl characters pay attention only to their physical appearance, look skinny and mature, wear short skirts, and have long hair and clear skin. Traditional behavioural manifestations of female representations include that girl characters often engage in shopping, applying make-up and dating. They are passive, superficial, dependent on the male characters and only seem to fulfill the goal of finding love (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015).

Female postfeminist empowerment is a vaguer concept that needs some clarification. According to postfeminist thinking, the emphasis of female characters is on subjectification, choice and individualism (Gill, 2007). This may be reflected on screen as they are portrayed as physically and mentally strong and in full control of their own bodies and choices. The female characters in teen series are independent, smart and, for example, aspire to go to university after graduation. They pay attention to their appearance by applying make-up, buying clothes, or any other form of consumerism, but, only for their own sake and to celebrate their own bodies (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Riley et al., 2017).

To distinguish female teenage empowerment and submissiveness in *Elite*, the concepts of power and agency need to be clarified. Power can be understood as a political or cultural system of domination through language, also called hegemony, or through violence, or power relations (Ahearn, 2012). The latter implies the limitation of the actions people can perform due to the power of others. Agency is a component of (or against) power and refers to "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2012, p. 261). Agency must be placed in its socio-cultural context to understand how women are able to act in that particular context (Ahearn, 2012). Therefore, the context in which the female characters in the teen series act must be analysed to reveal whether, for example, they dress sexily from a position of subordination (thus do not have the ability to dress as they wish due to existing power relations) or from a position of empowerment (thus have the ability to dress how they wish). Visual elements that are able to communicate power relations and agency are further elaborated in section 3.1.

Muslim female oppression can manifest itself on screen by the Muslim girl (not) wearing a hijab because she is forced to, has no voice or control (over her relationships), is disciplined at school, and is at risk of radicalisation (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Mirza & Metoo, 2018; Navarro, 2010). Muslim female empowerment involves the Muslim girl character wearing the hijab because she wants to, because it protects her from boys and as a way of self-identification (Mirza & Metoo, 2018). Westernised Muslim female empowerment could be expressed through the character not wearing the hijab, adopting modern norms and values and having more agency (Navarro, 2010).

2.2. Female Sexuality

The expression of sexuality on television can be specified by different types of sexual behaviour and by talking about sex (Eyal et al., 2007; Kunkel et al., 1999). Sexual behaviour includes (physical) flirting, kissing, intimate touching, and sexual intercourse (whether implied or explicitly shown). Talking about

sex refers to, for example, the interaction between characters about a sexual act that has taken place, asking for sexual advice or talking about one's sexual desires.

However, the line between sexual (self-)objectification and subjectification in teen series is thin (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). Sexual objectification means that the female body is treated as thing or object, and disconnected from the woman (and her feelings and personality) herself. This manifests itself in media, for example, by depicting the female body as tool to satisfy the other person's sexual desires (such as masturbation), by valuing her (sexual) appearance above her other qualities, or by treating the female body as similar to a sex toy (Choi & DeLong, 2019). This constant sexual objectification often leads to sexual self-objectification of women, as they adopt the notion of their own bodies as sexual objects. This manifests itself, for example, through women being super-conscious (and dissatisfied) with their appearance, through body exposure (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011) and spending a lot of time and attention on their appearance (clothes, make-up, hair) rather than their other characteristics (Choi & DeLong, 2019).

The influence of postfeminism in recent years has resulted in female empowerment and subjectification of girl characters in teen series (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). Self-sexualisation (or subjectification) differs from self-objectification because it refers to certain behaviours rather than "internalization of an outsider's view of the self and viewing oneself as an object" (Choi & DeLong, 2019, p. 1361). Rather, self-sexualisation stems from women's own choice, pleasure and favour of focusing on her sexual appearance to achieve something for their own good, for example, by grooming and clarifying her sexual boundaries.

3. Methods of Analysis

3.1. Visual Analysis

The images from the series will be analyzed by conducting a Critical Visual Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Images are powerful in conveying implicit meanings and serve as reflection of society's ideas, values and (gender) discourses. This method allows for close observation of all individual elements on screen, to identify and convey deeper meanings without the need to be explicitly mentioned. The first step is denotation, which entails an explanation of everything visible on the screen. The next step, connotation, serves to translate the interpretation of all visual elements into the "meaning potential" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 51). This implies that these meanings depend on their context and therefore are unfixed, rather than being a universal truth. The connotation from the visual elements *Elite* is therefore placed within the socio-cultural context of contemporary gender and teenage identity

discourses. Both denotation and connotation are examined by using different tools to pay extensive attention to every small aspect on screen (Machin & Mayr, 2012), which Barsam and Monahan (2015) have divided into *mise-en-scène*, *cinematography*, and *narrative*.

Mise-en-scène. Mise-en-scène includes everything that is visible in the frame, focusing on *objects*, *setting* and *salience*, but also on behaviour and actions of the female characters. These are all important tools to illuminate, reveal and convey deeper symbolic meanings and ideologies. Attention is paid not only to the objects themselves, but also to what they communicate or symbolise given the context in which they are placed. Since looks, appearance and consumerism are considered important aspects in female teenagers' identity construction and the expression of their sexuality (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013; Riley et al., 2017), I focussed, for example, on (the colors of) the clothes worn by the female characters and their accessories.

The *setting* of the scene can reveal much about the discourses being communicated and contributes to the meaning of the objects. The *setting* includes the space in which the scene takes place, including other characters and occurrences (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The tool *salience* includes size, colour, tone, focus, foregrounding and overlap, and is used to make certain elements stand out (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Regarding size, the larger something or someone is in the frame, the more important it appears to be. This is similar to foregrounding and overlapping, where the object or character is placed in the front to attract attention and behind to indicate its less important position.

Cinematography. Cinematography is a way of creating and conveying complex meanings through different camera angles, points of view, use of light, and framing of shots (Barsam & Monahan, 2015). These tools indicate social relationships between viewers and objects in the image, and can communicate, for example, isolation, sincerity, power and vulnerability. This is for example done by means of low- and high-angle shots, long or close up shots, and low- and high-key lighting (Barsam & Monahan, 2015; Machin & Mayr, 2012). These tools may implicitly reveal much about the female characters' position in *Elite* and what this might say about the broader sociocultural gender debate. Moreover, these tools help to highlight the relevant or most important identity characteristics (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Narrative. The narrative not only encompasses the series' story world, it is also an important tool for conveying meaning through the sequence of events and depth of characters. The latter is essential when analyzing the representation of women as it implicitly tells how power is distributed. All aspects of one's character, and the degree to which it is developed, help to understand one's position in the narrative, as well as in society (Barsam & Monahan, 2015).

According to Foucault, the meaning of reality is socially constructed by means of interaction between people through language. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is derived from this notion and highlights, for example, how spoken or written words are used by people or groups with power to oppress others, by shaping a reality to their own advantage (Huckin, 1997). CDA allows for the rigorous examination of "written or oral texts that are deemed to be politically - or culturally influential to a given society" (Huckin, 1997, p. 79) and provides a suitable lens for this study to uncover intersectional power structures that are embedded in society and maintained and reinforced through popular culture. This combination of studying language and images is called Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 31). Since discourse and visual analysis are complementary in conveying meaning, it is very important to focus on both aspects when analysing the representation of female identity construction in teen series, otherwise crucial elements in the meaning-making process will be missed (Wodak, 2014).

Language is a crucial factor in naturalising certain thoughts, values and identities (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Given the interrelation between society and language, spoken words from teen series can thus perpetuate and reinforce existing discourses on teenage female identity, but also has the potential to reshape this status quo (Huckin, 1997; Wodak, 2014). As language is culturally constructed and constructive, CDA is therefore specifically useful in revealing the "linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4), and functions to indicate socially constructed power that is maintained and reinforced through representations (Wodak, 2014). What characterises CDA is that it places texts not only in their environmental but also in their political, social and cultural contexts, rather than assuming that a text is an isolated product (Huckin, 1997). When analysing the scripts of *Elite*, the previously elaborated theories and concepts therefore function as the theoretical foundation in which the text is placed and given meaning.

CDA helps to analyse not only how the female characters use language, but also how other (male) characters use language when talking about them. The semiotic choices in texts can be revealed incrementally by looking at the following elements (Machin & Mayr, 2012):

Word Connotations. Since language offers the possibility of choosing which words are used, it is necessary to analyse the words chosen by the creator. Words carry associations and can be applied to the creator's own advantage. These specific word choices could lead to the connotation of certain norms, values and actions within existing cultural discourses, without the creator having to mention them explicitly (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This step is pursued by highlighting the words or phrases that

referred to or expressed (anything related to) the identity of the female characters, whether this implied their sexuality, their religious beliefs or their alcohol and drug use for example.

Overlexicalisation. Overlexicalisation refers to the (unnecessary) repetition of words and their synonyms, to persuade the dominant discourse or ideology (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Within this step, I looked at the over-use of words and synonyms when referring to female identity construction, such as their sexuality or the importance of family. Moreover, I focussed on the word repetitions linked to female empowerment and agency (or submissiveness) to reveal deeper meanings that are tried to be conveyed.

Suppression or Lexical Absence. Contrary to *overlexicalisation*, it also occurs that words or sentences are absent or suppressed, when they would be expected to be present (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Huckin, 1997). When analyzing the female identity construction in *Elite,* I closely examined when necessary information was missing when referring to different aspects that are linked to their identity.

Structural Oppositions. This step entails the analysis of words or phrases that include oppositions or dualities, such as good and bad. However, this is not always explicitly mentioned, but often more implicitly hidden (Machin & Mayr, 2012). I focussed on gender oppositions and the opposition between societal expectations and one's personal identity. So, the opposition between men and women, between traditional gender roles and postfeminist gender roles and between the societal expected behavior of the female characters and their actual behavior. But, as teenagers are in the midst of an experimental phase of identity construction (van den Bulck et al, 2008), their inner struggles and search for identity is also marked.

Lexical Choices and Genre of Communication. By means of *lexical choices*, power and authority could be practiced by the producer of the text towards the consumers of the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Readers (or listeners/watchers in the case of *Elite*) could be manipulated by using language that give the idea that what is said is a fact. So, within in this stage of analysis, the way ordinary readers will consume this text has to be taken into account in order to understand the way manipulation could take place (Huckin, 1997).

3.3. Data Analysis

After analysing both text and images from the three seasons of *Elite*, the findings were systematically organised into a diagram. The findings were divided into *traditional* and *non-traditional* representations, to be able to answer the study's research question. In turn, the findings were subdivided into various categories that emerged most clearly from the analysis, such as sexuality and religion (see Appendix F).

This systematic arrangement allowed me to discover overarching themes, patterns and dualities in the identity construction of *Elite*'s female teen characters.

The analysis revealed three key ways in which the teen series negotiates the representation of their female characters' teenage identity construction: *internal factors*, *external factors* and *contradictions.* The internal factors include personal characteristics and motivations that determined the representation of the female teenage identity construction. The subcategories that emerged were *self-confidence and empowerment, embodying (and resisting) hyper-femininity*, and *emphasis on female intelligence.* The *external factors* consist of all contextual influences on the portrayal of teenage female identity. This includes the subcategories of *home, socioeconomic status, school, nightlife,* and *intimate spaces*. Finally, the *contradictions* category includes the dualities that emerged within, between and beyond the female characters, namely *the dichotomy of female (sexual) empowerment, the empowered sexual woman versus the prudish Muslim girl*, and *the duality of the hijab*.

5. Credibility and Reflexivity

Credibility of the research means that there is a reasonable and convincing connection between the interpretations and statements and can be established by means of reliability and validity. When the research is reliable, it means that there are no coincidental results, but evidence-based assertions. This is achieved by providing transparency about the research process and theoretical foundation of my study (Silverman, 2011). This is attained by thoroughly explaining the different steps of the methods used. Additionally, I have justified the sample's size and choice and how I gathered the required data.

Validity refers to "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Hammersly, 1990, in Silverman, 2011, pp. 367). This is achieved by ensuring that all relevant data are included in the analysis and by finding an appropriate theoretical structure, ensuring that the theoretical framework measures what it is supposed to measure (Boeije, 2010; Long & Johnson, 2000). To achieve validity, the feelings, knowledge and beliefs of the researcher must be taken into account. The connotation of texts depends on a shared map of meaning within a certain culture, in which people have the same ideologies, norms and values (Hall, 1997; Kang, 1997). It is therefore self evident that my position as researcher and my interpretations are dependent on my context and experiences (Gocsik et al., 2013). As Wodak states, a researcher is "not outside the societal hierarchy of power and status but subject to this structure" (2014, p. 305).

When researching the representation of female identity construction, the fact that I am a woman myself must be recognised as a factor that can influence my interpretations. Especially when analysed

from a postfeminist perspective and with the past and contemporary positioning of women in society, and my views on it as non-researcher, in mind. Moreover, although I no longer fit into the age category of adolescence, the phase of age and identity construction has not long passed. Therefore, it is likely that I will interpret or understand the representations of the female characters differently than researchers of an older age. However, this critical reflection on my own position as a young, female researcher will ensure transparency of the research (Wodak, 2014) and higher validity.

Finally, I acknowledge that the fact that the series is in Spanish, a language I do not speak, may be constraining my analysis. However, since Netflix offers high-quality English subtitles, the risk of missing important elements is minimized. Moreover, since the series has achieved great popularity on global scale and is consumed by a large non-Spanish speaking audience, I will analyze the text available to this global audience.

Results

This chapter elaborates on the representation of the identities of female characters Marina, Carla, Lucrecia, Nadia, Rebeca and Cayetana (information about these characters can be found in Table 1, Appendix A). First, the *internal factors* determining the representation of female teenage identity will be discussed. Subsequently, I will address the *external factors* that influenced the female teens' identity construction and the influence these had on (intersectional) power structures. Finally, the prominent *contradictions* within, between and beyond the teenage female characters are discussed to demonstrate the complexity of female teenage identity construction as entirety.

1. Internal Factors: Who Is the Teenage Girl?

1.1. Confidence and Empowerment

(1) Elite's Postfeminist Perspective. What immediately stands out is the portrayal of the teenage girl characters as strong, independent and very articulate about what they think or want. This is not to say that these characters are never portrayed as insecure or submissive, nor that this empowerment manifests itself in the same way in each character, but the series clearly seems to convey, both implicitly and explicitly, a postfeminist perspective from which the female teenage characters are represented. This is emphasised by small details, such as the teacher lecturing the students in class about feminism and women's rights, by having the teenage character Cayetana discreetly read Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, or by a dialogue between Carla and Rebeca:

> Rebeca: And what was it all for? For a guy. It's not your fault he's crazy about
> you. And then I say I'm a feminist. Fucking patriarchy (SS3/E8).

Rebeca, who is in love with the same boy as Carla, apologises to her after she has behaved jealously. By saying this, Rebeca ridicules the fact that she behaved in a mean and jealous way towards Carla for a boy and implicitly presents herself as a strong woman who does not need a man. Mentioning the patriarchy emphasises the gendered power structures that still dominate in our contemporary society (Pannekoek & Anderson, 2017).

Moreover, the traditional content of teen TV within Spanish discourse (and beyond) about girl characters being placed in passive positions and dependent on male characters is rejected (Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015). Instead, the girl characters are presented through the lens of postfeminist sensibility, in which *Elite's* teenage characters are characterised by their empowerment, hyper-

sexualisation, subjectification and own choice (Gill, 2007; Riley et al., 2017). This empowered position of the female teenage characters is emphasised another time, when all the girls go to a Valentine's party dressed in tuxedo's. In this particular scene, the series plays with gender roles and society's expectations of femininity (Lauzen et al., 2015). Lu, who organises this Valentine's party, says to her peers:

> Lucrecia: It's become a boring, cheesy, and old-fashioned tradition. The
> flowers, the chocolate, the colors… And we girls are objectified. We
> spend hours at the salon to look good for the guys. All that's over
> now. I had this great idea that the roles should be reversed this
> time (SS3/E4).

Besides creating awareness about girls' objectification and societal expectations of femininity, this particular scene also normalises being single and independent, rather than upholding society's expectation that girls need relationships and love (to be happy) (Aubrey et al., 2020).

Another unobtrusive detail that clarifies the empowerment of the teenage girls and the postfeminist perspective of the series can be seen during a scene where Lucrecia and Guzmán are arguing. Guzmán has lost himself in drinking, partying and drug use due to the loss of his sister Marina. Lu calls Guzmán to account for the umpteenth time, not only to help him, but also to indicate her own limits. The purple t-shirt Lu is wearing has the words: "Girls can do anything. And we know it":
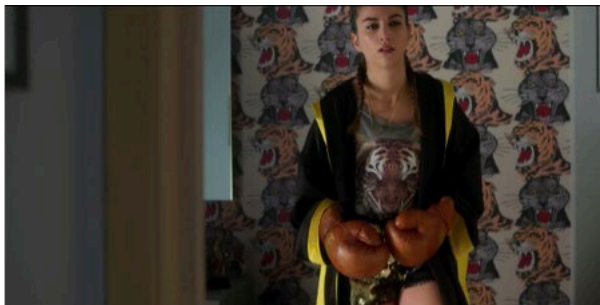

SS2/E3: Screenshot 12.1.

Lu is wearing a t-shirt with the words: "Girls Can Do Anything, and we know it"

This text embodies the meaning of Girl Power, as it underlines women's awareness of the powerful position they can hold and the celebration of this position. But, this also justifies Girl Power's
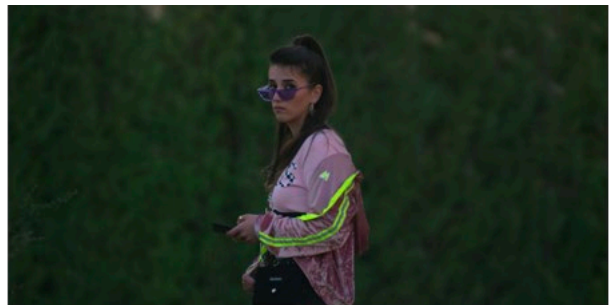
problematic aspect of consumerism as driving force (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010), as this T-shirt implicitly highlights the commercialisation and marketing of 'postfeminist girlhood' (Bullen et al., 2011) by extracting profits from female empowerment.

Lu, Carla, Marina and Rebeca all represent confident, strong young women, which is often emphasised by being filmed from a low angle to indicate their empowerment (Machin & Mayr, 2012), by the colour red they wear, their cool or sexy clothing and their confident body language. Rebeca and Marina's strength and self-assurance is portrayed clearly, through dialogue and behaviour. They behave in an indifferent and tough way, express what they want and do not care about what others might think of them. They do not let themselves be controlled by boy characters, nor do they feel threatened by other girl characters.

(2) Feminine Variety and Reversed Gender Roles. The empowerment and celebration of femininity is extended to the reversal and challenging of gender roles and norms that recurs throughout the series. As the shot below (1.2) illustrates, Rebeca engages in 'boyish' activities such as boxing and gaming, contrary to her counterpart Samuel, who has to learn boxing from Rebeca. The reversed gender roles are emphasised by small aspects in the series, such as Nano who irons, Omar who vacuums, Lu who insists on paying the restaurant bill and by Christian being sexually objectified by Carla, rather than the traditional female (sexual) objectification by men (Riley, 2019).

SS2/E2: Screenshot 1.2   SS2/E1: Screenshot 2.2

Although (most) of the female teenage characters in *Elite* are the embodiment of postfeminist hyper-femininity, the series also plays with society's expectations of female behaviour and expression of femininity. The series offers a variety in the representation of their female teenage characters and rejects a generalised image often perpetuated in the media about how women should look, behave and be (Lauzen et al., 2015). While Carla, Cayetana and Lucrecia embody hyper-femininity through short skirts, high heels and feminine colours and details, Rebeca and Marina are portrayed as outsiders and

different. Rebeca pays a lot of attention to her appearance, but it is the way she expresses herself that sets her apart from the stereotypical teenage girl. For example, when she and Nadia are not allowed to enter the club, she says to the guard of the club:

Rebeca: For fuck's sake, dude, I told you three times. Should I tell you in
another language? You're being so annoying. Are you letting us in
now or what? (SS2/E4).

This illustrates Rebeca's tough, vulgar and trashy character. She wears mostly sharp neon colours and black, large gold accessories, net tights and dark make-up, all emphasizing her tough personality. These accessories indicate that she is rich, but also distinguishes Rebeca from other rich girls. Rebeca's strong personality and self-confidence is emphasised by her pose in shot 1.2 and the tiger on both her t-shirt and the wall behind her. This representation of strength is reinforced by the wearing of boxing gloves and her body posture. Rebeca still reflects femininity by wearing make-up, accessories and the bright colour pink (screenshot 2.2), but she shows a different side of femininity than is normally shown in teen television (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). However, it must be noted that despite the different expression of femininity *Elite* represents, it is still only devoted to cis-gender, heterosexual and postfeminist Western girls (Butler, 2013; van Damme, 2010; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Nash & Grant, 2015).

1.2. Embodying (and Resisting) Hyper-Femininity

(1) The Importance of Looks and Appearance. All characters in *Elite* devote much attention to the way they dress or look, albeit all in completely different ways. Although this heavy emphasis on appearance of female characters in teen series is often seen as a stereotypical representation of femininity (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), in *Elite* it is precisely this that is used to indicate the postfeminist perspective and empowerment of the girl characters (Riley et al., 2017). Lu, Carla and Cayetana wear sexy clothes, high heels, have long hair, wear make-up and usually wear the colour red or pink. Red refers to the sexuality and empowerment of the characters (Elliot & Niesta, 2008), while bright pink emphasises their femininity and girl power (Koller, 2008).

Contrary to Rebeca's everyday tough outfits discussed in the section 1.1, in one scene Rebeca is dressed in a very feminine long yellow dress. It becomes clear that she only dressed so femininely to impress Samuel, the boy she is in love with. This emphasises society's expectations that girls should dress

femininely to be liked by boys (Gill, 2007; Riley, 2019). The series points out society's one-sided view of what femininity entails and normalises the possibility of multiple feminine expressions. For Nadia, looks and appearance do not seem very important at first. But over the course of the series, as she discovers more of who she is, her clothes and make-up reflect this changing identity and draw attention to her increasing empowerment. Whereas at the beginning of the series Nadia only wears skin-covering clothes with plain colours and childish prints, no make-up and no personal aspects at all, by the end of the series she is wearing bright red hijabs, make-up, more skin revealing and mature, feminine clothes. This reflects the transition from the traditional media representation of Muslim girls as deviating from the Western way of dressing (Karaman & Christian, 2020) to a more Westernised representation (Navarro, 2010).

(2) Girl Power Trough Consumerism. Physical appearance is strongly related to consumerism, a feature of postfeminist Girl Power (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). Although consumerism is a very important way of expressing female empowerment, sexuality and independence, the concern often expressed about Girl Power is the valuing of consumerism over political significance (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). This consumerism is linked to the portrayal of the female teenage characters in *Elite* as having no flaws or imperfections, as this indicates their remodelling of their appearance by buying new products (Gill, 2007). This consumerism through appearance is particularly evident in Lu, Carla and Cayetana through the purchase of new clothes and accessories:

> Lucrecia (to Carla):　　Sure. You wouldn't be worried about spilling anything on
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　you, wearing last year's dress (SS2/E3).

This not only draws attention to Lu and Carla's privileged and wealthy position, but also shows the importance of girls' appearance and the ignominy of wearing clothes that are not trendy or have already been worn once. The strong focus on appearance is further emphasised by the many shots in which the girls apply their make-up, look at themselves in the mirror, comment on other girls' outfits or when they buy new products. This consumerism is strongly interwoven with the female characters' socioeconomic position, which will be further elaborated in section 2.2. A good example of the link between consumerism, socioeconomic status and female empowerment is the storyline of Cayetana. Cayetana comes from a very poor family, but received a scholarship to study at the elite school Las Encinas. Cayetana is desperate for friends and belonging, so she pretends to be a rich girl:

Cayetana: When I activated mobile payments, I ended up killing

the battery at the Prada boutique in Goya. And then I had to hail a

cab in the street. That really was vintage (SS2/E3).

This remark by Cayetana emphasises the stereotypical assumption that girls are only concerned with activities such as grooming and shopping (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), and at the same time stresses the importance of consumerism and materialism to belong and make friends. This highlights the fact that adolescent girls are primarily valued by and popular among their peers for their appearance (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). However, when Polo buys a present for Carla to make up for a big mistake but Carla rejects it, the stereotypical assumption that girls only value materialism and consumerism is rejected.

    (3) Toxic Diet Culture and High Western Beauty Standards. In the 1990s, teen series were considered not realistic enough (Pasquier, 1996). Now, several years later, this unrealistic image of young femininity and teenage life still shines through in *Elite*. All female characters are skinny girls, with long hair, mature female shapes and smooth skin and are played by actresses who are much older than the age they should represent (see Table 1). This together perpetuates an unrealistic image of what young high school girls should look like and sets high standards of beauty as an example for its young female viewers. These high Western beauty standards are linked to consumerism and the value of appearance, and become visible, for example, when Lu tells Rebeca that when she frowns too much, she later needs Botox. This underlines the postfeminist importance of consumerism in remodelling female appearance (Gill, 2007).

    Societal expectations of female bodies and existing beauty standards of being slim and fit are emphasised through the many explicit and implicit references to toxic diet culture. A comment by Lu that she never eats breakfast indicates that she is conscious of what she eats and when Cayetana tries to decide what to choose from the vending machine at school, Lu says:

Lucrecia: Really? Those chips? If you're going to eat that many calories, at

least get something worthwhile (SS2/E2).

1.3. The Emphasis on Female Intelligence

Contrary to the stereotypical assumption that only teen girls' appearance is appreciated (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), *Elite* focuses on female intelligence, especially with the characters Lu, Cayetana and

Nadia. Nadia in particular is portrayed as very school-oriented and disciplined. Instead of partying, engaging in typically female activities such as shopping, or chasing boys (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), Nadia's only goal in life seems to be to get a scholarship to study at a university. In light of previous studies on media representations of Muslim girls, it can be argued that the representation of Muslim girl Nadia reinforces Western assumptions and the stereotypical image of Muslim girls as hard-working, disciplined and self-centred (Mirza & Metoo, 2018).

This focus on intelligence and school discipline of Nadia is emphasised by the fact that she is constantly studying, either at school or at home, always carrying books in her hands and striving to be the best in the class. When she introduces herself to the new class, she says:

Nadia: Hello. I'm Nadia. I'm 16. My family's from Palestine, but I was born

                here in Spain. And when I finish my studies, I'd like to be

                professional diplomat in the United Nations (SS1/E1).

This illustrates her ambitions for a successful career. Female intelligence is also emphasised in Lu's character, as she reads and expresses her knowledge of books, competes with Nadia to be top of the class, speaks several languages and has high ambitions for after graduation. This emphasis on female intelligence, especially in the case of Lu and Cayetana, contradicts their hyper-feminine representation and their appreciation of consumerism and materialism. However, it is precisely this duality that characterises postfeminist Girl Power and therefore continues to convey these norms of duality to its audience (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Riley et al., 2017).

2. External Factors: Female Identity Construction *and* Performance Through Space and Context

2.1. Home Sweet Home?

Family is one of the most recurrent themes in *Elite*, which is emphasised by the large proportion of the narrative that is about or within the home context. While this reliance of the female teenage characters on their parents for basic needs is not ignored (Eleuteri et al., 2017), it is mainly the negative influences that family has on their identity construction that are underlined in *Elite*.

(1) Expectations & Responsibility. What stands out in the course of the series are the high expectations that the family imposes on the way the teenage girl characters should be and act, and the high sense of responsibility that this engenders. These high family expectations clash with the female teen characters' freedom of identity construction and the way they want to be. Marina is, as explained,

different than the stereotypical 'girlie' girl (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012) and is dressed in cool clothes and accessories, such as leather jackets, clothes with studs and chokers. When Marina's mother insists on Marina to choose a long, feminine red dress for her coming-of-age party, Marina refuses to wear this as this hyper-femininity is not her style. When her brother intervenes with a sneer to Marina in the conversation, her mother continues:

Mother: Sweetheart. We want to celebrate you coming of age and to introduce you into society.

Marina: As a virginal young lady looking for a husband? (SS1/E1).

This points to the importance of the transition between childhood and adulthood within Spanish discourse on teenage (female) identity (Lacalle & Castro, 2018). Marina is portrayed by her parents to the outside world as innocent, unwitting young girl. In Spanish television, virginity appears to highly symbolize female innocence and childhood. As is explained later in this first episode, a coming-of-age party is a traditional festivity which celebrates female maturity and used to serve the purpose for young girls to find a husband (*Elite,* season 1, episode 1). Although nowadays such coming-of-age party mostly functions as a network opportunity, this conversation clarifies the still existing assumption and normalization that girls should find a man to marry. Marina's response to her mother is loaded with sarcasm, which refers to the fact that Marina is *not* a virgin anymore and is also *not* looking for man. This contrasts the girl that Marina really is with her family' expectations, while at the same time rejecting society's preconceptions of women's dependence on men.

This conflict of expectations between Marina's family and Marina herself is reinforced as she is the only one sitting on one side of the table, with her parents and brother in front of her. The ambiance and colors of the scene are cold, strengthening the distance that exist between the family members. Moreover, this expectational conflict is emphasized by Marina's outfit at her coming-of-age party: she wears a long white dress with a black leather jacket, large accessories and bright red lipstick. Her white outfit points to the innocent, feminine and pure girl she is expected to be (Wi & Choy, 2008), while her leather jacket and bright red lipstick point to her empowered and independent personality and her fierce temperament.

Contrary to Marina and Cayetana, Carla tries (at least in the beginning of the series) to fulfill her families' expectations and the responsibilities assigned to them. Carla is an only child, and the daughter of a Marchioness and a very successful businessman. Her parents have a high socioeconomic status and
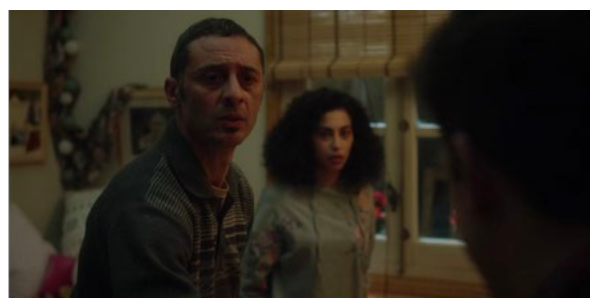
form, just like Marina's parents, the top of the Spanish elite class. She is expected to behave as a lady, to act mature (even though she is still only 16), to be with an affluent and successful boy, and to honorably preserve her family name. These high expectations lead to a high pressure from her parents, resulting in Carla obeying her parents' demands rather than speaking up for herself. This high sense of responsibility led Carla to do several things against her wish: she sacrifices her friends to secure her father's watch (which actually contains a USB stick with crucial, illegal business information), she covers up Marina's murder (committed by her ex-boyfriend Polo) and she dates a boy she doesn't want to be with.

(2) Oppression and Submissiveness. The high expectations of the home front and the associated high sense of responsibility are reflected in the fact that the girl characters Marina, Carla and Nadia feel oppressed and submissive by their family. This oppression and submissive position of the girl characters at home is most often indicated by high angle shots, through insecure body language and isolation in the frame, which position the female teen characters as vulnerable and powerless (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Barsam & Monahan, 2012).

The most apparent embodiment of oppression from parental authority is that of Muslim character Nadia. Nadia is portrayed as passive and does not dare to speak up towards her father about what she really wants (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018; Navarro, 2010). She is not allowed to go to the club, to drink alcohol or to date with (non-Muslim) boys. Although it is not that strange that parents still have authority over their sixteen year old daughter, it is the aggregation of events that points to the extreme control Nadia's parents have on her identity construction. She desperately wants to keep the peace in her family to that extent that she desires her brother to ignore his gay feelings, that she dates a Muslim boy only because her family will approve him and considers not to study at her dream university in New York to help her parents in their store. This oppressive position of Nadia at home is emphasized by Nadia being very often backgrounded and overlapped by other characters in the frame:

SS1/E2: Screenshot 8.2   SS1/E4: Screenshot 7.1
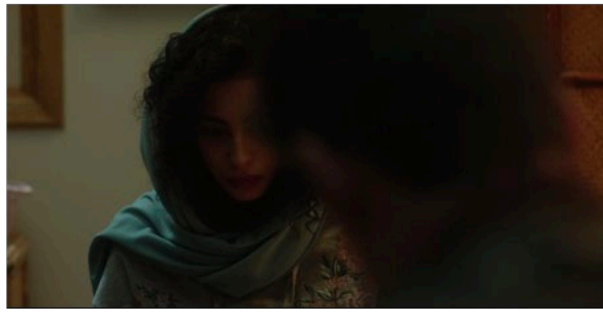
SS1/E4: Screenshot 7.3

In screenshot 8.2, Guzmán asks Nadia's father permission to work together on a school project. Nadia, who is filmed from a high angle and is backgrounded towards Guzmán, is in this way excluded from the conversation between her father and Guzmán. This, combined with Guzmán even asking for her father's permission, points to Nadia's powerless and submissive position. Screenshot 7.1 and 7.3 strengthen Nadia's oppressed position in her family as she is, again, backgrounded and overlapped by the male characters. Moreover, the moment Guzmán walked into their home, Nadia's father demanded her to put on her hijab, pointing to the control her father has and the fact that she is forced to wear the hijab, rather than her having agency to choose for herself (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018).

This simplistic and generalized image of Muslim femininity in *Elite* perfectly fits within the dominant (negative) discourse of Muslim racialization and Orientalism (Garner & Selod, 201; Holtzman & Sharp, 2013; Said, 1978). Furthermore, Nadia's representation preserves the hegemonic discourse of intersectional oppression and subordination of (young) Muslim women towards male authority and religious beliefs (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018; Navarro, 2010; Pannekoek & Anderson, 2017).

2.2. Socio-Economic Status as Issuance of Female Empowerment

This position from which the female characters act empowered is important, as not every girl character experiences the same agency and this is highly dependent on the context in which the girl character finds herself (Ahearn, 2012). Socio-economic status is highly connected to family context and school context. A driving aspect of the narrative is the fact Nadia, Rebeca and Cayetana, all of which have a low social and/or economic background, enter the elite school Las Encinas, at which the rich Carla, Lu and Marina are already students. This narrative aspect emphasizes the importance of socioeconomic status in the way different female teenage identities are constructed and expressed.

Marina, Lu and Carla all come from very wealthy families, from the elite class of the Spanish society, which leads directly to their own affluent position. This high socio-economic status is emphasised by their huge houses, their clothes, the elite school they attend and the way they (can) spend their money: Marina, Carla and Lu reflect the essence of Girl Power through consumerism (Butler, 2013; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010), which in turn enables their empowered behaviour. When Lu finds out she is not the top of the class anymore now that Nadia arrived at the school, she uses her (family's) socio-economic status to get what she wants. When she finds out that her teacher Martín and his wife will have to wait for years to adopt a child, she offers him a deal to arrange this adoption free of charge and very fast, on the condition that he continues to give Lu the highest marks of the class:

> Lucrecia: My father has excellent contacts in Mexico. A couple of phone calls,
> and you could have a beautiful child. Faster than you can have a
> pizza at your door. Color and size of your choice (SS1/E4).

Not only does this reflect the sneaky, competitive nature of Lu (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), it most of all implicitly shows her empowerment made possible by the socio-economic status of her family and the class difference between her, her teacher and Nadia. Another example when the socio-economic context acts in the favor of a female character's empowerment, is when Carla buys clothes for Christian to manipulate him. Carla's socio-economic status as insurance of her empowered position is emphasized by Samuel:

> Samuel: They wouldn't have believed most girls. But your word is not worth
> the same as the others. You're rich, the daughter of a marchioness
> (SS2/E6).

This supports previous studies that indicated that female (postfeminist) empowerment is today still mostly specified to white, heterosexual and upper-class girls, who fulfill the Western beauty ideals and expectations of young womanhood and who find themselves in a privileged position to act empowered (Butler, 2013; van Damme, 2010; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Nash & Grant, 2015). Cayetana and Nadia, on the contrary, do not possess over this privileged position. Cayetana comes from a poor family, is the daughter of the elite school's cleaning lady, and pretends to be rich to be liked by the other students.

When Cayetana's mother frustratedly says that Cayetana is faking her whole life, Cayetana replies:

> Cayetana: This is what I am… Yes! Do you think they would accept me into their circle, that I could be their friend, if they knew I was the cleaner's daughter? (SS2/E3).

This does not only show the importance of friends in teenage life and the fact that teenagers distance themselves from their families during adolescence (Eleuteri et al., 2017), it also reflects the assumption that social status and affluence is something to strive for and points to the classification of different socio-economic layers in society.

2.3. In The School Hallways: To Prove and Be Approved

During the coming-of-age phase in life, teenagers are looking for support in and connection with their peers and friends (Eleuteri et al., 2017) and are trying to find out to which group they belong (Ellithorpe & Bleakly, 2016). Also in *Elite* this search for group affiliation, friendship and belonging is a main theme, of which school functions as an important space. As mentioned, Cayetana comes from a poor family and pretends towards the other students that she is rich. She makes her own clothes, steals expensive dresses from the house she works as cleaning lady, pretends she lives in a huge house all by herself and fakes on Instagram that she travelled the world. She acts dumb and unwitting, copies the mean behavior of Lu and Carla towards other girls, and creates a superficial fake personality, all to prove herself and to be approved by her peers. During another fight with her mother, she says:

> Cayetana: Mom, please! Don't ruin everything. For the first time, I'm starting to feel part of something. I have friends. And someone that could be more than a friend (SS2/E4).

On the contrary is Rebeca, who does not seem to care much about making friends. When Rebeca's mother invited everyone to a party at her place, Rebeca says:

> Rebeca: It has nothing to do with me. The last thing I want is to make them aware that I exist. It was my mother attempting to get me to make friends (SS2/E5).

However, although in the beginning of the series, not all main characters seem to get along that well, nearing the end of the series they have become closer and sticking up for each other in difficult times. For example, the former friends and enemies are cooperating to prevent Rebeca from being expelled and to cover for Lu having murdered Polo, both highlighting the importance of loyal friendship.

(1) The Sexualization of Female Intelligence. At some point in the series, Cayetana is reading *The Second Sex* from Simone de Beauvoir. By this, the series' makers implicitly indicate Cayetana's interest in feminism and awareness of the gendered power structures in society. Cayetana is wearing reading glasses and is concentrated while reading the book. This focus on her intelligence and the feminist book she is reading together reject the stereotypical portrayal of girls who only spend attention to their looks (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012) and support the Girl Power's strive to highlight women's characteristics beyond their appearance (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010).

However, the rest of the scene strongly contradicts this. Valerio, Lu's half-brother, takes a seat next to the reading Cayetana:

Valerio:	There is nothing more attractive than a woman reading.
Lu:	She is not reading, she is posing.
	[…]
Cayetana:	You're reading *The Second Sex*?
Valerio:	Well, actually, I prefer doing it. And if it's with a feminist, it's a whole new level (SS2/E2).

Although Cayetana is portrayed as a clever subject, Valerio's comment about the attractiveness of women who read sexualizes Cayetana and her intelligence. A little later in the conversation, Valerio makes a flirty joke/comment about preferring to have sex, rather than reading about it (emphasizing his lack of knowledge regarding the real content of the book). Although it could be assumed that the makers of the series added these feminist components on purpose, Cayetana's intelligence is overshadowed and suppressed by being sexualized by Valerio. Moreover, although Cayetana's intelligence is emphasized at one point, the other moment she is flattered by and accepts Valerio's sexualizing comments.

(2) Survival of the 'Smartest': Competition Between (Intelligent) Girls. Another interesting comment in this scene described above is that of Lu, who viciously claims that Cayetana performs to be the intelligent girl who likes to read. This not only undermines the possibility that Cayetana actually likes

reading, it also points to Lu's jealousy. This supports existing research that has indicated the common stereotypical representation of girl characters in teen series being mean and competitive towards other girls (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). This competitive drive by Lu is noticeable throughout the season. Especially towards Nadia, Lu expresses her competition by being mean, making racist comments and shutting her out.

The competition between girls is mainly aimed at, but not limited to, their intelligence, but also implies jealousy towards other girls and over boys. Lu pretends to be better than other girls, behaves possessively towards Guzmán and tries to lecture (and judges) Carla about her sex life. In the latter case, Lu taunts Carla for having sex with several boys (at the same time):

| Carla: | I have better things to do than spend the day thinking about what clothes I'm going to wear. |
| Lucrecia: | Instead, you think about the clothes you're going to take off the next lowlife you want to fuck, right? (SS2/E3) |

This example shows that Lu is not only portrayed as strong, independent and articulate, but also stereotyped by portraying her as mean, superficial and sneaky (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). In response to Lu's competitive behaviour, Nadia slowly changes in the same direction as her over the course of the series. When Nadia turns out not to be top of the class, she blackmails Lu by threatening to tell everyone about Lu's secret affair with her half-brother Valerio. At the very end of the season, Lu and Nadia make it up to each other and even become friends, with which the series seems to reject the stereotypical portrayal of teenage girls as mean and competitive and conveys the togetherness and support that women can offer each other.

2.4. Teen Nightlife: Ultimate Freedom and Shifting Boundaries

The female teenage characters seem to be able to completely let go of all their boundaries when they are out partying. Carla sleeps with Christian, Rebeca chases boys, Marina finally feels free to behave the way she wants to, and Cayetana can pretend to be the high-class girl she wants to be. Thus, the teenagers' nightlife is very important in their identity formation. This is emphasised when Nadia tells Christian and Samuel about the rules of the elite school:

| Samuel (to Nadia): | What else is against the rules? |

Nadia:	Drinking, smoking on the ground, doing drugs.
Christian:	They don't allow anything cool?
Nadia:	Depends on what you think is cool. (SS1/E1)

(1) The Westernization of the Strict Muslim Girl. Nadia is portrayed as the complete opposite of her wild classmates. During the beginning of the series, Nadia is very loyal to her religion and her parents' rules: she does not consume alcohol, she is not allowed to attend parties and does not have the urge to copy the behavior of her classmates. This became clear in the quote in the subsection above, where Nadia expresses her disgrace towards partying and drinking alcohol. Nadia's reserved and immature portrayal is emphasised and reinforced by her skin-covering and unobtrusive clothing, which is usually very childlike with its floral prints and soft or dull colours (such as pink). While bright pink, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, often indicates femininity and girl power, light pink is more associated with softness and girlishness (Koller, 2008).

However, from a certain point in the series, Nadia begins to be attracted to the idea of going to clubs and parties. But although Nadia starts going out, while lying to her parents about it, she is still portrayed as the inexperienced, reserved girl who finds herself in a situation that is completely new to her:

Nadia:	And a little smashed. Or at least I think so. This is what smashed
	means, right? (SS3/E3)

Another example of Nadia being uncomfortable and isolated from her peers is at the coming-of-age party of Marina. The shot below (screenshot 23) shows Nadia's insecure and closed-off body language, as she stand with her arms over each other. Moreover, she is backgrounded and overlapped by her dancing classmates, which isolates her from the rest. Her clothes are skin-covering, although the bright red hijab pops out of the frame. This color red could point in this context, with the rest of the series in mind, to the curiosity, passion and power that is hidden behind the wall she build around herself (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). The fact that it is the hijab that is red, sets this empowered meaning of the colour red against the traditional media representation of Muslim girls as oppressed and powerless (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Navarro, 2010). This highlights the inner struggle Nadia experiences in being loyal to her religion on the one hand and discovering her true female identity on the other.

SS1/E1: Screenshot 23

The development of Nadia's character in nightlife could be seen as Westernisation, as she increasingly adapts to the behaviour of the other Western teenage girls and begins to cross her (family's) strict boundaries (Navarro, 2010). This is highlighted in a heated conversation between Nadia's father and the school headmaster, who asks Nadia's father to let her stay in school:

Yusef: Yes. She has learned to disrespect her parents. To lie,

               to sneak out of her house. To neglect her religious duties.

Azucena: That's normal for a teenager. They all rebel at that age (SS1/E7).

At the beginning of the series, Nadia constantly keeps Guzmán at distance and tries to ignore the feelings she has for him. When she's at the club, however, it seems like nothing is holding her back anymore. Under Rebeca's influence, Nadia takes off her hijab in the club and instantly changes into a sexually confident woman and starts flirting with Guzmán. She becomes more aware of her femininity and sexuality, which is emphasised by her beginning to wear make-up, dressing in a more mature and skin-revealing way and wearing the colour red. A similar example is the scene where Nadia seduces Guzmán at the pool in his house, after they had been at a party at Samuel's place. At this party, Nadia has been drugged and therefore does not behave as she normally would. As Nadia swims underwater, her light pink hijab falls off and sinks to the bottom of the pool. The camera zooming in on her hijab emphasises the fact that Nadia is not wearing her hijab while seducing Guzmán and suggests that only without the hijab is she able to let go of her boundaries.

SS1/E3: Screenshot 14.2   SS1/E3: Screenshot 14.4

This transition from the submissive Muslim girl to the Westernised empowered woman exactly covers the two dominant stereotypical portrayals of Muslim femininity in Western media (Navarro, 2010), thus contributing to the maintenance of hegemonic power relations between the West and Orient (Poole, 2019). By making her only act entirely free when she drinks alcohol, takes off her hijab, goes to parties, lies to her parents, distances herself from her religion and goes on dates with the boy her parents would never approve of, the ultimate experience of (postfeminist) freedom, agency and empowerment is equated and reduced to a Western perspective. Apart from this internal struggle between loyalty to her religion and family or expressing her true self, the question remains whether Nadia is actually wearing her hijab out of freedom or oppression. This duality is further explored in section 3.3.

2.5 Spaces of Love & Intimacy.

The sexual representations and content in *Elite* are partly in line with previous studies that pointed to the increasing attention to sex in teen series (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; 2013). However, whereas a decade ago teen series only referred to sexual intercourse in conversations between characters and was limited to portraying hugging and kissing (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014), in *Elite* sexual intercourse is shown very explicitly, to the extent that women's naked bodies, breasts and the sexual act are on full display (Eyal et al., 2007; Kunkel et al., 1999). This explicit portrayal of sex is related to both implicit and explicit educational messages conveyed to the audience. Through dialogue and camera work, for example, the importance of using contraceptives is emphasised. At a party, Rebeca says to her peers:

> Rebeca: Okay, guys, drinks, ice and food over there. Coats, condoms and
>   vices over here (SS2/E5).

Moreover, the series explicitly highlights possible negative sexual consequences. Marina, at the age of 14, is infected with HIV by her erstwhile boyfriend Pablo. This reinforces the assumption of sexual activity at a young age, but also creates awareness of the possible (negative) consequences of sexual intercourse (Aubrey, 2004). Not only does this break with the lack of portrayal of STIs in older teen series, it also points to the taboo surrounding HIV in our contemporary society. This is highlighted in an argument Marina has with her parents, where she tells them that her boyfriend Samuel knows she has HIV:

Marina: He knows, mom. And he doesn't care. He doesn't care how I got
            infected. Or who I did it with. Or what stupid things I've done.
            He doesn't look at me as if I had the plague. The way you do
            (SS1/E4).

Marina is a white, young and affluent girl who is infected after voluntarily having sex with her former boyfriend. This normalises HIV as an infection that anyone can contract, rather than sticking to the traditional and generalised depiction that the risk depends on a person's gender, sexuality or economic status (Earnshaw et al., 2021). At the same time, the seriousness of the infection is not ignored or undermined, as the series also points to treatment of and living with the infection.

Lastly, although homosexuality of the male teen characters in *Elite* is in full focus, female teen sexuality is only divided to heterosexual women and couples. Besides the presence of Polo's lesbian mothers, there is only one sentence during the entire series that point to the possibility of the teen main characters having different sexual orientation than the global heteronormative assumption that still dominates teen series (van Damme, 2010; Masanet et al., 2019):

Rebeca: Well… I mean, it's something, but it's not… I think that… sometimes,
            some girls turn me on, too (SS3/E2).

The hesitation in her voice and the stumbling over her words gives the impression that it is not easy to admit these thoughts. Moreover, this significant lower amount of attention that is paid to female teenage homo- or bisexuality is supplied by the sexualization of lesbians, during a conversation between Christian and Polo:

Christian (to Polo):   Your parents … are — are mothers. They are … two mothers.

Which is totally fine by me. I love lesbians. I could say I'm a

fan. I never miss any of their movies (SS1/E4).

Christian's surprised remark about Polo's mothers not only indicates that heterosexuality is the norm, by 'their films' he also refers to lesbian pornography. In doing so, he undermines the romantic relationship potential a lesbian couple might have and objectifies their intimacy as a tool to fulfill his own desires (Choi & DeLong, 2019; Aubrey et al., 2020).

   (1) Female Sexual Empowerment. Although studies of female sexuality in teen series emphasise the problematic recurrence of the so-called "double standard" (Aubrey, 2004. p. 506), it is rather the rejection of this double standard that stands out in *Elite'*s representation of female teenage sexuality. Contrary to traditional representations of girls as sexually passive, innocent and submissive to male characters, Marina, Carla, Lu, Cayetana and Rebeca are portrayed as sexually empowered women. This female empowerment is manifested in the series through physical aspects, such as the "hyper-feminine" way they dress (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014, p. 42) and the sexual confidence they radiate.

   What is striking is the colour red that recurs throughout the series. In the shot below we see Lu standing in a red short dress with a low-cut neckline, long wavy hair and bright make-up. The red of her dress and lipstick, combined with her outfit, emphasises her feminine body and sexuality (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). Valerio and Guzmán stand, out of focus, behind Lu, pointing out her dominant position in relation to the boys. The dim and warm colours of the surroundings reinforce the sense of sensuality and passion.

SS2/E3: Screenshot 16.2

Instead of passively waiting to be chased by boy characters (Aubrey, 2004), the female teen characters are the ones who take the initiative to have sex. This is emphasised, for example, when Lu takes off her

clothes to seduce Guzmán at the pool. Also, after Carla seduces Christian at Marina's coming-of-age party to go upstairs with her, she says:

> Carla: We have 15 minutes before they realize I'm not there. Are you
> taking your clothes off?? That comes off, too. But slowly, so I can
> see you (SS1/E1).

Carla, Lu, Marina and Rebeca are very aware of the sexual power they have over boys and the way they can use their bodies to manipulate and achieve their goals (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). Carla in particular uses her body, sexuality and femininity to get what she wants or to save herself from difficult situations. This sexually active, desirable and knowing representation of the teenage girl characters means they can be considered as ultimate manifestations of postfeminist sexual empowerment (Gill, 2007). Moreover, whenever sex is explicitly shown, the boys go down on the girl characters, rather than the girls being submissive to provide the boy characters' pleasure. This is accompanied by the girl characters being clear and confident about their sexual desires, which puts the emphasis on women's pleasure:

> Rebeca: I'd be happy with sleeping in each other's arms, all romantic. Or just
> you fingering me and getting me off would work. Do you have a
> place we could go? (SS3/E1).

Although teen girls are often represented in teen TV as desperately looking for love and valuing romance over sex (Aubrey, 2004), in *Elite* these gender norms are turned. Rather, the girl characters wear sexy clothes for themselves, they convey their boundaries and they have sex with who they want to (outside committed relationships), all for their own pleasure or good (Choi & DeLong, 2019).

(2) *Experimenting with Sex.* The female teenage characters in *Elite* are experimenting with their sexuality and consider sex to be fun and risk-free, which is in line with previous research (Aubrey, 2004; Aubrey et al., 2020; van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012). It is, however, the addition of female empowerment that sheds new light on this, by placing the girl characters in charge of the sexual games that are played. The female teen characters experimenting with sex is emphasized by multiple events throughout the series, such as Lu's desire to have sex at public places (such as the shower at school) and Carla and Cayetana having threesomes.

This depiction of the girl characters experimenting with sex and considering it as a game is strongly linked to female empowerment and contradicts the traditional representation of teenage female characters as passive, innocent and sexually vulnerable (Aubrey, 2004). Lu, for example, manages to seduce Guzmán to make a bet about sleeping with Nadia, who embodies the representation of the prudish, aloof Muslim girl:

Lucrecia: Oh sweetie, the idea of making a virginal Muslim girl fall for you doesn't turn you on? Come on, you seduce her, she falls for you, everyone finds out … That's it! […] Not even if I ask you? Then I'll let you do whatever you want with me.

Guzman: But I already do whatever I want with you.

Lucrecia: Not even half of it (SS1/E1).

Although Guzmán pretends to be in control over Lu, Lu is actually the one who places herself in an empowered position. Being clear about their sexual desires results in the sexual self-subjectifcation of the girl characters (Choi & DeLong, 2019).

3. The Many Contradictions of Female Teenage Identity

3.1. The Dichotomy of (Sexual) Female Empowerment

(1) (Sexual) Self-Subjectification vs. (Sexual) Objectification. The female sexual empowerment elaborated above has a thin line that differentiates sexual self-subjectification, sexual objectification and sexual self-objectification. The overarching representation of female teen sexuality is that of the empowered and confident sexual woman. However, in the course of the series, the female teenage characters are also often sexually objectified by male teenage characters. This is reflected, for example, in the dialogues between the male teenage characters, in which they assume that the girls are male property:

Guzmán: Because he's stealing her right in front of you, don't you see?

[…]

Polo: Guzmán, it's arranged. She's hooking up with him because I want her to. It's a game, okay? (SS1/E2).

Moreover, the series also contains several moments of sexual self-objectification, especially by Carla. This happens in the first season, when Carla seduces Christian into having sex with her. Polo and Carla are trying to spice up their relationship and have devised a game to manifest their sexual fantasies, which in Polo's case involves watching his girlfriend have sex with Christian. Although it is ultimately Carla who is in control of Polo and Christian and wants to continue their sex game, it is initially doubtful whether Carla wanted to have sex with Christian. This is emphasised by Carla's sorrowful facial expressions and high angle shots, which portray her as vulnerable. In the second season, a similar situation occurs in Carla's storyline. To cover up the fact that Polo killed Marina, Carla has sex with Samuel to distract him from finding out. In an argument with Polo, she says:

Carla (to Polo):	I'm doing it for you! Samuel suspects both of us. I'm with him to keep him under control.
Polo:	Sure. Like with Christian, right? You're pretty good at that, grabbing guys by the dick as if it were a joystick to control them.
Carla:	Do you think I like it? You think it makes me happy? (SS2/E3).

Carla clearly viewed her sexuality and sexual power through a male perspective and assumed her body as a sexual object, rather than having sex for her own pleasure (Choi & DeLong, 2019). In the final season, the same situation occurs *again*. This time, as elaborated in section 2.1, Carla has a relationship and sex with a boy she does not like, just to save her family and their business.

   (2) Victims of the Toxic Masculinity. Although the female teenage characters are not necessarily looking for committed relationships, the whole story ultimately seems to revolve around finding love and affirmation from the boys they like. This is emphasised by Lu, who pursues Guzmán throughout the series and tries to convince him to stay together. Cayetana is also very dependent on her boyfriend Polo. She wants to go to the same university as him, they do everything together and she even helps him cover up Marina's murder. Although Nadia makes her boundaries clear to Guzmán and is very clear about the fact that she does not want a relationship with him, Guzmán does not accept or respect her answer of no. Throughout the series, Guzmán tries to win Nadia over, as a kind of hard-to-get challenge. In this way, it is assumed that girls want to be chased, even if they express themselves clearly. In the end, even after the very bad way Guzmán treated Nadia, she wants to be with him. This is one of the few moments

where the "double standard" (Aubrey, 2004, p. 506) is confirmed. It illustrates the dominant power of men over women and the stereotypical representation of girls who need to be saved by men and want to be chased.

(3) *Scapegoats of Sexual Intercourse.* Although much attention is paid to the positive consequences and pleasure of sexual intimacy and female sexual control (see section 2.5), the analysis also pointed to the fact that the female teenage characters are usually the ones who bear the negative consequences of it. For example, when Guzmán and Nadia have sex in the locker room at school, the male character Valerio films them while Lu eventually distributes the video to all students at the school. Nadia is laughed at and stared at at school, feels very ashamed, and worse, her application for her dream university is rejected because of the video. She quickly changes from empowered young woman into a vulnerable and insecure girl again. While Nadia suffers physical, emotional and social consequences, Guzmán is not portrayed as feeling shame over the video's spread, nor does he experience any negative consequences. The link between the girl as initiator of sex and the experience of negative consequences of the female teen characters in *Elite* is in line with previous research on consequences of sexual intercourse in teen series (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014).

Moreover, Marina became infected with HIV and also became pregnant by Nano, with whom she was cheating while dating his brother Samuel. Although the series breaks the taboo of talking about HIV by bringing it up in the series and dedicating it to a young, white, heterosexual and wealthy girl, it is the sum of these negative consequences experienced by the female characters that makes it problematic. However, Nano takes responsibility for the pregnancy and by addressing these consequences, the series offers a good form of sexual health education by emphasising the risks of having sex.

3.2. The Empowered Sexual Woman vs. The Prudish Muslim Girl

Another striking contrast is that between the sexually mature characters, such as Lu, Marina and Carla, and the inexperienced Nadia. Nadia is portrayed as the prudish Muslim girl, who has no sexual experience and prefers to distance herself from it rather than be open to it. This prudery and detachment from sexual experiences is motivated by her strong allegiance to her religious values and the strict rules of her parents. Nadia's sexual innocence is reflected in her insecure and reserved body language, her light or white-colored hijabs that indicate innocence and purity (Wi & Choy, 2008), and her reactions to her peers' sexual encounters. For example, when Marina tells the class that she has HIV, Nadia reacts with shocked, unsupportive and uncompassionate.

Her prudery is emphasised by her refusal to take pictures of Guzmán's half-naked body and her quick turn around when Guzmán changes clothes (screenshot 14.3). This sexual inexperience is also noticed by others, as becomes clear during a conversation between Nadia and Valerio:

Nadia:	What makes you think I would tell you anything about my sex life?
Valerio:	I'm taking an interest. And I get the impression that that doesn't happen to you much.
Nadia:	I'm not a prude. I simply want to do it with someone I'm in love with (SS2/E3).

This conversation shows that Nadia values love, romance and commitment over meaningless sex, which is in line with the stereotypical depiction of teenage girls in teen series (Aubrey, 2004), while for Lu, Marina, Rebeca and Carla it is rather the opposite. However, over the course of the series, Nadia begins to experiment more with sex and to open up about her sexual desires.
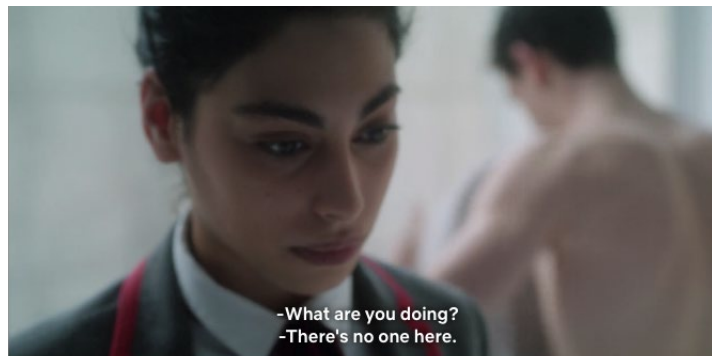
SS1/E2: Screenshot 14.3

3.3. (Not) Wearing a Hijab: An Act of Free Choice or Submissiveness?

Finally, there is a strong contrast between the 'modern', progressive Western world and the old-fashioned, conservative Orient (Poole, 2019; Said, 1978). The series seems to reject the hegemonic power structures between the West and the Orient by including very explicit and exaggerated Islamophobic remarks. Nadia is referred to or approached, mostly by Lu, with stereotypical, racist nicknames, such as 'fundamentalist', 'exotic location' or 'Taliban girl'. However, the series does not draw any consequences from such racist comments and Othering. In a scene where Nadia is standing in the club queue with Samuel and Rebeca, for example, Nadia is been laughed at by other girls for wearing her hijab (see screenshot 14.1). Nadia lets this happen to her, rather than standing up for herself, nor do her

friends back her up. By this, the series conveys that Islamophobia and 'othering' are just there and normalises this racist behaviour as being part of society.

SS1/E1: Screenshot 14.1

One of the most characteristic dualities within this perpetuation of Orientalism is Nadia's hijab, which is already slightly touched upon in sections 2.1 and 2.4. Within Western media, the hijab often embodies the oppression and subordination of Muslim women and is seen as being worn out of obligation. *Elite* seems to emphasise and reject this stereotypical representation, by explicitly referring to Nadia wearing the hijab out of free choice, although her peers do not believe so. This is emphasised when Nadia hears that she is not allowed to wear the hijab at school:

Principal: Per our rules, no accessories are allowed.

Nadia: My hijab is not an accessory. Besides, everyone has things around here. Expensive bags, gold watches.

Principal: Those are ornamental. They don't mean anything (SS1/E1).
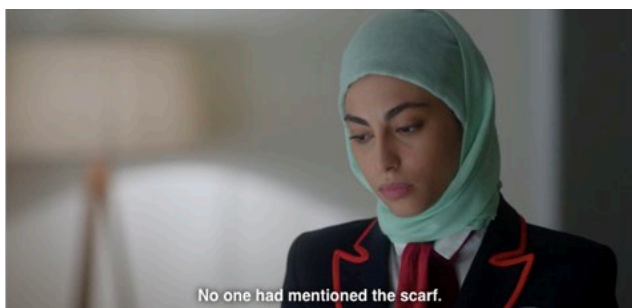
SS1/E1: Screenshot 6.2
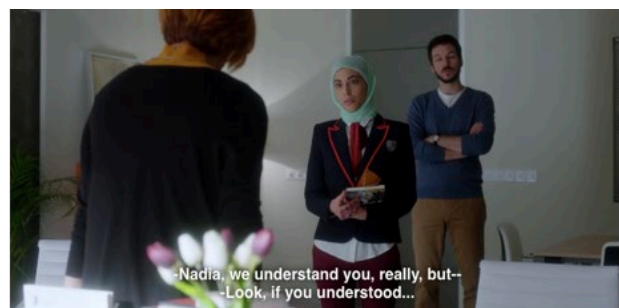
SS1/E1: Screenshot 6.3

The repetition of the complexity of the hijab within the different contexts elaborated in this chapter, such as nightlife, family and school, emphasises that Nadia's oppression comes from several sides and reinforces the traditional, stereotypical assumptions about Muslim femininity that still dominate Western media.

Although in the beginning Nadia clearly wears the hijab out of free choice and faith, towards the end of the series there are several events that subtly indicate that Nadia is forced to wear the hijab, for example when Nadia's father forces her to put on her hijab when Guzman enters their home (as elaborated in section 2.1). Another event is when Nadia takes off her hijab in the club as a 'free pass', implying that Nadia would rather not wear it and feels enlightened when she takes it off. Moreover, on the back of Nadia's jacket, in the scene where she is standing with Rebeca and Samuel in the club queue, are the words "I want more". These words implicitly suggest Nadia's submissive position towards her family and religion and the contradiction between who she actually wants to be. This contradiction is highlighted by the color green of her hijab, a holy color within the Islam (al-Domi, 2015) and therefore pointing to Nadia's loyalty to her religion on the one hand, while actually seeking to explore her own identity on the other.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although media representations are not necessarily the truth, they can be considered a reflection of the contemporary ideological hegemony and gender discourses that exist within society (Hall, 1997; Poole, 2019). Therefore, examining female representations in teen series reveals much about how young women are perceived and positioned in society today (Poole, 2019). Postfeminist waves are increasingly influencing society and the positioning of women therein, but the dominant presence of (negative) female teenage stereotypes within popular culture is still a cause for concern (Berridge, 2013; van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015).

The aim of this study was to answer the following research question: *How does the recent popular global coming-of-age teen series Elite (2018-) negotiate (non-)traditional representations of female teen identity construction?* By conducting a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012) of all 24 episodes of *Elite*, I conclude that the results indicate a promising representation of the non-traditional, postfeminist (sexually) empowered young woman, while at the same time the longstanding battle against gender stereotyping has not yet been fully overcome. This study sheds light on the complexities of female teenage identity construction and gendered power relations within our contemporary society.

To recognise these traditional and non-traditional representations of female teenage identity, this study was conducted from a postfeminist perspective (Gill, 2007; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). Because one of the characters in the series is a Muslim girl, the concepts of intersectionality and Orientalism were added as crucial foundation for examining the construction of female teen identity in *Elite* as entirety (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Poole, 2019; Said, 1978). This theoretical underpinning proved to be very appropriate to juxtapose traditional representations with non-traditional ones.

1. Main Results

The female teenage identity construction in *Elite* is in greatest extent in line with the most important themes of teen series, namely experimenting with sex and sexuality, the importance of love and friendship, partying and distancing from parental authority (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012; 2013). *Elite*'s female teenagers' representations largely reject traditional stereotypes relating to their (romantic and sexual) relationship with the opposite sex (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012), while fitting in perfectly with more recent postfeminist representations and celebration of young femininity, such as consumerism and self-subjectification (Berridge, 2013; Butler, 2013; Jackson & Westrupp). However, this series is pioneering in showing sex explicitly on screen and in educating on topics such as HIV, pregnancy,

abortion, revenge porn, and the use of contraceptives, which are usually underexposed or ignored (ter Bogt et al., 2010; van Damme, 2010; Ortiz & Brooks, 2014). Below, I elaborate on the most evident findings regarding the representation of female teenage identity construction.

(1) The Empowered (Sexual) Female Subject. Above all, *Elite* presents a postfeminist image of young femininity. This postfeminist stance is evident in small implicit and explicit references to postfeminism, but also in the recurring reversal of gender roles and in the depiction of the female teenage characters as strong, confident and dominant women. This female empowerment is emphasised by the female characters' statements about their sexual desires, their dominance in both sexual and romantic relationships, the emphasis on female intelligence, their valuing of sex over committed relationships, hyper-femininity and confident body language. Thus, it can be argued that *Elite* rejects the "double standard" (Aubrey, 2004, p. 1135), both within global and Spanish context (Masanet et al., 2019), and reproduces postfeminist representations of young womanhood (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013; Riley et al., 2017).

The series moves beyond the pigeonholing of teenage girls by illustrating different manifestations and expressions of femininity and female empowerment. Although the hyper-feminine representation of female teen characters in *Elite* is often considered stereotypical, it is precisely this that constitutes the main expression of teenage female emancipation (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2013). At the same time, this physical representation perpetuate and reinforce high Western beauty standards and unrealistic expectations of femininity (Pasquier, 1996). Moreover, one must ignore that the hyper-feminine, empowered representation of *Elite*'s female characters reinforce the concern of postfeminist empowerment being limited to heterosexual, attractive and cis-gender girls only (Butler, 2013; van Damme, 2010; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Nash & Grant, 2015).

(2) The Importance of Context and Space. This study revealed the importance of space and context on both the construction and expression of teenage female identity. The most important contexts were those of *family*, *school*, *socioeconomic status*, *nightlife* and *intimate spaces*. These contexts proved to be crucial for the expression of female empowerment, but also of submissiveness and vulnerability. Within home context, high pressure, expectations and submissiveness were found to be dominant and to result in the female teenagers' distancing from their families. At school, the non-traditional representation of female characters' intelligence (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010) blossomed, but at the same time, so did their stereotypical competitive nature and urge to be approved by their peers (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012).

The socioeconomic status of the characters resulted in a power imbalance, privileging some female characters over others and emphasizing intersectional oppression. This socioeconomic status was found to be highly determinant for the extent to which female empowerment and agency could be expressed and demonstrated that postfeminism is only dedicated to affluent, white girls (Nash & Grant, 2015; van Damme, 2010; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). The context of nightlife and spaces of intimacy were the most prominent spaces where female postfeminist empowerment flourished, where the female characters were able to push their boundaries and express their female sexuality, while at the same time the complexity of self-subjectification and (self-)objectification (van Damme & van Bauwel, 2012) shines through.

(3) *Dualities and Inconspicuous Stereotypes.* The importance of context and space within the representation of teenage female identity construction is related to the many dichotomies that exist between traditional (stereotypical) and non-traditional representations of young femininity. To name a few, the stereotypical emphasis in *Elite* on appearance and consumerism sharply contrasts with intelligence and ambitions to study after high school. Moreover, the sexual empowerment of all female characters (except Nadia) exists in duality with the stereotypical portrayal of teenage girls carrying the negative consequences of sex and intimacy (Ortiz & Brooks, 2014; Lacalle & Castro, 2018). Despite the female teenage characters clarifying their boundaries and do not seem to desire committed relationships, it is still assumed that they want to be chased and rescued by men and are therefore still undermined by toxic masculinity and male dominance (Aubrey, 2004).

Given these internal and external contradictions, the representation of young femininity seems to be in line with previous research that pointed to the duality and coexistence of traditional and non-traditional elements in teen TV (Berridge, 2013). But, many of the stereotypes and power structures seem to be incorporated in the series on purpose by the makers, given their exaggerated presence. Thus, *Elite* seems to create awareness about contemporary power structures and the position of women in society, by ridiculing and overemphasizing it. But despite such exaggerated stereotypes, the presence of less obvious stereotypes, which are overshadowed by the overarching post-feminist theme of the series, could be seen as worrying in its implicit normalisation of gender behaviour and power relations.

(4) *The Failed Intersectional Approach.* Although the overall message of the series is one of female empowerment and the rejection of traditional gender norms, there is still much to be gained in terms of inclusivity and intersectionality. Nadia's character and her identity construction embody the stereotypical representation of Muslim femininity within Western popular culture (Navarro, 2010; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). She is portrayed as passive, submissive, school-oriented, prudish and disciplined and is

oppressed within multiple contexts. Moreover, although the series includes Islamophobia and 'othering' (Garner & Selod, 2015; Poole, 2019; Saeed, 2007) very explicitly, no sanctions or consequences are attached to these racist comments.

Moreover, Nadia's changing identity aligns perfectly with popular culture's traditional depiction of the westernisation of Muslim girls (Navarro, 2010), by portraying her as only free when she does not wear a hijab and distances herself from her religion and family. Later in the series, her empowerment is measured against Western experiences of freedom and agency, rather than acknowledging that Muslim girls experience this empowerment differently (Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). These implicit stereotypes, combined with the explicit recurring elements of Islamophobia, lead to a reinforcement and maintenance of Orientalism and Western assumptions of submissive Muslim girls (Navarro, 2010; Poole, 2019).

2. Societal and Scientific Implications

These results demonstrate the importance of studying the construction of female teenage identity and postfeminist empowerment from an intersectional approach. It showed that in the struggle for equality between men and women, caution is still needed to include all young women. Thus, academic research can benefit from this study as it draws on both traditional and non-traditional aspects of teenage female identity as entirety, while integrating the concerns of non-traditional, postfeminist representations. Moreover, this study may influence future research by encouraging them to use context and space as a starting point for examining teenage female identity expressions to reveal power relations and women's positioning in society.

For society, the representation of female teenagers in *Elite* primarily stimulates the celebration of female empowerment, sexuality and self-subjectification, and offers young female viewers inspiration for the many different women they can grow into. At the same time, this study raises awareness and caution not only for the stereotypes that are hidden behind the pretty layer of postfeminist Girl Power, but also about the many concerns this Girl Power itself carries. This study will be of societal value for all genders and generations, as it can contribute to the awareness about teenage female identity and their position in society. The development of the female characters in *Elite* shows and reflects the complexity and versatility of female teenage identity construction, the challenging of gender norms, and how both traditional (stereotypical) and non-traditional elements of young femininity can be recognized and coexist within and between women.

3. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

However, this study also has its limitations. Firstly, due to the scope of the study, I could only analyse female teen representations in *Elite*. This in itself is already a very pertinent and revealing study about the contemporary positioning of young women in our post-modern society and its changes over time. However, it did not allow me to compare the representations of female teenagers in *Elite* with other very popular teenage series at this time, to paint a picture of the representations of female teenagers more generally. Secondly, as I focused specifically on the representation of female teenage characters, this limited me to some extent in examining the male teenage characters as well. An in-depth study of these male teenage characters could have revealed more about the contemporary societal positioning of men. This in turn would perhaps have provided relevant insights into hegemonic power structures and women's position within them.

In light of these findings, I would like to make some recommendations for further research. Complementary to the interesting results this study has yielded, it would be relevant to investigate the identity construction of female teenagers beyond teen series, by comparing the representations of female teenagers in teen series with the general representation of women in film and TV. This will shed more light on the shift between childhood and adulthood by analysing their representations from an adult feminine lens. Moreover, this research has shown that there are still some major steps to be taken in representing a more inclusive and intersectional image of the empowered young woman. Therefore, it would be interesting to focus fully on the representation of intersectionality and racial diversity in teen series. This will shed light on the representation of female teenage identity within many social, cultural and economic strata of society and will help to overcome inequalities not only between men and women, but also between women themselves.

In all, this study offers a promising future perspective for the empowered positioning of young women in society. Step by step, representations such as those of the young women in *Elite* will contribute in establishing equal gender power relations and encouraging young women to be the empowered and strong women they could possibly be. At the same time, this research also points to the unobtrusive stereotypes and the high, unrealistic beauty standards within teen series that still need to be overcome and to the critical eye that we must continue to cast on postfeminist empowerment, to make this Western society a better place for *all* (young) women.

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Appendix A. Information about the Female Characters

Table 1. **Information about the female characters**

Season	Female main characters' name	Age	Important aspects
1	Carla Rosón (performed by: Ester Expósito)	16 years during the first season (current age of actress: 21)	Main character. Carla is the daughter of a marquise and has a strong and manipulative personality. She has a relationship with one of the other very rich students from school, but also gets feelings for Samuel, one of the "poor" students with a scholarship at Las Encinas. She is very sexually active and has (sexual) relationships with several male characters.
	Lucrecia "Lu" Montesinos (Danna Paola)	16 years (25)	Main character. Lu comes from one of the richest families. She is very smart, but also competitive and manipulative towards the other girls in school. She has (sexual) relationships with two of the male characters, Guzmán and Valerio.
	Nadia Shanaa (Mina El Hammani)	16 years (27)	Main character. Nadia has received a scholarship to study at Las Encinas. She is raised in a strict Muslim family and helps her parents in their grocery store. She is very intelligent and works very hard. She does not get along with most other girls in her school.
	Marina Nunier (María Pedraza)	16 (25)	Main character. Marina is the girl who is murdered in the first season. She is raised in a very wealthy family and attends the Elite high school Las Encinas. However, she is nothing like her family or the girls at her school. She is very smart, but also cheeky and resists the class difference she was raised in. She has (sexual) relationships with two characters in the series (Samuel and Nano, played by Itzan Escamilla and Jaime Lorente respectively).
	Inspectora (Ainhoa Santamaría)	Adult (age unknown)	Main character. Aside from her job in the criminal investigation department, not much is privately shown of the personality of the "inspectora". However, while doing her job, she seems to have a strong personality.
	Imán Shanaa	Adult (age unknown)	Mother Nadia and male main character Omar.
	Beatriz Caleruega	Adult (age unknown)	Mother Carla.
	Laura Osuna	Adult (age unknown)	Mother Marina and male main character Guzmán.
	Pilar Domínguez	Adult (age unknown)	Mother of main male characters Nano and Samuel.

	Begoña	Adult (age unknown)	Mother of male main character Polo.
	Andrea	Adult (age unknown)	Mother of male main character Polo.
2	Carla Rosón (performed by: Ester Expósito)	17 years	-
	Lucrecia "Lu" Montesinos (Danna Paola)	17 years	-
	Nadia Shanaa (Mina El Hammani)	17 years	-
	Rebeca de Bormujo (Claudia Salas)	17 years (26)	Rebeca is very rich because her mother is in the drug trade and goes to the same school as the other girls: Las Encinas. However, she is very different from the others. She is not so "girly," but more of a tough woman. She is mostly friends with the not so rich students, like Nadia.
	Cayetana Grajera (Georgina Amorós)	17 years (22)	Cayetana enters season two and is first seen as a rival to the other girls at school. Although she is not that rich, she tries her best to pretend that she is.
	Inspectora (Ainhoa Santamaría)	-	-
	Mothers, same as previous season	-	-
	Victoria Pando	Adult (age unknown)	Mother Cayetana.
	Sandra López Gallego	Adult (age unknown)	Mother Rebeca.
3	Carla Rosón (performed by: Ester Expósito)	18 years	-
	Lucrecia "Lu" Montesinos (Danna Paola)	18 years	-
	Nadia Shanaa (Mina El Hammani)	18 years	-

Inspectora (Ainhoa Santamaría)	-	-
Rebeca de Bormujo (Claudia Salas)	18 years	-
Cayetana Grajera (Georgina Amorós)	18 years	-
Mothers same as previous season	-	-

Information is collected from Wikipedia and IMBd.

Appendix B. Information about the Series

Table 2. Information about the series

Season	1	2	3
Release date	5 October 2018	6 September 2019	13 March 2020
Created and written by	Carlos Monte and Darío Madrona	Carlos Monte and Darío Madrona	Carlos Monte and Darío Madrona
Producer	Francisco Ramos	Francisco Ramos	Francisco Ramos
Executive producers	Carlos Monte, Darío Madrona, Iñaki Juaristi and Diego Betancor	Carlos Monte, Darío Madrona, Iñaki Juaristi and Diego Betancor	Carlos Monte, Darío Madrona and Diego Betancor
Production company	Zeta Producciones	Zeta Producciones	Zeta Producciones
Director	Dani de la Orden, Ramón Salazar	Dani de la Orden, Ramón Salazar, Sílvia Quer	Dani de la Orden, Jorge Torregrossa
Distributor	Netflix	Netflix	Netflix
Amount of episodes	8	8	8
Duration per episode (+/-)	50 min.	50 min.	50 min.
Synopsis of the season	When three students from a collapsed high school receive scholarships to study at the Elite Las Encinas, two completely different worlds and groups of people merge. When one of the wealthy students, Marina, is	It is clear that Polo killed Marina. Samuel tries to get his brother Nano out of jail after he is accused of murdering his girlfriend Marina. After the two new students Cayetana and Rebeca enter the school, new relationships and complications blossom.	Another student at the Elite high school dies mysteriously. The other students help the killer to cover it up. Ander, one of the rich students, becomes very ill. The students from the first season have finished their high school years and the students who join later are approaching their senior year.

murdered at the beginning of the season, a complicated case begins that is slowly solved over the course of the first season.

Information is collected from Wikipedia and IMBd.

Appendix C. Example Plot Segmentation

Time stamps SS1/E1		Description of events in the scene + notes.	Link to theoretical concepts + observations.	SS
00:55:47 - 00:55:18	1	Samuel is in shock and there are some shattering shots of him in the school.	-	0
00:55:18 - 00:54:46	2	Interrogation Samuel. Flashbacks to him biking past his old school.	-	0
00:54:46 - 0053:39	3	Samuel in shock at crime scene.	-	0
00:53:39 - 00:53:33	4	Intro shot	-	0
00:53:33 - 00:52:54	5	Samuel comes home, his mom and grandma are there. Shifted to interrogation.	-	0
00:52:54 - 00:51:24	6	Christian arrives at school and meets with Nadia and Samuel. They walk into the school together. Samuel sees Marina.	• Othering: Nadia emphasizes that she needs to know the rules (implying because she is Muslim). • Stereotypical Muslim school girl: Nadia is hardworking and follows the rules. • Contrast between Marina and Nadia. • Nadia is on the background in the shots, making her submissive/less important.	6 (1.1-1.6)
00:51:24 - 00:50:46	7	The three students walk into the school swimming pool. They see Guzman getting out of the pool.	• Contrast between stereotypical female Muslim prudishness and reservation and Western sexuality and openness. • Nadia looks away when almost naked Guzman passes by.	1 (2)
00:50:46 - 00:50:18	8	Interrogation Samuel.	-	0
00:50:18 - 00:49:58	9	The three students walk into the gym room where guys play basket ball.	• Nadia continues telling about the rules and implies that she don't drink or smoke. • Large white hall.	1 (3)
00:49:58 - 00:46:56	10	First English class of the three students. Marina wishes them luck at this school.	• Nadia always walks / sits / stands in the back(ground). • Nadia tells that she is from Palestine, but born in Spain (implying that she just as Spanish as the others). • Westernized image of Nadia: seeks professional job.	6 (4.1-4.6)
00:46:56 - 00:45:32	11	Marina talks to Samuel outside. Polo and	• Female empowerment: Marina goes against her brother. • Marina seems secure.	3 (5.1-5.3)

		Guzman walk to them and are being asses.		
00:45:32 - 00:44:29	1 2	Nadia hears that she can't wear her hijab at school.	• Othering: high contrast between the West and misunderstood Orient. • Stereotype Muslim veil: the veil is not understood for its religious and cultural meaning.	3 (6.1-6.3)
00:44:29 - 00:42:15	1 3	All the students (except Marina) are studying or taking a break. Christian makes a move by Lu and Carla. Guzman et al. don't like him.	• Nadia sits in the back again. • Stereotype female teenagers: attention to looks. Lu is applying/checking her lipstick. She looks very girlie. • Nadia expresses her discipline for studying again. • Female empowerment: Lu demands Christian to not touch her.	5 (7.1-7.5)
00:42:15 - 00:41:30	1 4	Interrogation Christian.	-	0
00:41:30 - 00:40:57	1 5	Omar and Samuel walk at the street in town.	-	0
00:40:57 - 00:40:00	1 6	Samuel comes home and Nano is there.	-	0
00:40:00 - 00:39:32	1 7	Omar comes in the shop, Nadia is studying.	• Nadia is studying again. • Nadia sees her own reflection in the mirror. Could refer to her hidden side.	2 (8.1-8.2)
00:39:32 - 00:38:11	1 8	Marina and Guzman sit at the breakfast table with their parents and talk about Marina's coming of age party (that she doesn't want)	• Marina is at one side of the table, and her family at the other. This shows the distinction between them. Her puberty of being against her parents. • Marina is an outsider. • Loss of virginity typical for Spanish series (Lacalle & Castro, 2018)	3 (9.1-9.3)
00:38:11 - 00:37:48	1 9	Nadia takes hijab off in front of the mirror at school.	• Meaning of veil misunderstood. • Mirror reflects Nadia being captured between two worlds. (Western and Orient world)	2 (10.1-10.2)
00:37:48 - 00:37:07	2 0	Christian clothes are stolen while showering. He walks naked through the hallway.	-	0
00:37:07 - 00:36:30	2 1	Marina asks Samuel to come to her party. Nadia takes a seat in the classroom without hijab. Lu mocks her.	• Female empowerment: Marina flirts with Samuel. • Othering/racism: Lu mocks Nadia for not wearing her hijab. Reflects clash between West and Orient.	2 (11.1-11.2)
00:36:30 - 00:36:18	2 2	Interrogation with Nadia and Christian.	-	0

00:36:18 - 00:35:36	23	Christian and Ander in the dressing room. Christian drops his weed.	-	0
00:35:36 - 00:35:02	24	Guzman and Lu have sex in the shower at school, but get caught by Nadia.	• Sex is explicitly shown and naked bodies as well. • Sex as experimental. • Nadia is prudish.	1 (12)
00:35:02 - 00:33:26	25	Christian introduces Ander to Omar the dealer.	-	0
00:33:26 - 00:31:55	26	Christian, Samuel and Nano are hanging and drinking on the street.	-	0
00:31:55 - 00:31:08	27	Ander is blowing in his room and makes a guy dating profile.	-	0
00:31:08 - 00:30:04	28	Nano and Samuel are vandalizing the wall of Guzman and Marina's house with graffiti.	-	0
00:30:04 - 00:29:33	29	Interrogation Nadia.	• Nadia is portrayed as the disciplined and school focussed girl.	1 (13)
00:29:33 - 00:28:25	30	Lu and Guzman talk about being caught while having sex at school.	• Lu is placed in the back of Guzman. • Lu is carrying the negative consequences: she initiated the sex and is now accused of it being her fault by Guzman. • Sex as experimental and playful. • Female empowerment from Nadia. • Lu is superficial.	3 (14.1-14.3)
00:28:25 - 00:27:53	31	Christian talks to Ander about how much he likes Carla.	• Boys chasing girls.	1 (15)
00:27:53 - 00:26:57	32	Marina invites Nadia for her party and Nadia is pulling on her hijab.	• Nadia does not like to party (stereotypically Muslim girl) • No understanding or knowledge of value and meaning of the hijab. • Nadia emphasizes that she is not forced to wear the hijab.	2 (16.1-16.2)
00:26:57 - 00:26:02	33	Ander invites Christian to the party.	-	0
00:26:02 - 00:25:41	34	Omar asks Samuel to take care of Nadia at the party.	• Emphasis on no alcohol use by Muslims. • Nadia is lower on the steps, referring to her submissive position. • Nadia cannot go without men.	3 (17.1-17.3)
00:25:41 - 00:24:37	35	Nadia, Chris, Ander and Samuel arrive at the party.	• Nadia walks again in the back of the shot, implying her submissiveness.	1 (18)

00:24:37 - 00:24:05	36	Carla and Lu talk. Carla and Christian are flirting with each other.	• Lu and Carla are touching each other's earrings. • Lu and Carla are dressed very feminine.	2 (19.1-19.2)
00:24:05 - 00:23:22	37	Guzman and Ander are fighting.	-	0
00:23:22 - 00:22:54	38	Marina's father says he knows about the graffiti.	• Marina wears a white dress: emphasizing innocence and virginity.	1 (20)
00:22:54 - 00:21:43	39	Lu and Nadia have a conversation.	• Racist comments about hijab. Implying that Nadia has no choice. • Strong contrast between West and Orient. Reflects the mutual misunderstanding. • No alcohol use Nadia emphasized. • Nadia only focusses on school. • Competing between the girls.	3 (21.2-21.3)
00:21:43 - 00:20:40	40	• Marina and Samuel talk at the bar. Marina asks if Samuel wants to dance.	• Marina emphasizing she is not like her father. She distances herself from her family. • Marina is filmed from low-angle view, showing her power in chasing after Samuel.	1 (22)
00:20:40 - 00:19:42	41	All the students are dancing. Nadia stands on the side. Ander throws up on Lu's dress.	• When everyone is dancing, Nadia keep staying on the side. This reflects her reservation and her no-freedom in letting herself go. • The Muslim girl as the strict and boring girl.	1 (23)
00:19:42 - 00:18:25	42	Lu proposes to Guzman to play a game with Nadia. Guzman has to seduce her, to make fun of her.	• Sex as a game. • Lu wants to be submissive to Guzman for her own pleasure (self-subjectification). • Guzman sexually objectifies her. • Sexy outfit Lu.	1 (24)
00:18:25 - 00:18:00	43	Polo comes up with the idea of Carla having sex with Christian at the party.	- Sex as a game.	1 (25)
00:18:00 - 00:16:00	44	Father Marina asks for a photo with Samuel.	-	0
00:16:00 - 00:15:37	45	Carla seduces Christian while Polo is watching.	-	0
00:15:37 - 00:15:05	46	Photos are taken of the scholar ship students.	-	0
00:15:05 - 00:13:22		Carla seduces Christian to have sex with her. They have sex. Polo watches them to have sex.	• Carla seduces Christian. • Female sexual empowerment / subjectification: Carla wants to have sex with Christian for her own pleasure. • Low and high angle views illustrate the empowered position of Carla.	2 (26.1-26.2)

			• Sex is explicitly shown.	
00:13:22 - 00:13:02	47	Ander is chatting on his dating app.	-	0
00:13:02 - 00:11:28	48	Marina talks about Pable having infected her with HIV. She discusses that she does not want it a taboo anymore.	• In the story the taboo on HIV is emphasized, while the series itself break this taboo by discussing it.	1 (27)
00:11:28 - 00:10:36	49	Polo asks if Carla did like the sex and if everything is okay. Nano arrives at the party.	- Is questionable whether Carla liked the sex.	2 (28.1-28.2)
00:10:36 - 00:09:37	50	Guzman is fighting with Nano and Samuel.	• Nadia is in the back of the shot again.	0
00:09:37 - 00:08:16 00:08:16 -	51	Nadia blackmails Guzman.	• Nadia is empowered.	1 (29)
			TOTAL AMOUNT OF SHOTS	**62**

Appendix D. Example Textual Analysis

<div align="right">

RED: Word connotations
GREEN: Overlexicalisation
BLUE: Suppression
YELLOW: Structural oppositions
BLUE: Lexical choices

</div>

Transcript SS1/E1

Shot cuts to the students dancing. **00:20:40 - 00:19:42**

[Ander throws up on Lu's dress]

Shot cuts to Lu's washing her dress in the sink of the bathroom. Guzman walks into her.

LU: What?

GUZ: Why are you acting like this?

LU: Don't you see? It's not about the skirt, I don't care. It's about that Taliban girl. The little hypocrite. Wearing a scarf on your head makes you superior to us? Please, how ridiculous!	Not caring about her clothes (but only because of the money she has). Racist comments regarding Nadia. Opposition between the West and the Orient. Stereotypical assumptions that Nadia think she (and her religion) is better that the rest and vice versa.
GUZ: I don't want her here either. But we have to do something, so she won't tell on us.	Disdain for Muslims.
LU: I have an idea.	
GUZ: Tell up.	
LU: I propose a game. Why don't you seduce her? Then everybody finds out … and that's that.	Sex as a game / playful. Lu being stereotypical rivaling with other girls.
GUZ: You want me to hook up with the Palestinian girl, who walks around school in a turban?	Assuming Guzman has the control to hook up with Nadia if he wants. Disdain for Muslims. Repetition of synonyms for veil. Repetition of different racist names for Nadia.

Appendix E. Example Visual Analysis

Denotation

Objects: - Nadia wears a yellow hijab and a blue shirt, no skin besides her face is revealed. - Guzman wears a jacket and red striped polo underneath. - Nadia has a flower print on her shirt	**Setting:** - In the store of Nadia's parents. - There are green elements in the background. - Large windows, through which the street is visible. - In shot 8.5 there is a red with white plate in the background of Nadia.
Salience: - Nadia is backgrounded and off focus (8.2) - 8.5 consists a single shot of Nadia, where she is in focus and the background is blurred. - Guzman is placed before Nadia, but stands between Nadia and her father. - The color green is standing out. - The colors are bright. - Focus on the subjects	**Representative strategies:** - High angle view in both shots - 8.2: two-shot, 8.5: single shot - 8.2: medium close up, 8.5: closeup shot - 8.2: Nadia looks fearful to Guzman, 8.5: Nadia looks down.

Screenshot 8.2 **Screenshot 8.5**

Nadia's submissiveness is emphasized in this shot and scene. In terms of the narrative, Guzman is asking her father for permission to hang out with Nadia. This emphasizes the powerless position of Nadia in her family and religion and the powerful position of the father. A man asks permission to another man over the woman. The mother is also placed in the back of the next shot, making her irrelevant and powerless in the family. This is very stereotypical regarding Muslim / Arabic cultures. The fact that this emphasizes the submissiveness of Muslim women is supported by the green elements in the store. Green is a holy color in the Islam. This illustrates the context in which the conversation takes place and emphasizes their religious norms and values.

Nadia is dressed childish, which a blue shirt with flowers. There is no skin showing.

Nadia is backgrounded and overlapped by Guzman. Moreover, Nadia is filmed with a high angle shot. This points to Nadia's submissive and powerless position. In shot 8.2 Nadia looks fearful to Guzman, which points to the fact that she is afraid of her father. In shot 8.5 Nadia is filmed high angle. The background is faded, which leads all the attention to Nadia's emotions. These emotions are amplified by the closeup shot. Nadia looks sad and afraid. The fact that she is not completely covered in the frame gives the impression of Nadia being captured. She has no freedom.

Connotation

Appendix F. Results Overview – Season 1

	Traditional representations	Non-traditional representations
Gender	- Marina is distancing herself from her family during the entire first season. This is a traditional representation of teenage identity construction (p. 22, E4; p. 10, E5; p. 26, E6; p. 37-38, E7; p. 8-9, E8) (SSE1: 9.2) (SSE7: 15.4). - Marina is portrayed as powerless in her family (p. 5-10, E4; p. 11, E8). Her family believes she is lost and needs her parents and big brother. Marina resists against this (p. 10-11, E1; p. 14-21-33, E3) (SSE1: 5.2; 9.2; 27) (SSE7: 15.3; 15.4). - Lu is a typical superficial mean and sneaky girl who is competitive towards other girls, bullies or is not kind to other guys she doesn't like (p. 13-27-31-35, E1; p. 2-34, E2; p. 16-24, E4; p. 6, E5; p. 6-38-41, E6; p. 15, E7; p. 12, E8) (SSE3: 17.1) (SSE6: 3.3). She think she is better than other girls (p. 15, E7; p. 12, E8). But also empowered —> . - Competing between girls (p. 20, E4; p. 48, E5; p. 11, E6) —> but not always about boys, also about scholarships. - Marina is expected to wear a girlie dress to her party (p. 17, E1), which is stereotypical for girls, but she doesn't want to —> . - Carla is addressed by a physical characteristic, such as gorgeous, beauty etc. (p. 19, E1; p. 25, E2). - Nadia is submissive in the context of her family. She can't decide herself whether she wants to do something or who she hangs out with (p. 30, E1). She has no agency or power and need the approval of her dad for everything (p. 21, E2; p. 4, E3). She is expected to be responsible for and work in her parents store (p. 23, E2).	- Marina is an outsider, who is and wants to be different from the other girls (p. 17-34-38, E1, p. 30, E3; p. 5, E4; p.1, E5; p. 22-41, E6) (SSE1: 9.1). She does not work hard for school (p. 10, E2). She is mysterious (p. 11-13, E2). She has a complicated personality (stereotypical??) (p. 44, E3; p. 38, E6; p. 17, E8). Contrast between social / family expectations and real identity (p. 36-38, E7; p. 16, E8). - Lu says what she wants (p. 2, E2) and does not allow boys to touch her if she does not want to (p. 13-26, E1) (SSE1: 7.4). - Marina is outspoken and (sexually) confident (p. 6, E3; p. 41, E4) (SSE3: 7.9, 2.1) (SSE4: 10.2). She says what she wants and goes into discussion with others (p. 18, E1; p. 11, E4; p. 29, E6). She is a rebel/troubled (p. 42, E4). - Carla is confident and flirts with guys (p. 31, E1) (SSE4: 10.1). - Focus is on Marina's passion to dance and she mentioned she wants to make documentaries. And on her intelligence (p. 9, E6). Less emphasis is on her looks and appearance (by herself or others) (p. 11-12-18, E2). - In the context of school is Nadia empowered and does she what she wants. However, it is still also limited to her family's expectations (p. 29, E2). - Nadia is valued for her intelligence (p. 30, E2). - Carla resists the control Guzman and Polo think they have (p. 31-32, E2) (SSE7: 4.3, 4.4). - Nadia is empowered and acts with agency when being around boys or other students (but not in her family!) She says what she wants (p. 14-15-31-36, E3).

- Female submissiveness: everything seems to be focussed on finding love or attention from boys (p. 31, E1) (SSE1: 7.2).
- Nadia and Lu are stereotypically competing with each other (p. 34, E1; p. 4, E3; p. 8-11, E7).
- Guzman acts as if he is in the position to concur Nadia and Lu —> (sexual) objectification (p. 35-36, E1).
- Marina is insecure about what others might think (p. 18, E2). Identity conflict: opposition between who Marina wants to be and who she has to be (for her family and surroundings) (p.18, E2; p. 49, E3). She wants to do the right thing for her family and what society expects of her, but she also wants to be different and do her own thing.
- Guzman acts like he and Polo have the control over Carla, because she is his girlfriend and acts like he possesses her (p. 31-33, E2; p. 31, E7; p. 7-21, E8).
- Boys talking about Marina for being stupid and not valuing her for her intelligence, she is objectified (p. 9, E3; p. 12, E5).
- Lu and Carla (and other girls) pay much attention to looks and appearance (p. 24, E4; p. 20, E6) (SSE1: 7.2; 28.2; 19.1; 19.2) (SSE2: 5.1) (SSE3: 20.1) (SSE4: 2) (SSE6: 11). This often reflects consumerism. They are dressed very feminine (SSE5: 12.1).
- Lu has a dominant position over Carla (SSE1: 7.2) (SSE3: 3.1, 3.4).
- Marina is portrayed as innocent in the beginning of the season (SSE1: 9.1; 30.2).
- Marina is portrayed as the strong woman who overcome and learned to live with HIV (p. 1, E4).
- Consumerism (from an economic privileged position) used to win girls over. Assuming that girls only care about material stuff (p. 6-9, E4; p. 10, E7) (SSE7: 4.4). Female empowerment

- Nadia slaps Guzman in the face when he says she is easy (p. 43, E3).
- Marina is independent / wants to be independent (p. 21, E3; p. 7, E5; p. 9, E7).
- Rejecting the normalization of boys taking advantage of girls (p. 41-42, E3).
- Marina rejects consumerism (when her mother want her to buy a dress) (p. 17, E1).
- Nano is ironing (SSE1: 30.1).
- Marina is lonely, isolation and distorted (screenshots SS1/E5+6+7) (SSE4: 1) (SSE5: 1.1, 5.3, 19, 20.1, 20.2, 21.2) (SSE6: 8.2, 15.1) (SSE7: 5.3), she has no friends (p. 26, E5; p. 25, E7; p. 17, E8). She makes the wrong decisions, and loses everyone. And she cannot be who she wants to be (p. 42). She is vulnerable (SSE5: 6.4) (SSE6: 5.3, 5.5, 8.4).
- Lu seems strong and empowered, but is actually very insecure, vulnerable and powerless. Her mean girl act and empowerment is an act. She also needs love and is longing to be with Guzman (SS1/E7 screenshots; p. 33, E5; p. 14, E7; p. 36, E8). She is also jealous (SSE3: 16.2).
- Lu is on the one hand stereotypical mean girl, but her intelligence and motivation to study is also emphasized (p. 2, E4; p. 42, E6).
- Marina is (due to her sexual behavior) not considered as a kid anymore (p. 42, E4) (SSE3: 2.2, 7.1).
- Marina has a cool and tough appearance (SSE5: 5.1).
- Marina has a dark side (SSE5: 10.2).
- Carla comes up for herself and doesn't let anybody walk over her (p. 6-8, E7). She clarifies her boundaries (p. 11-12, E7; p. 29, E8). She is cold (p. 25-26-34, E8).

	through consumerism (p. 8, E4; p. 4-10, E5; p. 21, E6; p. 12, E8).	
	- Lu seems empowered, but only can get what she wants by schemes, blackmailing, being mean and because of her status (p. 16, E4; p. 38, E5; p. 10, E6) (SSE3: 1.4) (SSE6: 6).	
	- Assumption that girls need to be protected by men (p. 3-7, E5; p. 14-41, E6; p. 5, E8).	
	- Perpetuating the discourse of female skinny body ideals (p. 10, E6).	
	- 'No' is not accepted —> toxic masculinity (p. 7, E8).	
Love/relation-ships	- Although Samuel likes Marina, Marina starts chasing / flirting with him (p. 9, E1) (SSE1: 11.1). But Samuel also chases Marina (p. 2, E4).	- In this series, the guys are more interested in committed relationship, while the girls are more interested in sex (Christian wants a relationship with Carla, Samuel wants a relationship with Marina, Nano wants a relationship with Marina, Guzman wants a relationship with Nadia) (p. 31, E1; p. 12, E5; p. 29-31, E6; p. 6-10-13, E7; p. 7-22, E8).
	- Marina falls for bad / troubled guys (p. 10, E1; p. 4, E3; p. 41, E4; p. 2-7, E5) (SSE1: 30.1) (SSE4: 5.2). She choses them over friends and family (p. 17, E6; p. 36, E7).	- Girls chase boys. Carla chases after Christian (p. 31, E2), Lu after Guzman. Although the boys also chase after them, most often the girls take the initiative.
	- Nadia's parents don't accept Guzman or other Western boys (p. 20, E2).	- Polo has two mothers / lesbian couple (p. 29, E3).
	- The chasing for the other seems the same for each sex. Guzman chases Nadia.	- Marina plays with boys (p. 49, E3; p. 45, E6).
	- The importance of love and sex in teenage life (p. 5, E3).	
	- Lu implies that Carla is submissive to Polo (p. 10-46, E3). Lu wants her to stand up for herself. But Carla implies that Lu is submissive (p. 46, E3).	

| **Sexuality** | - STI's are a taboo. Marina has HIV, but it is clearly a taboo in the story world (p. 18, E1; p. 22-23, E2; p. 44, E3). But, the series in turn tries to break this —> .
 - Marina experiences negative consequences of sexual intercourse (more than guy characters), namely HIV, pregnancy, being used (p. 18, E1; p. 21-44, E3; p. 42, E4; p. 15, E6).—> but regarding pregnancy: Nano takes responsibility.
 - Lu experiencing negative consequences after initiating the sex. She is blamed by Guzman for being caught (p. 26, E1).
 - Sex is an important element or theme in the series, if not the most important one (p. 18, E3).
 - Experimenting with sex is important in identity construction (SSE3: 6.1) (threesome of Carla, Polo & Christian, and Lu & Guzman (p. 21-26, E1; p. 5, E5). However, in contrast to studies it is in this series explicitly shown —>.
 - Sex is considered as playful and a game. For example, the bet by Guzman and Lu (p. 35, E1) and Polo & Carla (p. 36-39, E1; p. 25-33, E2; p. 19-48, E3; p. 4-9, E4) (SSE1: 26.1; 26.2).
 - Nadia's prudishness is emphasized and stereotypically for Muslim girls (p. 26, E1; p. 35, E2) (SSE1: 2; 8.1; 8.2; 23).
 - Sex is not devoted to committed relationships (p. 27-33, E2; p. 24, E3).
 - Sexual objectification of Carla in the conversation between Guzman and Polo. Polo states she has sex with Christian because he wants her to (p. 33, E2). And in the conversation between Nano and Christian (p. 45, E3).
 - Sexual objectification of Nadia by Lu and Guzman (p. 4, E3).
 - Sexual objectification of Marina and girls in general. Implying that boys need to chase girls and that girls want | - Sexual intercourse is explicitly shown on screen (p. 30-32-33, E3; p. 22, E8).
 - Attention is payed to STI's, which is in conflict with previous studies that show that STI's are barely covered in teen series. The HIV is even applied in this series to Marina, a rich, young girl. This breaks the taboo (p. 21-48, E3; p. 1-42, E4, p. 6, E5; p. 29, E6; p. 2, E8).
 - Sexual intercourse is explicitly shown on screen. Female breast are also full in screen every sex scene (Marina & Nano, Marina & Samuel, Carla & Polo & Christian, Lu & Guzman) (p. 20-39, E1). This is in contrast with the previous studies.
 - The female characters are not only interested in committed relationships, but also (more) in loose, sexual relationships (p. 24, E6).
 - Girls (Marina, Lu and Carla) actively chase boys to have sex with, rather than passively waiting to be chased. Carla (p. 14, E2). They use their sexuality and femininity (SSE5: 12.4, 12.5)
 - Sexual self-subjectification of Lu (p. 36, E1) (SSE1: 26.1; 26.2).
 - Sexual self-subjectication of Carla (p. 38, E1; p. 15, E2; p. 26, E2; p. 48, E3) (SSE3: 20.3, 20.4). Carla wants sex with Christian and a threesome for her own pleasure, although others don't understand that (p. 4, E4; p. 5, E5) (SSE2: 5.2) (SSE3: 12.1, 12.2) (SSE4: 12.2). However, it is doubted whether in the beginning she really want it (p. 3-14, E2). Polo is in control of sexting (p. 26, E2).
 - Female characters (Carla) take the initiative in chasing boys or having sex (p. 38, E1) (SSE3: 20.3, 20.4) (SSE5: 8.3).
 - Female sexual empowerment. Marina behaves how she wants and sexual at a party. Confident about her own body (p. 18-20-24, E3; p. 45, E5) (SSE3: 7.9) (SSE5: 16) —> Samuel is insecure.
 - Female sexual empowerment / self-subjectification. Marina has sex with |

	to be chased and it will succeed (p. 8, E3). - In the beginning of season 1 it seems like Polo has the control over Carla (SSE1: 28.2). But later, she takes the control (p. 20, E4). - Sexual activity at a very young age (p. 6, E4). - Sexualization of lesbians (p. 31, E4).	boys because she wants to (p. 21, E3) (SSE3: 7.14). - Red is a frequently recurring color. Could point to sensuality and sexuality (but at the same time to death and danger, which is relevant in the genre of the series) —> and blue. - Carla is sexually objectifying Christian (p. 5-9, E4, p. 4, E5; p. 19-21-25, E8) (SSE4: 3). - Carla uses her body and female sexuality to manipulate and get what she wants. She is aware of her sexual power (p. 5, E4; p. 14-22-23, E8) (SSE3: 12.1, 12.2). - Lu uses her sexuality to seduce Guzman (p. 33-34-35, E5) (SSE2: 6.2). - Marina is clear about her sexual desires (p. 45, E5) (SSE5: 8.3, 16). She is sexually experienced. - Education on and normalizing abortion (p. 25, E6). Nano takes responsibility for the abortion (p. 26-27-28, E6; p. 35, E7).

| Religion | - Nadia judges everyone with other norms and values as her (Marina having HIV, other students drinking or doing drugs, Guzman and Lu having sex) (p. 23, E3; p. 22, E5) (SSE1: 3; 12).
- Nadia is portrayed as a disciplined and hardworking student (p. 4-8-12-26-34, E1; p. 2, E4; p. 27, E7) (SSE1: 6.1; 7.1; 7.5; 8.1; 13) (SSE2: 1.5; 6.1; 8.1; 22) (SSE7: 2.1, 8.1) who only focuses on school instead of boys, partying and stuff (p. 5, E1; p. 29, E2). This is in line with research about stereotypical representations of Muslim girls.
- A reoccurring element in the first season is Othering and racist comments and assumptions towards Nadia. She is called by several nicknames, such as Taliban girl or fundamentalist. Jokes are being made about her origins (p. 3-18-19-35, E1; p. 4, E3; p. 7-21, E4; p. 6, E5) (SSE1: 21.3), while she emphasizes herself to be born and raised in Spain (p. 8, E1). This reflects the Western conception of Muslims as outsiders or foreigners. She also mentions herself that as a Muslim she better stick to the rules (p. 4-5-33, E1).
- Another pattern is the high contrast between the Western 'modern' world and the Orient (p. 4-5-8-11-33-35, E1; p. 3-15, E2; p. 7-17, E4; p. 28, E5; p. 19, E6) (SSE1: 8.1; 8.2; 10.2; 23) (SSE7: 12.1).
- Value and meaning (cultural and religious) of the veil "scarf" is ignored or not understood, or even made fun off (p. 11-13-28-33, E1; p. 22, E3; p. 6, E6) (SSE1: 6.2; 6.3 —> Nadia looks insecure down. This makes her look powerless and vulnerable. In the next shot she is standing between the two teachers, which reflect her being stuck/captured in the middle of the Western society. She seems trapped) (SSE1: 6.1; 6.2; 6.3). Misconception and | - Nadia acts empowered and in control of herself, but most often when it is about defending her religion and beliefs (p. 12, E1; p. 29, E2) (SSE1: 14.2; 14.3; 29) (SSE4: 4.1, 4.2). Or because she has no other choice due to her religion (p. 35, E4).
- Religion is important for Nadia. She wears a hijab because she wants to and she prays because it is important for her identity construction (p. 16, E2) (SSE7: 16).
- Nadia can only be won over through her own culture (p. 29-34, E4) (SSE4: 13.1, 13.3).
- Nadia wants a guy to do some effort (p. 35, E4). She is not easy to be chased --> empowerment (p. 35, E4).
- Nadia is (sexually) empowered and free when she is drugged or when she doesn't wear a hijab. This reinforces the existing stereotypes about the submissive position of Muslim women (SSE3: 14.1, 14.2, 14.4).
- Opposition between who Nadia is expected to be and who she wants to be (p. 4, E8). In the end of the season she speaks up for herself, she wants to be who she wants —> empowerment (p. 30-31, E8). —> her character is evolving. |

	generalization of Muslim culture (p. 12, E4; p. 14, E7). Forced marriages (p. 23-24, E7).	
	- Nadia lies about her not being allowed to wear the veil at school. She knows her family won't take that well (p. 17, E4). She is very submissive in her family and has no agency (p. 12, E4; p. 27-29, E7; p. 4, E8) and afraid of her father (p. 13, E4; p. 16, E7). She wants to hold the family together (p. 32, E7).	
	- Nadia is not easy to be chased. She is very closed, shy and reserved (p. 16-29-33-36, E2; p. 8, E5).	
	- Nadia (and her mother (p. 18, E6)) is submissive and anti-feminist (p. 34, E2; p. 34, E6). Her powerless, submissive position and closed personality is emphasized by her position in the background of many shots and high angle shots (SSE1: 1.1; 1.4; 1.6; 4.1; 4.1; 7.1; 7.2; 17.3; 18; 23) (SSE2: 8.2; 17.3) (SSE4: 7.1, 7.3) (SSE6: 19.1).	
	- The Westernization of Muslim girls (p. 22-39-40-41, E3; p. 18, E4; p. 34, E6; p.31, E8).	
	- Contrast between the free and sexually confident Marina and the submissive, sexually innocent Nadia (p. 25, E6) (SSE1: 16.1; 16.2).	
	- Nadia is considered as a challenge to concur (drawing on prejudices about Muslim girls) (p. 7-13, E4). —> not accepted that when Nadia says 'no', this means no. The challenge to concur her becomes only bigger --> toxic masculinity (p. 14, E4).	
	- Nadia is stuck in the expectations of her family and her religion (SSE5: 9.3).	
Alcohol and drugs	- Drinking and smoking considered as being cool and part of teenage life (p. 5-33, E1).	
	- Partying is important in teenage life (p. 12, E1).	
	- The stereotypical assumptions of Muslim values regarding alcohol and drugs (p. 30, E1).	

	- Marina uses drugs often (p. 21, E3) to avoid her problems (p. 7, E6) (SSE3: 5.2). - Teenagers using drugs —> young age is emphasized (p. 9, E6).	
Other	- Overlexicalisation: family. Family is important (whether for the characters themselves or for the aim of the story) (p. 21, E6; p. 9, E7). Marina resists against her family, she wants to be different. This is typical for teenagers (p. 28, E1). - Coming-of-age party reflects the importance of transition from childhood to adulthood (p. 14-17, E1). In line with Spanish research. - Losing virginity Spanish discourse (p. 17, E1). - Marina distances herself from her family (p. 13, E2; p. 13, E3) (SSE1: 5.3). - Family is an important theme that keeps coming back in every character's line. The teenagers rely on their family (p. 31, E4), especially Nadia (p. 7, E4). But the teenagers also start distancing themselves from them (p. 6, E3), and high pressure from them. - Teenage years important phase for identity construction and experimenting phase and discovering oneself (p. 40, E3). - Friends are very important (SSE1: 7.2; - The class and ethnicity privilege to act empowered (p. 7, E4) (SSE1: 9.2). The opposition between class and privilege --> very determined for the girl's agency and power (p. 35-41, E4).	- The importance of (social) media in the identity development of teenagers. This is emphasized by them continuously being on their phone, talking about their social media accounts or using dating apps (p. 1, E2; p. 20, E4) (SSE1: 7.2; 7.3). - Carla does everything to save her family (p. 4-5-23, E6) (SSE7: 3.4). She feels responsible. - Being rebels fits teenage identity construction (p. 27, E7).