

Popular Formulas in Sara Shepard's *Pretty Little Liars*

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the popular formulas found in Sara Shepard's novel entitled *Pretty Little Liars* and examines how the popular formulas contribute to the success of the novel. In order to meet these objectives, this paper adopts the theory of popular genre and John G. Cawelti's approach to popular formulas. This research is a library research where the primary data were obtained from the novel. Furthermore, other books related to popular formulas and online information from credible sources were also consulted. The results of the study show that the popular formulas in *Pretty Little Liars* include gothic romance, questioning sexuality, sibling rivalry, self-esteem issues, and forbidden love.

Keywords: *Cawelti, popular formula, popular genre, Pretty Little Liars, Sara Shepard.*

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, popular literature has always been positioned lower than high literature due to its low quality. This happens due to its short time production which makes popular literature appear to be produced to meet the market demand (Adi, 2011). However, analyses and criticisms of popular literature show that high quality popular literary works are not always favored by the audiences (or reader). Furthermore, it is even possible that popular literary works that are considered to have low quality by the experts and critics are the ones that are actually favored by many people (Adi, 2011).

This paper deals with one of the examples of popular literature that is favored by many people entitled *Pretty Little Liars* (Shepard, 2014). This novel is different from high literature because popular fiction like *Pretty Little Liars* was produced massively in the market and not limited to certain elite people. Bloom (2002, p. 17) explains how popular fiction fulfills what the readers demand as long as it benefits both the writer and publisher:

Popular fiction is the expression of mass, industrial and consumer society. It is organised into aesthetic categories that often correspond to sociological, political and economic categories, cross-divided themselves by gender considerations. Popular fiction is always commercially oriented and its production and marketing is essentially corporate and industrial, aimed at the maximum distribution and sales of units (books) and the capitalisation on past successes for potential future sales.

This research is an attempt to examine the work as a product of popular culture. Bloom (2002) stated that in its extensive range, studies done on best-selling fiction are similar to studies of popular literature, "but a study of popular literature is a broader concept than the more narrow one of the bestseller and covers a wide range of ideological (especially sociological,

political, and aesthetic) areas of which the bestseller is only one acute example” (p. 17).

Pretty Little Liars tells the life of four young girls: Spencer Hastings, Hanna Marin, Arya Montgomery, and Emily Fields. These girls are in a *clique* where their ringleader, Alison DiLaurentis, suddenly goes missing on the night of the seventh grade. After the disappearance of Alison, the girls are no longer close to each other as it was Alison who unites them all in the first place. However, following the finding of Alison’s body in her old house, the four girls start to receive messages from ‘A’, an anonymous person who sends them notes, texts, and emails containing threats and secrets which only Alison would have known. The novel series later follows the reunion of the four girls as they embark on a journey to reveal who ‘A’ really is before this person destroys their life with the secrets they prefer to bury forever.

Catchy title, appealing cover—the series original cover features a Barbie doll dressed as one of the major characters—combination of teenage drama with thriller and mystery, have made *Pretty Little Liars* one outstanding novel series among other popular literary works. As it is such a big hit, a TV series based on the book installment was aired on ABC Family for the last seven years, and Sara Shepard, the author, even had the chance to appear as a cameo in one of the episodes of the first season of *Pretty Little Liars* TV series. The success of *Pretty Little Liars* does not stop only until it reaches the TV screen. It has also invaded the game industry. *Pretty Little Liars* is currently on *Episode*, an app with interactive games that can be played on any smartphone where the players are included in the narrative and they are allowed to make choices which later will lead them to different kinds of plot lines.

The popularity of this novel has attracted many researchers to investigate it. For example, Novita (2008) investigated the kinds of figurative language used in *Flawless*, the second book of the *Pretty Little Liars* series. The figurative language she found includes simile, personification, hyperbole, metaphor, symbol, and irony.

Another study by Carlino (2014) examined lesbian characters on a number of television

shows. One of them was Emily Fields, one of the major characters in *Pretty Little Liars*. She found that the negative representation of lesbians on the television shows have been omitted from the five lesbian characters she analyzed.

Similarly, Donatelle (2014) examined how the *Pretty Little Liars* shows actually sell post-feminism through social media. She argued that through the actors and actresses playing the characters from the book of *Pretty Little Liars*, the television shows inspire audiences both as cultural phenomena and objects of consumption.

Next, Galope (2016) investigated how ABC Family—the TV station which airs *Pretty Little Liars*—uses the series to brand their TV station as a home for ‘Millennials’, younger audiences who are considered as ‘native’ to the term ‘post-network’—which was coined by Amanda Lotz in her book back in 2007 to described the competition between TV stations to win audiences on ‘larger array of platforms, including online platforms’.

Finally a study by Pandansari (2016) deals with one of the major characters, Hanna Marin. This study employs a moral philosophical approach to examine Hanna Marin’s character development, i.e., the changes in her moral values in the first book of *Pretty Little Liars* series. The study revealed that due to her obedience to what society wants, Hanna Marin ends up having positive development on her appearance but not her personality.

None of these studies, however, deals with the popular formulas found in the first book of the *Pretty Little Liars* series. The present study is an attempt to investigate the popular formulas in it to find out what makes the novel so popular among its readers and examine whether the popular formulas are responsible for the popularity the work has obtained. This paper focuses only on *Pretty Little Liars*, the first novel in the *Pretty Little Liars* series as it is the first book that started all the accomplishment the series has obtained today.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Popular Genre

The literary conception of genre is similar to formula, which then, according to Cawelti (1976), often creates misunderstanding, because in film and literature, people find the terms interchangeable. In film, many academics and critics use the term “to denote literary types like the western or the detective story that are clearly the same as what I call formulas” (p. 6). In literature, on the other hand, “the term is often used to described the broadest sort of literary type such as drama, prose fiction, lyric poetry” (p. 6). He further emphasizes how “popular genre” is not the same kind of grouping than that of western, detective story, and spy story. He adds: “Still another usage of genre involves concepts of genre imply particular sorts of story patterns and effects, they do bear some resemblance to the kind of classification involved in the definition of popular genre” (p. 6).

As people’s taste develop, so does popular genre, making a certain pattern that is generally accepted. As Nachbar and Lause (1992) argue, “A genre is an especially powerful ... because each genre is a distillation of the elements common to hundreds of individual works and is generally accepted and approved of over long periods of time. A genre is a framework.”

Popular Formula

Cawelti (1976) states in his book that “in general, a literary formula is a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works.” (p. 5) and “The concept of a formula as I have defined it is a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combination of cultural materials and archetypal story pattern” (p. 7) Those statements then can be assumed as a confirmation that the formula here are shaped by the people and their culture.

Cawelti (1976) also suggests that popular formula hold a quite important role when it comes to connecting the writers and audiences. Apparently, audiences would like to read a

particular literary work which formula they are already familiar with:

Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience’s past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work (p. 9).

METHODS

The method of collecting the data used in this study is library research. We studied several credible books related to the topic and did a close reading of the work itself. The primary data were obtained from the first book of *Pretty Little Liars* written by Sara Shepard (2014). In addition to examining the literary work itself, we had also taken into account some criticisms from the internet as secondary data to support the analysis and enrich the discussion.

The data analysis was done by observing important intrinsic elements which were thought to be necessary as a means of corresponding to the popular formula found in the first novel of *Pretty Little Liars*. These included the theme, plot, characters, characterizations, point of view, also setting of place and time. After the primary data were collected, they were then analyzed using the popular formula approach. The primary data from the novel were then connected to the secondary data from the various references to answer the research questions. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Popular Formulas in *Pretty Little Liars*

Although it can be problematic to determine why a particular novel or film becomes a best-seller since it is difficult to be certain what elements or combination of elements the public is responding to (Cawelti, 1976), a popular literary work is likely to achieve its success due to the freshness and originality of the story which attracts a wide variety of readers. *Pretty Little*

Liars certainly has certain elements inside it that attract the reader in the first place. These elements are the popular formula(s) of the novel. “A formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products.” (Hinds, Motz & Nelson, 2005). This means that Sara Shepard as a formulaic writer followed the already built system in order to sell *Pretty Little Liars* as a product of popular culture.

Aside from keeping up with the gothic romance formula which Meyer’s *Twilight* and Stewart’s *Cathy’s Book* have served, Shepard added something extra. In an interview with Amanda Kennedy from *lancasteronline.com*, Shepard explained about how she wants the reader of *Pretty Little Liars* to feel that they can relate with her novel, “I wanted to kind of broadly capture what lots of people were going through—sexuality questions, sibling rivalry—just like everyone else ...” (Kennedy, 2010)

The “sexuality questions” and “sibling rivalry” which Shepard mentioned in her interview are just a few among other elements that can be found inside the book which become the popular formulas. Other than “sexuality questions” and “sibling rivalry”, *Pretty Little Liars* also deals with self-esteem issues and serve the most selling popular formula of all, romance (About the romance genre, n.d.). Uniquely, these popular formulas are presented through exactly four major characters in the book.

Pretty Little Liars as Gothic Romance

Pretty Little Liars has a detective story plot with its premise of four teenage girls getting texts, notes, emails containing threats and secret they prefer to keep forever from presumably their missing friend. Adi (2011) states that every detective story starts with the murder and other hidden crime, and then the detective is looking for evidence to track the murderer. Finally, the story will end with the revelation of the murderer who the readers would never have expected. The pleasure of reading a detective story comes from following the detective’s efforts to solve the crime.

Pretty Little Liars also has an adventure story involving four girls on a mission to reveal who ‘A’ is. This matches with what Cawelti (1976)

wrote in his book, “The central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero—individual or group—overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission” (p. 39). The simplest fantasy archetype is perhaps the adventure story, furthermore, Cawelti even compares adventure to romance:

The feminine equivalent of the adventure story is the romance. This is not to say that women do not read adventure stories or that romance cannot be popular with men; there is probably no exclusive sexual property in these archetypes of fantasy. Nonetheless, the fact that most adventure formulas have male protagonists while most romances have female central characters does suggest a basic affinity between the different sexes and these two story types (p. 41).

The comparison gives an explanation of convention in the popular literature under the genre of adventure and romance. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Shepard as the author defies from the most adventure formulas while at the same time serving something new to the reader through her female protagonists. *Pretty Little Liars* can also be classified under the category of romance since it has romance elements in it. Each major characters in *Pretty Little Liars* are all females who happen to have love interest. Also, the major characters have to face challenging obstacles to be with their love, just as Cawelti suggested, “Romances often contain elements of adventure, but the dangers function as a means of challenging and then cementing the love relationship” (p. 41).

The combination of detective story, adventure, and romance can be considered as gothic romance, which Cawelti (1976) defines as follows:

The “gothic romance” or “contemporary gothic”, one of the most popular present-day formulas, makes extensive use of elements of adventure and mystery. Unlike a straight mystery

formula such as the detective story where the solution of the mystery is the dominant line of action, the gothic romance uses mystery as an occasion for bringing two potential lovers together, for placing temporary obstacles in the path of their relationship, and ultimately for making its solution a means of clearing up the separation between the lovers (p. 41).

Though in recent years, with the birth of *Twilight* and *Cathy's Book*, the term "gothic romance" has often been understood as love stories with supernatural beings such as vampire and werewolf, "gothic romance" as Cawelti defines is generally a mix of multiple genres into one. Certain gothic conventions are mixed with romance conventions which then produce literary work that follow those conventions. However, it is also possible for a writer of popular fiction to leave some of the conventions to modify the genre, similar to what Shepard did in *Pretty Little Liars*.

Questioning Sexuality

Teenagers in high schools are in the phase of discovering who they are. They question themselves whether they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. However, it is normal for them to do so. In fact it is considered to be necessary so that they can find their one's sense of self (Malibu, 2014). Through Emily Fields, one of the major characters in *Pretty Little Liars*, Shepard managed to deliver that message to the reader.

In the prologue of the book, *How It All Started*, Emily is described to be protective over Alison DiLaurentis, the leader of the clique who later just went missing for three years, making the other major characters call her "Killer":

They crossed through Spencer's back gate. To their left was Ali's neighboring backyard, where her parents were building a twenty-seat gazebo for their lavish outdoor picnics. "Thank *God* the workers aren't here," Ali said, glancing at a yellow bulldozer.

Emily stiffened. "Have they been saying stuff to you again?"

"Easy there, Killer," Alison said. The others giggled. Sometimes they called Emily "Killer", as in Ali's personal pit bull. Emily used to find it funny, too, but lately she wasn't laughing along (Shepard, 2014, p. 10).

The scene above happened during the sleepover they are about to have in Spencer Hastings' barn. At this part, Emily just feels protective toward Alison's safety, but it is not clear yet whether she has more than friends feelings for Alison or not. Alison, on the other hand, seems to notice that Emily might have a crush on her that she teases her about it:

"So, girls," Ali said. "I know the perfect thing we can do."

"I hope we're not streaking again." Emily giggled. They'd done that a month earlier—in the freezing frickin' cold—and although Hanna had refused to strip down to less than her undershirt and day-of-the-week panties, the rest of them had run through a nearby barren cornfield without a lick on.

"*You* loved that a little too much," Ali murmured. The smile faded from Emily's lips (Shepard, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Yet, three years after Alison's disappearance, Emily has a boyfriend named Ben, her friend in a swimming team at Rosewood Day. However, the moment Maya St. Germain stepped into her life, Emily started to question whether she truly likes boys. Maya is the girl whose family had just moved in to Alison's old house and had met Emily when Emily's mother asked her to deliver a welcome basket to the St. Germain. In the following scene, Maya tells Emily cryptically that she might like girls more than boys and Emily was about to say that she can relate when she stopped herself because she cannot establish yet whether she is a lesbian or not:

"I'm...I'm not sure if I like guys," Maya said quietly. "It's weird. I think they're cute, but when I get alone with them, I don't want to be with them. I'd rather be with, like, someone more like me." She smiled crookedly. "You know?"

Emily ran her hands over her face and hair. Maya's gaze felt too close all of a sudden. "I..." she started. No, she *didn't* know (Shepard, 2014, p. 116).

As the story goes, Maya gets even more brazen with her action of showing Emily about how she really feels toward her; making Emily get even more confused about her sexuality. Maya even bravely initiates a discreet make out session inside a photo booth during a party which is held by one of the minor character, Noel Kahn. Emily happens to enjoy their make out session so much that she thinks "this (the kiss) felt a zillion times different than kissing Ben" (Shepard, p. 201). However, it was not long before Ben caught them:

Maya's hands traveled up her body and felt over her bra. Emily shut her eyes. Maya's mouth tasted delicious, like Jack Daniel's and licorice. Next, Maya kissed Emily's chest and shoulders. Emily threw her head back. Someone had painted a moon and a bunch of stars on the photo booth's ceiling.

Suddenly, the curtain started to open. Emily jumped, but it was too late—someone had torn the curtain back completely. Then Emily saw who it was...Ben held two cups of beer, one in each hand (Shepard, 2014, p. 201).

Emily and Ben's relationship are officially over after the photo booth incident. Despite the fact that she enjoyed her make out session with Maya, Emily still denies the possibility of her being lesbian because she thinks there is no part of herself that fits with her own concept of what lesbians would do:

But there was nothing, *nothing*, about Emily that said lesbian. She bought girly hot-oil treatments for her chlorine-damaged hair. She had a poster of the hot Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe on her wall. She giggled with the other swimmer girls about the boys in their Speedos. She'd only kissed one other girl, years ago, and that didn't count. Even if it did, it didn't mean anything, right? (Shepard, 2014, p. 228)

The one girl that Emily mentioned she kissed was not named. However, when one day Emily tries to clear her head by riding her bike, she noticed something caught on the wheel. It was a letter she sent to Alison years ago. In the letter, it is revealed that it was Alison, the one girl she claimed to kiss years ago:

...and I've done a lot of thinking about why I kissed you the other day. I realized: It wasn't a joke, Ali. I think I love you. I can understand if you never want to speak to me again, but I just had to tell you. -Em (Shepard, 2014, p. 229).

The letter was from 'A', as the moment Emily flipped the paper to the other side, there is a note that says "Thought you might want this back. Love, A" (Shepard, p. 230). It is then confirmed that Emily was in love with Alison and that her reaction toward Maya can be concluded as normal in Emily's concept as she is attracted to girls more than boys, explaining why she compared her kiss to Maya with her kiss to Ben that she felt different.

Sibling Rivalry

Bruno Bettelheim, a Freudian psychologist, defines the term sibling rivalry as "a most complex constellation of feelings and their causes" (Bettelheim, 2011, p. 652). Furthermore, he explains that in spite of the name sibling rivalry, "this miserable passion has only incidentally to do with a child's actual brothers and sisters" (Bettelheim, 2011, p. 652). The real source of it is the child's feelings about his parents.

The dynamics of sibling rivalry is commonly relatable to the reader since the beginning of time. It is described in the Bible through the stories of Jacob versus Esau and Cain versus Abel (Mahoney, 2017). Although it does not convey sibling rivalry as its main theme, the well-known fairy tale of *Cinderella* still has its dynamic and conflict (Bettelheim, 2011). Even the classics such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice's* Bennet sisters and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women's* March sisters also tell the conflict of siblinghood. As for the more recent popular fiction, *My Sister's Keeper*, a 2004 novel written by a New York Times Bestselling author, Jodi Picoult, similarly deliver

the up and down of sisterhood through its touching story line (Mukundarajan, 2016). Two years later, Shepard managed to keep up with the popular trend as she presents the sibling rivalry between the Hastings sisters through *Pretty Little Liars*.

Spencer Hastings, another pretty little liar, is depicted to be an academic driven young girl who is fighting over her parents' attention and affection with her sister, Melissa Hastings. In the prologue, Shepard clearly described how it is in Spencer's nature to want to be the best "Spencer hated when anyone was better at anything than she was" (Shepard, 2014, p. 7).

Spencer Hastings is six years younger than her sister, Melissa. As she is younger, Spencer cannot help but being overshadowed by Melissa's success. Melissa has always set a pretty high standard for Spencer on anything. No matter how hard Spencer tries to beat Melissa, her effort seems to end up futile, just as Shepard (2014) explains on Spencer's part of the story entitled *Spencer Walks the Plank*:

The sisters had a quiet yet long-standing rivalry and Spencer was always losing: Spencer had won the President Physical Fitness Award four times in elementary school; Melissa had won it five. Spencer got second place in the seventh-grade geography bee; Melissa got first. Spencer was on the yearbook staff, in all of the school plays, and was taking five AP classes this year; Melissa did all those things her junior year plus worked at their mother's house farm and trained for the Philadelphia marathon for leukemia research. No matter how high Spencer's GPA was or how many extracurriculars she smashed into her schedule, she never quite reached Melissa's level of perfection (pp. 54-55).

The home environment of the Hastings did not help lessen the rivalry of the two sisters either. If anything, Mr. and Mrs. Hastings encourage the competition between Spencer and Melissa through the game of Star Power:

Star Power was a game her parents had made up when Spencer and Melissa were little kids that she'd always suspected they'd

pilfered from some company power-retreat. It was simple: Everyone shared their biggest achievement of the day, and the family would select one Star. It was supposed to make people feel proud and accomplished, but in the Hastings family, people just got ruthlessly competitive (Shepard, 2014, p. 132).

On the day they were playing Star Power, Spencer was excited because she just got her PSAT score, which if compared to Melissa's score, she got a hundred points higher. Her parents almost forgot her turn to gloat her achievement of the day after hearing about Melissa's achievement of helping the builders tile the entire bathroom of her currently-under-construction-town-house and Melissa's boyfriend, Wren, who admitted that he just went to the pub with his friends and watched the Phillies game. When Spencer told her parents about her score, they are very proud of her that they offer Spencer to think about her reward. Much to Melissa's dismay, Spencer chooses to move in to the barn, where Melissa and Wren currently live in while waiting for their town house to be ready. Since Spencer won the Star Power, her parents granted her wish right away:

...Mr. Hastings turned to Spencer. "Done, then."

Spencer jumped up and hugged her parents. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Her mother beamed. "You should move in tomorrow."

"Spencer, you're certainly the Star." her father held up her scores, now slightly stained with red wine. "We should frame this as a memento!" (Shepard, 2014, p. 136).

For once, Spencer was able to beat Melissa. Nevertheless, if there is one thing that Spencer appears to excel better than her sister other than reaching higher PSAT scores, it would be attracting guys, especially guys who date Melissa. In the beginning of *Pretty Little Liars*, it was told that Melissa dated Ian Thomas. During their dating period, there was one time where Spencer had gotten her revenge on Melissa, who Spencer described to be "outwardly nice but inwardly

horrid” (Shepard, 2014, p. 60) by kissing Ian Thomas:

One evening, Melissa and her then-boyfriend, Ian Thomas, were studying for finals. When Ian left, Spencer cornered him outside by his SUV which he’d parked behind her family’s row of pine trees. She’d merely wanted to flirt—Ian was wasting all his hotness on her plain vanilla, goody-two-shoes sister—so she gave Ian a peck good-bye on the cheek. But when he pressed her up against his passenger door, she didn’t try to run away. They only stopped kissing when his car alarm started to blare (Shepard, 2014, pp. 60-61).

The fact that all Melissa’s boyfriend always happen to flirt with Spencer did not go unnoticed by Ian himself as he said to Spencer during the field hockey practice, where he is working as the new assistant coach:

“*Spencer?* Spencer Hastings?”

Spencer stood up slowly. “Oh. Ian, right?”

Ian’s smile was so wide, Spencer was surprised his cheeks didn’t rip. He still had that All-American, I’m-going-to-take-over-my-father’s-company-at-twenty-five look, but now his curly hair was a little longer and messier. “You’re all grown up!” he cried.

“I guess.” Spencer shrugged.

Ian ran his hand against the back of his neck. “How’s your sister these days?”

“Um, she’s good. Graduated early. Going to Wharton.”

Ian bent his head down. “And are her boyfriends still hitting on you?”

Spencer’s mouth dropped open (Shepard, 2014, p. 80).

Ian’s comment about how Melissa’s current boyfriend always hitting on Spencer is true as it is also happened to Wren Kim, Melissa’s new half-British-half-Korean boyfriend who is in his first year of college studying medicine. At first, Spencer and Wren were just flirting, but then the two were caught making out at the barn by

Melissa who then rat out Spencer and Wren’s action to the older Hastings; ending Melissa’s relationship with Wren and Spencer got kicked out of the barn:

“One thing’s for certain; Melissa will be moving into the barn,” her mother continued. “I want all of your stuff out and back into your old bedroom. And once her town house is ready, I’m turning the barn into a pottery studio” (Shepard, 2014, p. 251).

As the book ends with the finding of Alison’s body in her own old backyard, Spencer was shook but none of her family seem to care what she is currently feeling since her parents and Melissa do not come to her to at least make sure about her well-being. After the Wren’s fiasco, her relationship with her own family are already broken; as her parents are taking Melissa’s side.

Self-Esteem Issue

As a group of young people who are lacking in self-confidence during their phase, teenage girls tend to feel that their bodies are not in line with the so-called-beauty-standard which the media constantly promote, thus, indirectly stimulating the self-esteem issue among them. Even worse, the beauty standard may affect these girls’ health through unhealthy diet which will lead to bulimia and anorexia (Gunanathan, 2010).

Hanna Marin, the second main character, is portrayed to have an eating disorder, bulimia. In an interview with CNN, Shepard told Breeanna Hare that she depicted Hanna that way because she wanted to capture the problem people her age had when they were teenagers, “When I started out, the main problems were things that I saw as a teenager. Hanna is bulimic, and I certainly knew people who went through that.” (Hare, 2013)

In the prologue, it is mentioned that Hanna and the other girls bonded with Alison over Saturday afternoon work at Rosewood Day School’s charity drive. As Hanna always thought of Alison as the epitome of perfection, Hanna was immediately charmed by Alison when she complimented Hanna’s shirt. It has been more than a year ever since their first meeting and Hanna has encountered a hard time with her

parents' divorce, "she had been steadily putting on weight and overgrowing her old clothes" (Shepard, 2014, p. 7).

Alison had introduced a game to the girls called "not it". It was supposed to be said "whenever there was anyone ugly, uncool, or unfortunate near them" (Shepard, 2014, p. 9). In the beginning, "not it" was Mona Vanderwaal, Rosewood resident dork. However, three years after Alison went missing, Hanna befriended Mona and went through a makeover process of losing weight and buying designer clothes only that they became the current it girls of Rosewood Day.

Hanna had maintained her perfect 'it girl' status of Rosewood Day so cautiously. She had stopped making herself throw up and opted for salad every time she ate to keep her body in shape. Yet, it did not last long since she got caught shoplifting a bracelet from Tiffany's. Although her mother managed to save her from the charge the police was about to press her, she was still worried that her rebellious act would tarnish her perfect status and so, she ended up going back to her old destructive self to make her feel better:

Hanna was amazed how, even though it had been years since she'd done this, everything felt exactly the same. Her stomach ached, her pants felt tight, and all she wanted was to be rid of what was inside of her.

Ignoring Dot (her dog) excited cries from her bedroom, Hanna bolted to the upstairs bathroom, slammed the door, and collapsed onto the tiled floor. Thank God her mom wasn't home from work yet. At least she wouldn't hear what Hanna was about to do (Shepard, 2014, p. 126).

For the matter of her issue with body image, Sean as Hanna's boyfriend, did not help much with him joining a V Club, a club where the people were taking a pledge to only have sexual intercourse once they are married. It is because Hanna was ready to give her virginity to him and had been trying to make Sean give up the pledge. So when Hanna decided to take matters in her own hand by forcing herself on him and Sean recoiled, Hanna started to think that she was not

hot enough for Sean to give up his virginity. She even went as far as to accuse Sean of being gay:

"Jesus," Hanna said, rolling away from him. The vodka lemonades sloshes in her stomach. "Are you *gay*?" It came out a little meaner than she meant it to.

"No!" Sean sounded hurt.

"Well then what? Am I not hot enough?"

"Of course not!" Sean said, sounding shocked. He thought for a moment. "You're one of the prettiest girls I know, Hanna. Why don't *you* know that?"

"What are you talking about?" Hanna asked, disgusted.

"I just..." Sean started. "I just think that maybe if you could have a little more respect for yourself—"

"I have plenty of self-respect!" Hanna shouted at him (Shepard, 2014, p. 192).

Even Sean knew about Hanna's lack of self-esteem issue and had been trying to make Hanna comfortable about herself by respecting her, but Hanna had mistaken his good intention as rejection. Sean's action had brought Hanna into a flashback when she was accompanied by Alison to meet Kate, her father's fiancé's daughter:

Without realizing it, Hanna had eaten the entire bowl of cheese popcorn that was on the table. And six of the profiteroles. And some of the Brie wedge that was meant for Isabel and her dad. She clutched her bloated stomach, gazed at Ali's and Kate's flat six-packs, and groaned out loud, without meaning to.

"Little piggy doesn't feel good?" Hanna's dad asked, squeezing her small toe. (Shepard, 2014, pp. 193-194)

Although Mr. Marin had meant to call Hanna 'little piggy' as a term of endearment, Hanna got even self-conscious about her body because she thought that she was as fat and greedy with food as a pig. Hanna could not handle the fact that Kate had been as perfect as Alison and she with her bloated stomach could not possibly keep up with those two; making the day she met

with Kate was the day Hanna started to make herself throw up:

Hanna stared at herself in the mirror. A peal of laughter floated in from outside. Her stomach felt like it was bursting from all the popcorn everyone had watched her eat. She felt so sick, she just wanted it *out* of there, but when she leaned over the toilet, nothing happened. Tears spilled down her cheeks. As she reached for a Kleenex, she noticed a green toothbrush sitting in a little porcelain cup. It gave her an idea.

It took her ten minutes to work up the nerve to put it into her throat, but when she did, she felt worse—but also better. She started crying even harder, but she also wanted to do it again (Shepard, 2014, p. 246).

As mentioned earlier, her parents got divorce. Hanna had been dealing with her parents' separation by making herself throw up any food she had eaten earlier. Despite the fact that she is the queen bee of Rosewood Day, she never thought that she was good enough. This is shown with her father who left her mother for Isabel, Kate's mother, that made Hanna think he loved Kate more than her and Sean who refused to give up his virginity for her.

Forbidden Love

In regards to the popularity of romance, Shepard brings an appealing love story in a *Lolita*esque fantasy of forbidden love through the character of Aria Montgomery and Ezra Fitz. Their relationship is not as taboo as Humbert and Dolores' with the noticeable age gap (Brevis, 2014) since Ezra happens to be only five years older than Aria. Yet, it is still considered frowned upon as Sahar Shiralian (2012) wrote on her post about how Aria as a high school student should not have a romantic relationship with her English teacher, Mr. Fitz. She went as far as criticizing Shepard as the author of *Pretty Little Liars* and ABC Family as the network that carries the television version of the novel:

First of all, it is against school regulations and could cost the

reputation and career of the teacher involved. Additionally, the power imbalance can emotionally and mentally harm the student. Sara Shepard, the author of the "Pretty Little Liars" book series, and ABC Family are guilty of perpetuating this false image of romance and depicting that this affair is not only acceptable, but desirable and romantic to impressionable teenage girls. No matter how cute or romantic Ezra and Aria appear to be, their relationship is fundamentally illegal and wrong (Shiralian, 2012).

Nonetheless, the relationship of Ezra and Aria does entice the reader to keep flipping the pages of the book as the story goes because the plot gets thicker when it is shown that apparently the expression of "the apple does not fall from the tree" is quite appropriate to describe how Aria Montgomery has taken after her father, Byron Montgomery, who Aria and Alison DiLaurentis once caught fooling around with his own student:

It had happened in May of seventh grade. Rosewood Day had dismissed the students early for teacher conferences, so Aria and Ali headed to Sparrow, Hollis campus's music store, to search for new CDs. As they cut through a back alley, Aria noticed her father's familiar beat-up brown Honda Civic in a far-off space in an empty parking lot. As Aria and Ali walked toward the car to leave a note, they realized there was someone inside. Actually, two someones: Aria's father, Byron, and a girl, about twenty years old, kissing his neck (Shepard, 2014, p. 104).

The favored formulaic plot in romance is Cinderella formula. It is when an underprivileged girl falls in love with a wealthy or royal man. Aside from Cinderella formula, there is also Pamela formula, i.e., when the girl tries to handle the obstacle that comes her way to be with the man she loves (Cawelti, 1976, p. 42). Aria happens to fall for the latter category due to her attempt to persuade Ezra to ignore the obstacle of their growing relationship, which is their statuses as student and teacher, but Ezra refuses:

Ezra reached across the desk and touched his hand to hers—it was warm, dry, and soothing—but then quickly pulled away. “But this isn’t meant to be, you know? ‘Cause, well, you’re my student. I could get in a lot of trouble. You don’t want me to get in trouble, do you?”

“No one would know,” Aria said faintly. (Shepard, 2014, p. 107)

In the ending of *Pretty Little Liars*, Aria and Ezra did not end up together as seen in the previous scene. The unhappy ending clearly differs from the strict popular romance formula of living happily ever after. However, about a love story which ends unhappily, Salinger (2014, p. 1) argues that “unhappy endings serve emotional and social needs very different from those of the romance’s HEA (Happily Ever After).”

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the discussion above that there are five popular formulas found in *Pretty Little Liars* and four of them are presented through the novel’s four major characters. The first formula, which is *Pretty Little Liars* as a gothic romance is the only one formula that is not presented through the major characters due to its whole presence throughout the story with the mix of romance genre, adventure, and detective story in it. The second formula is questioning sexuality, which is shown through the character of Emily Fields, who is still trying to figure out whether she is straight or gay and therefore is considered questioning her own sexuality as seen in the lesbian scenes of the novel. Spencer Hastings, another pretty little liar, is the representation of the third formula, which is sibling rivalry. She and her older sister, Melissa Hastings, are depicted to be in a constant competition that ends badly for Spencer since her parents are taking Melissa’s side after she get caught making out with Wren, Melissa’s boyfriend. The self-esteem issue is the fourth formula and found in the character of Hanna Marin. She is portrayed as a bulimic girl who in spite of the title queen bee she currently holding, still thinks that she is not good enough, especially for her father and Sean, her boyfriend. Last

popular formula found in *Pretty Little Liars* is forbidden love. It is described in the student-teacher relationship of Aria Montgomery, and her love interest, Ezra Fitz, who happens to be his English teacher at school. Their relationship is considered to be forbidden because of their statuses. At the end of the book, their relationship does not survive because ‘A’'s interference. These popular formulas all contribute to the success of *Pretty Little Liars* because they happen to be the reasons why the reader of this book buy them, which makes Sara Shepard as the author, follow the market demand and therefore making the book popular.

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